

Media Relations after the Introduction of Social Media

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1. INTRODUCTION

For many decades public relations' (PR) professionals have used mass media in order to reach their audiences. Media relations' strategies have widely been used by PR practitioners because studies have shown clear linkages between public relations materials, media coverage based on the materials and beneficial outcomes for the sources (Waters, Tindall & Morton 2010: 243). With the emergence of Internet the numbers of newspaper readers and television audiences have dropped. "It seems that attention is moving away from the traditional heartland of public relations practice." (Phillips & Young 2009: 96).

The shift to Internet and to the social media is viewed as a revolutionary force that changes the way PR practitioners think and practice public relations (Grunig 2009, Williams et al. 2008, Pavlik 2007). Furthermore, the emergence of the Internet and social media also influence the way journalists work and gather information. There is an increasing number of journalists who use blogs in their

work (Pavlik 2007), a share of journalists even make use of social networking sites (Lariscy et al. 2009; Waters et al. 2010).

In the light of the changes in PR field brought by Internet and the popular social media the goal of this thesis is to study the meaning of media relations and functions involved with media relations after the introduction of social media.

1.1 The PR paradigms behind using media relations and social media

The chapter describes two approaches of public relations which lay the basis for the issues studied in the research. First, the symbolic interpretive approach, which relates to the traditional media relations, is explained. Second, the behavioural strategic approach, which creates linkages between social media and public relations, is introduced.

In this thesis Grunig's definition of stakeholders and publics will be used. Stakeholders are a broad group of people with stakes in the organisation. However, not every member of a stakeholder group is a member of the same public, because publics form around issues, which may result from organizational decisions (Grunig 2009: 5).

It is typical of the symbolic-interpretive paradigm to assume that PR strives to influence how publics interpret the organization. Typically the followers of this paradigm believe that the images, reputations and brands can be created or managed. This kind of PR emphasizes messages, publicity, media relations and media effects (Grunig 2009: 5, 9). According to research, reputations, images,

brands and other types of cognitive representations are what members of different publics communicate to each other, not something that organisations can create or manage (Grunig 2009: 5). Bosch and Riel (1998, cited in Grunig 2009: 9) describe the symbolic-interpretive paradigm as an asymmetrical communication, which allows an organisation to buffer itself from its environment and then behave in the way it wants.

Contrastingly, the behavioural-strategic management approach on PR stresses that “the only way in which PR workers can “manage” cognitive representations is by participating in managing the behaviours of organisations and by managing communication with publics in order to cultivate relationships with them” (Grunig 2009: 5) Hence, the participating role of PR executives in strategic decision-making is emphasized, so that they can help to manage the behaviour of organisations (Grunig 2009: 9). This paradigm sees public relations as a bridging activity to build relationships with stakeholders. The paradigm views PR as a mechanism for organisational listening and learning (Grunig 2009: 4). The strategic management approach emphasizes symmetrical communication to provide publics a voice in management decision-making. Also, it facilitates dialogue between management and its publics during the whole process of decision making rather than supports the conveying of messages after the decisions have already been made (2009: 4, 9). In the Internet-mediated society it is even more so than before that the actions of an organization shape its reputation, not the image crafted by communications professionals (Phillips and Young 2009: 250).

This study builds on the behavioural-strategic management approach of public relations.

1.2 Insights on the topic

This chapter points out the difference between traditional media relations and social media for public relations and explains why organizations include social media in their communication activities.

“Public relations concerns itself with the management of relationships with the organization’s stakeholders.” (Merwe, Pitt & Abratt 2005: 39). According to David Weinberger (2008, cited in Miel & Faris 2008: 5), the value created by traditional media models is based on information scarcity, but the Internet supports an environment of information abundance. This leads to changes in the old media models. Before the introduction of Internet and before the advent of social media, organizations relied in their stakeholder-communication mostly on the traditional media (print and broadcast). It was unidirectional communication from one to many (Merwe et al. 2005: 40). Contrastingly, the Internet and especially social media enable multidirectional communication between the organization and its publics, but also between organization’s different stakeholder groups.

If an organization wants to reach its publics, it should follow the people and contact them via the channels they use. Jeff Hayzlett (2009), the vice president of Kodak, says it is vital for the organization to be where the people are and engage in two-way conversations with them. The American new media experts Solis and Breakenridge expressed the same idea by writing that “PR has to go where the customers are, using the channels of influence that reach them.” (2009: 33). So, where can the people be found and which channels they use?

According to Pew Research Center's survey (2009) 27 percent of all American adult Internet-users used an online social networking site (like MySpace, Facebook or LinkedIn) daily (<http://www.pewinternet.org/Trend-Data/Online-Activities-Daily.aspx>). In the popular social networking site Facebook (FB) there are over 500 million active users and the numbers are growing. Half of them log on to FB every day. 70 percent of users are outside the United States. FB users share 30 billion pieces of content (i.e. Web links, news stories, blog posts etc.) each month. More than 700 000 local businesses have active pages on FB (<http://www.facebook.com/#!/press/info.php?statistics>). The fastest growing demographic group on FB is 35 years old and older (Corbett 2010: online). This shows a tendency that various demographic groups are participating in social media, not only young people.

Why should organizations take on social media activities? Many people using social media take part in conversations about the products they have bought or services they have used. These people share opinions about different organizations and their brands. A study showed that 19 percent of microblogs (such as Twitter) contain mention of a brand. Of these, more than 50% were positive and 33% were critical of the company or product (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel & Chowdury 2009: 2169). Numerous conversations about organizations are held on social media platforms with or without the organizations themselves. This fact urges businesses to include social media in their communication strategies. The Inc. 500 study revealed that the corporate familiarity with and usage of social media within the Inc. 500 (a list of the fastest-growing private U.S. companies) has nearly doubled in one year. 77 percent of the Inc. 500 reported using at least one social media tool (Barnes& Mattson 2008).

1.3 Purpose of the study

Reckoning with the assumption that the popularity of Internet and social media change the way public relations and journalism is practiced, it should also be examined if and how this affects one of the core activity spheres of public relations – media relations.

The aim of this thesis is to study the public relations' perspective of media relations in the context of social media. The study will focus on the media relations in the Estonian public relations scenery.

Estonia is a small and dynamic country, which has shown an exceptionally fast development in the adoption and usage of the Internet and Internet-based services. According to Statistics Estonia, 71 percent of the Estonian population aged 16-74 used Internet in 2009 (<http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/Database/Majandus/databasetree.asp>). Estonia is often referred to as e-Estonia, some examples of it being the Cabinet's paperless meetings and e-elections. Also, the electronic income tax declarations have been very warmly embraced by the citizens as 91 percent of the income tax declarations in 2009 were presented electronically (http://www.estemb.fi/eng/estonia/e_estonia).

Assuming that the popularity of Internet and social media platforms has influenced the working practices of Estonian public relations professionals, the study will deal with the following questions:

1. What are media relations today?
2. What are the functions of social media in organizational communication?

2.1 What are the functions of media relations after the introduction of social media?

3. Have media relations changed with the introduction of social media?

4. What is the future of media relations in public relations?

1.4 Previous Studies

This chapter gives an overview of the literature related to the topic of media relations and social media from PR's perspective. Social media are relatively new phenomena. Most of the popular social network sites have been launched after 2003, for example YouTube has operated only since 2005 and Twitter since 2006 (Boyd & Ellison 2008: 212). Hence the research about social media and PR, especially those concerning media relations, is still scarce. What is more, so far the bulk of the research on the topic is U.S.-based.

The latest study about social media and its impact on media relations explored the shift that new technologies have caused in the traditional approach to media relations (Waters, Tindall and Morton 2010). In the study the researchers explored the new trend of "media catching". It is a reversal of the traditional media relations' communication pattern where journalists are no longer passively receiving news releases and media kits from practitioners, but instead, journalists are expressing their own needs at practitioners through social media outlets (Waters, Tindall and Morton 2010: 260).

As blogs were one of the first social media applications, there has been more time to examine blogs from PR's perspective. For example a growing number of U.S.

corporations use blogs as a corporate communications tool and that topic-oriented blogs have grown popular over time (Cho and Huh 2010).

In traditional media relations the common way to pitch information is press release, whereas in social media the new trend is social media release (SMR). The factors that influence bloggers to use social media releases have been studied. It occurred that majority of bloggers have not yet been exposed to SMR-s (Steyn et al. 2010). A 2006 study discussed the impact of blogs and its specific characteristics for the public relations and concluded that monitoring blogs is of high importance for an organization (Marken 2006).

There has been some research about the general usage of social media among organizations (Barnes & Mattson 2008) and communication practitioners (Williams et al. 2008). Research results show that social media is growingly used by many U.S. organizations. The survey conducted among communication professionals showed that the readiness to use social media in organizational communication split the respondents in half (Williams et al. 2008).

Many studies about social media approach the topic from a marketing perspective. The study of Jansen and Zhang (2009) handled the e-word-of-mouth (eWOM) phenomenon on Twitter. The authors concluded that microblogging is a promising activity for companies to explore as part of their overall branding strategy.

The research related to social media from journalism's perspective deal with journalists' source gathering activities from social media platforms and their attitudes towards it. Lariscy et al. (2009) reported that journalists do not use

social media widely yet. However, the journalists appear to not oppose using social media in their work. Contrastingly, the 2009 survey of Media in the Wired World by Middleberg Communications and the Society of New Communications Research revealed that 70 percent of journalists said that they use social networks in reporting (Porter 2009: online). According to the findings of Middle East Journalist Survey 2009 (<http://www.middleeastmediaguide.com/survey.htm>) the larger proportion of Arabic and English-language journalists “view the importance of social media as a source of information in a neutral or negative light, yet they feel it has a role to play in providing greater interaction with their audiences” (Media Source 2009: 2).

In a bachelor thesis on social media in Estonia Gross (2009) examined how PR is done in the Web 2.0 environment. The results showed that many of the interviewed public relations practitioners (from PR agencies) do not use Web 2.0 much in their everyday work because the clients are unfamiliar with these new communication tools. However, the respondents were convinced that the Web 2.0 redefines the role of PR and changes how PR is done. According to the interviewees, using the same ways and forms as in the traditional media channels will not have the desired effect in the Web 2.0 environment.

In sum, although the number of studies dealing with social media and public relations or journalism is growing, the topic of media relations from the perspective of social media seems to be poorly covered by academic research so far. This exploratory study looks into the media relations in Estonia now and in the future in the context of social media.

Chapter 2 of this thesis presents the theoretical framework of the study. The concept of media relations and the interplay between PR and journalists will be discussed. Further, social media will be defined and its accordance with the strategic management paradigm by James Grunig will be considered. After that the future of media relations will be discussed, relying on the theory of future studies. In chapter 3 the methodology (focused interview and visual data) of the research is introduced, the processes of data gathering and analysis will be described. Chapter 4 presents the significant results of the research data and provides the answers to the research questions. In chapter 5 the results of the study and the limitations of the research will be discussed. Chapter 6 concludes the main findings of the research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this thesis builds partly on the Intereffication model about the working relationship between PR and journalism. The model sees the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners as a mutual symbiosis. Then follows the strategic management approach by James Grunig who suggests that digital media is a perfect channel to carry out strategically managed communication. Lastly, the main principles of the future studies will be introduced and the future of media relations will be discussed based on the constructed scenarios.

2.1 Media relations

This chapter introduces the concept of media relations and the functions it has for public relations. Table 1 presents different definitions for the concept.

Definition	Source
<i>"The ongoing facilitation and coordination of communication and relationships between an individual, group or organisation and the news media."</i>	(Johnston 2007: 4).
<i>"Linkages with the media personalities and resources that facilitate an organization in getting a favourable, timely, and widespread editorial coverage."</i>	The Business Dictionary (http://www.businessdictionary.com/)
<i>"Activities that involve working directly with persons responsible for the editorial (news and features), public service and sponsored programming products of mass media. Effective media relations maximize coverage and placement of stories and messages in the mass media without paying for it directly through advertising."</i>	Woo Public Relations Communications site (http://woopr.net/glossary.aspx)
<i>"Public relations practitioner's interactions with various media for the purpose of informing the public about an organizational campaign."</i>	(Howard & Matthews 2006, cited in Waters et al. 2010: 244)

Table 1. Various definitions of media relations.

To put these definitions together, media relations, firstly, involve working relationships with the members of the (mass/news) media. Secondly, it endeavours (favourable) media coverage for an organization without directly paying for it.

Books about the media relations often mention only briefly what media relations are for. Authors usually hastily carry on explaining how to manage media relations most effectively. However, Wragg, Theaker and Bland (2005: 1) say that the media are central to public relations activity for the reasons that the origins of the industry are in the press agency and that during the world wars media were used in propaganda campaigns, which led to the birth of British public relations. The media can be used to target the public narrowly and to encourage two-way communication (Wragg et al. 2005: 1). The media is a relevant tool to persuade and inform people, because journalistic publicity is considered to be more believable than advertising (Juholin & Kuutti 2003; Larsson 2009).

Media relations have a variety of functions in organizational communication. Media relations have two functions – building awareness (of a product, service or idea) and fostering positive regard i.e. credibility (Horton 2009: 1). Similarly, Wragg et al. state that the true purpose of press relations is to enhance the reputation of an organization and its products and to influence and inform the target audiences (2005: 55).

Johnston (2007: 9-10) has also listed the advantages of working with the media for public relations:

- Raising awareness and getting your point of view heard
- Creating impact within the chosen audience
- Saving money by using editorial to gain exposure rather than pay for advertising
- Gaining legitimacy and creditability through editorial
- Reaching targeted audiences both large and small
- Building public support and mobilising public opinion
- Using range of media depending on the message

Media relations are often seen as the most significant communicational activity of the organization. In their book Wragg et al. (2005: 55-56) list a number of different reasons why businesses use public relations, the second of them being a higher (and better) media profile. However, the authors go on saying that in reality favourable media coverage can facilitate achieving all PR objectives on the list. While Jane Johnston agrees with the latter, she also points out that in addition to „getting information out“, the media serves as a monitoring tool for planning, analysis and evaluation for the public relations (Johnston 2007: 5). So, according to the literature media relations is one of the strongest pillars and a vital resource for public relations activities.

Traditionally media relations are seen as interplay between PR practitioners and journalists. However, one can see the trend that lately the journalistic part is emphasized less when talking about media relations. The definition of media relations by Howard and Matthews (2006, cited in Waters 2010: 244) in Table 1 only mentions relationships with “various media” which leaves room for broader interpretation of the media relations’ concept.

Furthermore, the author of communication books and an expert in corporate communications and online public relations matters, Horton (2009) offers an interesting view on the concept of media relations in the age of social media, when bloggers and other content creators grow more important. Horton unties the concept of media relations from a certain channel or a profession, but emphasizes the PR practitioners’ activity as a persuader of the content generator. Thus he suggests that media relations could mean relationships with content generator, whoever that may be. Horton (2009: 4) says:

“At its heart, media relations is persuading a generator of content to consider and write about a product, service or issue without paying the content generator to do so. [...] Media relations relies on a practitioner’s talent for selling a story through understanding the content generator’s preferences, the needs of target individuals and the ability of the media relations practitioner to bring the two together. Media relations depend on a content generator’s understanding of the information his readers/viewers/listeners want. This in turn depends on the generator’s understanding of the audience for whom he produces content.”

2.1.1 The relationship between journalists and PR practitioners

The chapter points out the tension in the relationship between journalists and PR workers, but also indicates to the interdependence that these two professions have regarding each other.

The relationship between the press and public relations is complicated. Journalists have generally a sceptical approach to communication professionals representing commercial interests, because they feel they are being objects to manipulation efforts. In addition, journalistic norms regard textual product placement unethical. Some PR specialists do whatever it takes to gain exposure for their organization in the media and this produces conflict between public relations and journalism (Grunig 1990: 18). According to a 2009 study, PR people disagree with the allegation that their professional task involves any kind of manipulation of the media (Larsson 2009: 140). Instead, they claim that they just offer information and deliver ideas for news, while it is up to journalists to decide whether to use the materials or not. Larsson concluded that PR agents

commonly declare a high level of respect for the norms of journalistic conduct and for the media's role in a democratic society (2009:144).

Although public relations have different methods for working with the media (i.e. press conferences, media events etc.), the most common tool is a press release (Johnston 2007: 65). Journalists can get up to hundreds of press releases daily. Most often the journalists complain about getting irrelevant press releases and feel irritated by the "scattergun approach" to press release distribution by PR people (Media Source 2009, Larsson 2009).

There have been many studies about the relationships between journalists and public relations practitioners (Kopenhaver, Martinson & Ryan 1984; Nejiens & Smit 2003; Larsson 2009). These studies can be summarized with the comment of one journalist: "It seems they have a better relation with me than I do with them" (Larsson 2009: 137). It means that while PR people deem journalists as partners, the journalists see PR professionals more as opponents.

However, the journalists' negative perceptions towards public relations are rather a later development which can be associated with the advent of Internet and e-mails. The interplay between public relations and journalism goes back to the beginning of the 20th century. Ivy Lee, the founder of modern public relations, believed that if people were presented with all the facts on both sides of the issue, they would regard the business interests more positively (<http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/m039k489x>). His goal was to provide the newspapers with as much information as possible. In his "Declaration of Principles" Lee stated to guarantee the accuracy of the facts and leave to the discretion of the newspaper editor whether an item was worth printing as news.

Lee's ideas were set in practice after a tragic railroad accident in 1906 where 53 people died ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1906 Atlantic City train wreck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1906_Atlantic_City_train_wreck)). Ivy Lee, working with the Pennsylvania Railroad, convinced the railroad to distribute a public statement and convinced the railroad to provide a special train to get reporters to the scene of the accident. Right after the accident Ivy Lee issued the first press release, which was printed in the New York Times on 30th of October 1906 as a "Statement from the Road". In the following weeks newspapers praised Pennsylvania Railroad for its openness and honesty (Jarboe 2006: online).

This indicates that open and honest communication by PR professionals and press releases form the basis for successful media relations which are appreciated also by the journalists.

The relationship between journalists and PR professionals is briefly discussed also in the theory of attention economy. According to the theory attention is the most valuable asset, the personal reputation plays an important role because participants choose their interaction partners based on the reputation (Luoma-aho, Uskali & Weinstein 2009: 4-5). For the attention workers (journalists, PR professionals, marketers, lobbyists, advertisers and distributors/salesmen) whose success lies in their social capital, it is important to uphold a positive reputation. Hence it is for the own good of the journalists and PR practitioners to avoid conflicts and collaborate (Luoma-aho, Uskali & Weinstein 2009: 11).

Despite the fact that journalists are often unsatisfied with PR practitioners' work, the financial situation and cutbacks in editorial staff have resulted in the lack of time for journalistic fieldwork. This, in turn, has increased the dependence on news material and information sent from the sources. The public relations agents

are well aware of this situation and use it consciously (Larsson 2009: 135). By now most of the journalists have accepted the role of PR in their work and try to get the most out of it by picking up news ideas, by asking information overviews or suggestions for suitable sources and by negotiating contacts higher up in the organizations (Larsson 2009: 136).

2.1.2 Intereffication model

Media relations comprise the positions that PR and journalism have regarding each other. Are media relations about one-way communication where public relations officers desperately try to get their message through while journalists have the ultimate power position? Or is there something more to it?

When it comes to the news production process, the journalists claim that “power cannot be located to any parties other than themselves” (Larsson 2009: 144). Reckoning with the fact that the thesis has been severely criticised, the determination thesis by Baerns (1991 cited in Bentele, Liebert & Seeling 1997: 236) offers a fully contrasting perspective on the matter. The determination thesis states that public relations determine the information output of daily news coverage. Based on her studies in 1979 and 1985, Baerns found that public relations have control over the topics and over the timing (indirectly) of the media coverage, while journalists selecting and edit the given information (Raupp 2005: 197).

The determination thesis has been the object of extensive scholarly criticism. The reproaches concern Baerns’ heuristic and outdated stimulus-reaction approach to

the subject (Schantel 2000: 85). What is more, the critics have pointed out that Baerns studied the matter only from public relations' perspective and left the journalists' side without attention, thus the broad generalization on the relationship between journalists and PR people was premature (Bentele et al. 1997: 237).

The Intereffication model (Figure 1) proposed by German scholars Bentele, Liebert and Seeling in 1997 offers a more balanced view on the relationship between PR and journalism. The term Intereffication is a mix of the words "inter" and the Latin word "efficare", which means "to enable" (Bentele 2005: 211). The model emanates from the assumption that the relationship between PR and journalism is characterized by the mutual influence and dependency of both autonomous sides. According to Bentele (2005: 211), the communication outputs of both sides are possible only because of the existence of the other side and its willingness to "play along".

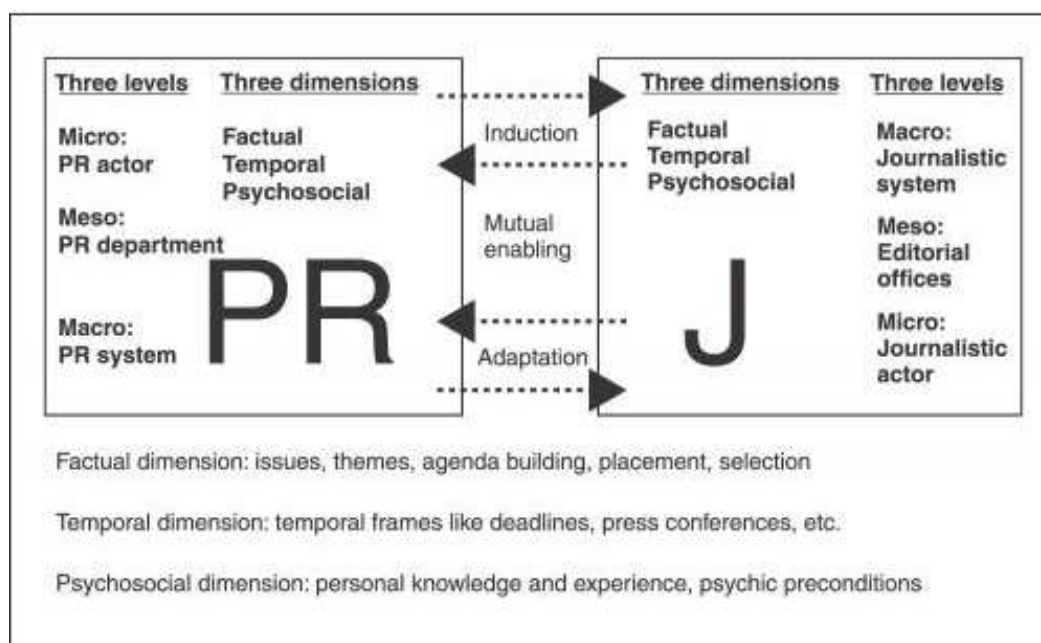


Figure 1: Intereffication model by Bentele, Liebert & Seeling (Wehmeier 2008)

The intereffication model depicts the mutual processes going on between PR and journalism. These processes are induction and adaption. Adaption means that “one system directs its activities and routines towards the other system in order to successfully place its messages” (Wehmeier 2008: online). Processes that have the ability to influence the other system are called induction.

Both induction and adaptation happen on three dimensions Bentele et al. (1997: 243-244):

- Factual: i.e. gaining in inductive activities designed to influence the journalistic system like sending out a press release; or journalists selecting placing, assessing and commenting on the received information
- Temporal: i.e. PR practitioners orienting their timing towards the routines of journalism and the other way around
- Psychosocial; i.e. journalists’ and PR practitioners’ personal relationships

The induction and adaption processes take place not only on three dimensions, but also on three levels. The micro-level reflects the processes of individual actors. The meso-level comprises the PR-departments and media organizations and the macro level embraces the whole systems of PR and journalism (Wehmeier 2008: online). However, the authors of the intereffication model stressed that usually there is no symmetry neither balance in those mutually enabling processes – the inductions and adaptations can vary in their intensity and strength on both sides (Bentele 2005).

Although the only criticism of the intereffication model is the lack of further analysis and broader research to cover the full range of the model (Wehmeier 2008: online), it seems that the model's overlying idea of two-way processes between the PR practitioners and journalists is adequate. Larsson (2009:145) concluded in his study of the relationship between journalism and PR:

"The PR industry and the media collaborate in line with the logic of traditional exchange theory – one party's need for media space is served by satisfying the other's need for material. This also means that in many cases the parties have become mutually dependent on each other and that they have developed a common interest in the relationship."

Due to the changes in the media market, which resulted in the drop of advertisement money and shrinking personnel numbers, the editorial staff is under a constant pressure to deliver the same (or greater) volume of journalistic content as before. The journalists are in need of interesting and newsworthy material. This has enhanced the probability that the information offered by public relations practitioners gets noticed and used. Thus, the starting point of this thesis is that the PR-journalism relationship can be described as a symbiosis. However, this relationship is not static, it is prone to change. The prior studies and analyses about PR-journalism relationship have not taken social media into account. This thesis will study the possible impact of social media on media relations.

2.2 Social Media

There are many concepts used interchangeably to indicate social media. Next the social media will be defined. Also, the difference between social networks, user-generated content and Web 2.0 will be explained.

Web 2.0 is a platform where content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 61). The authors consider Web 2.0 as the platform for the evolution of social media. Further, Kaplan and Haenlein explain that the term “user-generated content” is usually applied to describe the different forms of media content that is publicly available and created by end-users (outside of professional routines and practices).

Social media is defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 61). Solis and Breakenridge (2009: xvii) have defined social media as follows: “Social media is the democratization of content and the shift in the role people play in the process of reading and disseminating information (and thus creating and sharing content).” Kangas, Toivonen and Bäck (2007) argue that social media comprise content, communities and Web 2.0 technology. All of these definitions add something to each other, but the main idea is that social media is an umbrella term for different applications, which utilize the platform of Web 2.0 technology and enable to create and distribute content and connect with people.

There are a number of different social media applications, which all have something different and characteristic to them. Different social media applications have been divided into different categories (Lietsala and Sirkkunen 2008, cited in Matikainen 2008: 26) :

- creation and publishing content (blogs, wikis, podcasting)
- content sharing (i.e. Flickr, Youtube, del.icio.us)
- networking or community services (Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace)
- joint content production (Wikipedia, OhmyNews)
- virtual worlds (Second Life, Habbo)
- add-ons: services, which you can use in other service environments like Google maps

Social networking sites have become so popular that some scholars (Boyd & Ellison 2008) approach them as a separate phenomenon in the online communication system. However, it is more common to consider applications, which include creation and sharing content, participation and networking as part of social media.

In the light of the previous information about social media and traditional media, table 2 draws the characteristics of traditional media and social media together.

Traditional media	Social media
One-way communication	Two-way, interactive communication (Grunig 2009)
Broad, anonymous audience	Broad audience, specific small groups, non-anonymous

Accurate, fact-based, neutral	Partial, personal, more emotional (Solis & Breakenridge 2009)
Journalists create content	Joint content creating (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010)
Discussion possibilities limited	Enables discussions & instant feedback (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010)
Sending content to the audience	Sharing & mediating content (Baroody 2009, cited in Luoma-aho 2010:3)
Content somewhat controllable and static	Content non-controllable & in constant change (Gross 2009)

Table 2. Traditional media versus social media

2.2.1 Social media and public relations

Social media and its impact on communication are currently widely discussed. In this chapter the links between social media and public relations are discussed based on Grunig's symbolic interpretive approach.

One might think this is just hype, but research shows the tendency that social media's popularity increases. This happens not only at the expense of using traditional media, but also at the expense of other Internet activities. Although people spend more time online the popularity of traditional websites is in a slow decline, while the social media sites (blogs, file-sharing communities, social networking sites) show a strong upward trend (Phillips and Young 2009: 105). According to Gartner Survey (2008) information seeking is one of the most important activities in Internet and it probably remains so (<http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=659807>). There is a new paradigm of online communication that is partly about information (traditional websites) and

partly about social content sharing and commentary (social media) (Phillips and Young 2009: 105).

Here the public relations steps in. On one hand, there is the growing popularity of social media, which refers to the place where people like to spend their time, look for information and communicate with each other. On the other hand, there is the abundance of information on the Internet and the struggle for getting people's attention on this information. Winning the attention for an organization by communicating with its stakeholders and using the channels these stakeholders use is the task of public relations.

Social media users can not be regarded as a "mass audience", but rather niche communities (Phillips & Young 2009). According to the strategic approach to PR, there is seldom a reason for an organization to communicate with a mass audience, because a PR practitioner who has identified its stakeholders can choose specialised channels or interpersonal communication to communicate with them (Grunig 1990 :19).

2.2.2 The symbolic interpretive approach of PR and social media

Grunig talks about two approaches to public relations – the symbolic-interpretive paradigm and the behavioural-strategic management paradigm. He argues that digital media seems to force communicators toward behavioural-strategic management, which is characterized by two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig 2009: 7). The theory of behavioural- strategic

management is the theoretical frame to connect social media and public relations in this thesis.

Digital media have dialogical, interactive, relational and global properties, which are perfectly suited for a behavioural- strategic management paradigm of public relations (Grunig 2009: 6). Grunig does not mention explicitly social media, but among others he mentions blogs and microblogs, which belong to social media. In his article Grunig (2009: 13-15) points out the digital media's appropriateness for:

- carrying out and evaluating different communication programmes to cultivate relationships with publics
- environmental scanning, which Grunig thinks is even more valuable when used for digital media than for traditional media
- segmenting of stakeholders and publics using digital media as a database
- anticipating and dealing with issues and crises
- measuring relationships and reputation

Even when digital media has dialogical, interactive, relational and global properties that might bring PR activities closer to strategic management theory, the problem is that many public relations practitioners use digital media (and social media) for one-way, asymmetrical communication programmes by stacking information on people as they used to do with traditional media (Phillips 2009, cited in Grunig 2009: 6, 7).

However, the "rules" of communication on the Internet are different. The Oxford Internet Survey shows that people are resistant (and this tendency is growing) to

spam and “pushed” content. A message cannot be pushed to an audience without the absolute and individual acceptance of the recipient (Phillips and Young 2009: 98). Powell (2009, cited in Grunig 2009: 7) has stated that if the social-networking sites will be flooded with marketing messages, it will likely hasten their demise. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 65), too, state that social media is about participation, sharing and collaboration, rather than straightforward advertising and selling. Several authors talk about the importance of monitoring the environment and engaging with publics in social media by having conversations with them (Grunig 2009; Phillips and Young 2009; Solis & Breakenridge 2009) . Grunig (2009: 1) concludes:

“Although many practitioners have simply transferred their traditional media skills and techniques to digital media, the new fascination with social media promises to have positive consequences for the public relations profession. If the social media are used to their full potential, I believe they will inexorably make public relations practice more global, strategic, two-way and interactive, symmetrical or dialogical, and socially responsible.”

Today people are no more dependent or constrained by the information that traditional media choose to present, or information that organizations choose to disclose either directly or through traditional media (Grunig 2009: 6). The effectivity of one-way messaging has been questioned before, but certainly in the Internet and especially in social media environment people are resistant to top-down information, as they now have so many other sources to get information from.

The reasoning suggests that if social media fosters the behavioural strategic paradigm in public relations and simultaneously takes away from the symbolic-

interpretive paradigm, which emphasizes publicity and media relations, then this affects media relations. Could this mean that the “better” way of doing public relations excludes media relations as we know it?

The conversations within and among publics, that are typical for behavioural strategic paradigm, may still include journalists writing online or in the traditional media. What differs is that people now have more sources of information available to them than just journalistically mediated sources (Grunig 2009: 6). “The strategic management approach does not exclude traditional public relations activities such as media relations and the dissemination of information. Rather, it broadens the number and types of media and communication activities and fits them into a framework of research and listening.” (Grunig 2009: 9). This statement indicates that social media have an influence on organizations’ communications as a whole, but not necessarily on media relations.

The purpose of the study is to find out if this is true or not in the context of Estonian public relations. It is also of interest to examine if using social media could show signs of fostering the strategic management approach in public relations.

2.2.3 Criticism of strategic management approach

Grunig acknowledges his critics such as Weaver, Motion and Roper (2006, cited in Grunig 2009). These critics say that strategic management paradigm is “an unlikely rarity and even something of a fantastical idea” (Grunig 2009: 9), while the interpretive paradigm is the way as public relations actually is practiced. However, the interpretive approach does not provide a normative model for

how PR should be practiced; whereas the strategic management paradigm provides a normative model for an ethical, effective and organisationally and socially valued approach to public relations practice (Grunig 2009: 10).

According to Massy and Weitz (1977, quoted in Grunig & Grunig 1992: 291) “positive theories are used to understand problems, whereas normative theories are used to solve problems.” The Grunigs (1992) have concluded that the theoretical relationship between the models of public relations and an organization’s environment and structure is more normative than positive. Hence, the counter-argument to Grunigs’ critics is that it may fairly be that in reality practitioners act mostly in accordance with the interpretive approach. However, it should not be regarded as the “right” way to practice public relations as long as there is not a normative theory that proposes an “ideal” model for public relations, which would support the principles of interpretive paradigm.

2.3 Future scenarios

The purpose of this study is both to find out the current situation of media relations in Estonian public relations’ scene, and also to look in the future to predict a possible scenario for the media relations. In order to make predictions about something in the future the theory of future studies must be applied.

2.3.1 Future Studies

The purpose of future studies is to discover or invent, examine and evaluate, and propose possible, probable and preferable futures (Bell 1997: 73) The future exists because we can imagine it and because we know that there are some regularities in life and in the society (Metsämuuronen 2005: 259). In future studies the central research object and the starting-point for all findings is the present day (Bell 1997: 76). Hence, the information about future is more or less probable. In the model of future studies the period of steady development is followed by a turning point, after which comes (bi- or tri-) furcation, the different alternatives of the future. (Metsämuuronen 2005: 256). Thus, the future is a group of different possible futures. The weakness of this model is that although these turning points make many different potential futures possible, only one of them really happens (Metsämuuronen 2005: 257). One has to keep in mind that information about the future is not “the truth”, but more or less unreliable estimation about the future.

The apparent challenge of the future studies is to sense and make use of so-called “weak signals”. Weak signals are indications about trends and phenomena that are not clearly evident, but still in the hiding phase (Eriksson 1996, cited in Metsämuuronen 2005: 264). There are two kinds of weak signals – the rising signals of new trends and the descending signals of old trends. The catch with weak signals is that if everybody would notice these signals, they would not be weak signals anymore, but strong signals (Metsämuuronen 2005: 265),. For example already in 1999 some people sensed the signals and issued the Cluetrain

manifesto which foresaw the impact of Internet on mass media as well as on organizational and market communication (Owens 2009: online).

One of the key assumptions of futurists is that to a greater or lesser degree future outcomes can be influenced by individual and collective action (Bell 1997: 154). This means that people themselves help to create the future with their own present decisions and actions. So what one does today may pave the way for the developments in the future.

The future studies' scholars agree that future sends "messages" about its existence, but the question is who understands these messages? Eriksson (1996, in Metsämuuronen 2005: 265) claims that the activities of a complex system are best understood by a person who is part of that system. This person learns to sense the shades and trends by observing the environment. In addition to sensing the weak signals, the actions and decisions made after sensing the signals are equally important. The consequences of the actions based on the information about the future may affect the whole society (Bell 1997: 91; Metsämuuronen 2005: 266). In this thesis the Estonian public relations practitioners will make predictions about the media relations in the future. They are part of the system and know the field very well. With their present day actions these communication experts, among many others set the trends for the future. Thus the communication practitioners are competent to forecast the trends of media relations.

2.3.2 Scenarios of Media Relations

As noted in the previous section, the future can have different possible alternatives. The exploration of possible futures includes trying to look at the present in new and different ways, often deliberately breaking out of the conventional or traditional thinking and taking unusual, even unpopular perspectives (Bell 1997: 75-76). The predictions about the future are made based on the information that we have in present day, but also based on the weak signals in the form of trends and indications.

One method of gathering information about the future is constructing scenarios. Scenarios are used when one wants to get information or find out experts' views about different possible futures and the paths that lead to those futures (Metsämuuronen 2005: 286). In this thesis scenarios will be used only in the meaning of different future alternatives (as descriptions of a certain state in unknown future) and will not deal with the paths that lead to them.

Based on the available research, articles and writings of PR experts on the topic of social media and media relations three scenarios of the future media relations will be discussed. Later the empiric data of this study (interviews and drawings by the respondents) will be compared to these scenarios, in order to find out, which of the future scenarios have the highest probability to come true.

The scenarios have two actors – public relations and journalism placed in the context of social media. The aspiration of these scenarios is not to reflect the

reality in its all facets, but to offer a simplified construction of the actors in social media environment.

Scenario alienation

This scenario suggests that in the future PR and journalism will stop having direct connections. For public relations the primary communication channel will be social media. However, as both parties use social media in their work, they influence each other indirectly through social media. Public relations as well as journalism practice two-way communication with the people using social media. In the case of public relations it is done by distributing information, monitoring and engaging in conversations and in journalism by gathering information and enabling the social media users to read, comment and share the content.

Several PR experts (Bush 2009, Horton 2005) have suggested that in the light of shrinking editorial staff and growing use of Internet the PR executives give up on the traditional media relations practices and go on engaging their stakeholders directly via social media.

Nejiens and Smit (2003: online) say that in the present situation regarding the media there are many groups that can no longer be reached via the traditional media channels. James Grunig (1990: 23) holds that the better public relations practice becomes, the less public relations practitioners will need the media. He stresses that organizations do not need relationships with individuals who are not members of their publics (Grunig 2009: 6). Most of the traditional media is mass media, thus the communication through these channels is not necessary.

However, it is not only the PR practitioners that make use of the social media. The journalists, too, increasingly turn to the social media to get story-ideas, to find news and gather information (Waters et al. 2010). The agenda-building role of the social media is growing larger. According to the 2009 survey of Media in the Wired World by Middleberg Communications and the Society of New Communications Research (Porter 2009: online), 70 percent of journalists said that they use social networks in reporting (compared to 41 percent the previous year). The survey of Lariscy et al. (2009: 316) indicated that journalists desire to work with PR practitioners using social media. The authors said this can lead to PR executives being able to contribute to agenda building through social media.

Scenario one next to others

The second scenario predicts that PR and journalism will remain in contact, but the importance of the relationship will diminish compared to the past. Public relations' relationship with journalism will be placed next to other stakeholder relationships mediated through social media and other new media. The journalism-PR relationship is regarded as a mutually influencing symbiosis, so the communication between the PR practitioners, journalists and stakeholders will be two-way and symmetrical.

Most of the scholars and experts (Horton 2005, Grunig 2009, Solis & Breakenridge 2009, Phillips & Young 2009, Kaplan & Haenlein 2010), who have dealt with the topic of public relations and social media, have suggested and predicted that traditional media relations will and should stay as part of public relations practices. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 65) find that the integration of social media and traditional media is the key because in the eyes of the publics both of these channels mediate the image of the organization.

Aitamurto (2010: 30) points out that social media will not replace journalism because social media only facilitate the news, not create it. However, social media grows more important for journalism, too, enabling better service and accessibility for the readers and bringing more community-thinking into journalism. Even now many newspapers in the U.S. have included social media in their news reporting activities.

Furthermore, Castells (2007: 253-254) holds that the autonomy of social networking sites does not compete against mainstream media. On the contrary, he says that the networking services can boost the power of traditional media outlets. The numerous links to news articles will help the articles to move up in search engine rankings and brings more readers (and clicks) to the news providers' website. In his article, Grunig (2009: 6) referred to a 2006 report by Edelman and First& 42nd, which found that bloggers are more likely to comment on issues of corporate social responsibility identified by mainstream media, than to initiate these issues themselves. Thus, it seems that the traditional media has an agenda-setting role for bloggers.

The strategic management paradigm does not exclude traditional public relations activities such as media relations and the dissemination of information (Grunig 2009: 9). These rather broaden the number and types of media and communication activities. Horton predicts that in the future the media relations will consist of a mixture of old and new media and media relations will no longer be a core service, but just one in a number of services offered to clients (2005: 2). This is already now supported by the fact that many organizations have started using social media releases and have created social media newsrooms,

which are not meant only for journalists, but are easy to access, comment and link for everyone using the Internet (Kayser 2008: online).

What is more, Horton (2009) suggests that in the era of social media, media relations mean the contacts with and persuasion of content creators. Horton's idea diminishes the value of the relationship with journalists (as a representative of a profession) and sees them as just one of the many content creators.

Scenario 3 – convergence

This scenario holds the idea that in the future there are no clearly distinctive occupations of journalists and PR practitioners, but a converged mixture of these occupations with the goal of brokering attention. Traditional media institutions as such cease to be and journalists as well as PR professionals act as individual content creators using social media as a main arena for their activities.

The scenario is derived from the part of the attention economy theory which concerns communication. Attention economy is related to the increasing influence of the Internet and the digitalization of the media (Luoma-aho et al. 2009). Attention economy is seen as a system, which is built around paying, receiving and seeking what is extremely limited and not replaceable – the attention of people (Goldhaber 2006, cited in Luoma-aho & Nordfors 2009: 7). This fact increases the value of attention work.

Attention work deals with professional generation and brokering of attention, whereas their success is measured in the value of the attention they gain (Nordfors 2006: 8). Attention workers include professions like journalism, public

relations, but also lobbying, marketing, advertising, distribution and sales (Luoma-aho et al. 2009: 5).

The functions of journalists and public relations officers could in the future converge into a new profession – attention workers. Hence, the scenario suggests that there are no media relations as such in the future, but “a delicate system of symbiotic relationships between the various attention workers” (Luoma-aho & Nordfors 2009: 12).

3. METHODOLOGY

In this research two qualitative methods were used - focused interviews and analysis of visual data. In this chapter first the general principles of choosing the research method are explained. After that the characteristics of focused interview are explained. The principles of forming the interview outline are presented, a comparison of the focused interview with survey and in-depth interviews are provided. Also, the limitations of the method are considered. Next, the analysis of visual data as a research method is discussed. After that the principles of forming the sample are explained. Further, the research process is described and lastly, the analysis process of research data is discussed.

3.1 Main principles

In the core of this research stood the concept of media relations, its meaning(s) today and the possible change of the concept since the introduction of the social media and in the future. Taking that into account – if one wants to know what people think and why they act the way they do, then it should be asked from these people (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002: 74). The meanings and experiences can be studied with interviewing.

In this thesis interviewing was chosen as the main data gathering method because interviewing better enables the motivation of respondents, it is more flexible concerning the specifications and the order of the questions. Interviewing can point out the interconnectedness of variables and also enables to map out topics that are not yet covered by scientifically reliable tests (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 1982: 15). The topic of media relations from social media's perspective is new. Interviewing may help to find out how these two concepts are being perceived by the respondents, how they interrelate to each other, what are the reasoning concerning the issues of media relations and social media and what are the highlights when talking about these topics.

In this research the interpretative approach was used. This means that people, their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings were seen as the primary data sources (Mason 2002: 56). Accordingly, the purpose of qualitative interviews was to derive interpretations and to understand the meaning of respondents' experiences and life worlds (Warren 2002: 83). The interpretive approach was applied also in the analysis of the visual data.

The types of research interviews are usually distinguished from each other based on how fixed are the questions and how fixed is the structure of the interview (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 1982: 28). Hirsjärvi and Hurme (1982) have presented three types of research interviews. There is the structured survey interview where the formulation and order of the questions are strictly predetermined. At the other extreme is the in-depth (also called free or informal interview), which reminds more of a conversation because there are no pre-set structures or procedures. In the middle there is the semi-structured interview, which was the type of interview used in this study.

3.2 Focused interview

The semi-structured interview can be labelled and classified in different ways: Warren (2002) has talked about qualitative interviewing; Weir (1990) has written about controlled interview; and Merton, Fiske and Kendall have written in their book (1956) about focused interview. In this thesis the term "focused interview" is used. The overlying assumption for all of these name versions is the same – the themes or issues of the interview are predetermined, but the researcher is unlikely to have a complete and sequenced script of questions (Mason 2002: 62). The interviewer has to make sure that all the pre-set topics will be covered, but their order and depth may vary in all interviews (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 87).

According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (1982: 35) focused interviews are suitable for instance when studying matters that one is poorly conscious of, or when studying issues that the respondents are not used to talk about e.g. discuss

critically their appreciations, ideals, reasoning etc. Media relations' role and meaning for PR at the time of social media's growing popularity and in the future is something that most of the respondents have not thought about. Hence, interviews might help the respondents to construct (or reconstruct) the knowledge about that topic.

Talking about bias or the potential eradication of the bias is inappropriate when dealing with semi-structured interview because the interpretive approach sees interviews always as social interactions (Mason 2002: 65). From this point of view one cannot separate the interview from the social interaction in which it was produced because facts cannot be separated from contexts. According to Mason, it is better to try to understand the complexities of the interaction, and to try to develop a sense of how context and situation work in interview interactions, than to pretend that key dimensions can be controlled (Mason 2002: 65).

The Sociology Central (<http://www.sociology.org.uk/methfi.pdf>) points out that the focused interview has a high validity, because people are able to talk about something in detail and reveal meanings behind actions. The respondents can speak for themselves while getting little directions from the interviewer.

3.2.1 Thematizing in focused interview

The predetermined research themes of the focused interview were derived from the theoretical framework of the research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002: 75-76). Qualitative interview uses three kinds of questions: main questions that begin

and guide the conversation; questions to clarify answers and request further examples; and follow-up questions (Warren 2002: 86).

In this study the outline of the interview consisted of 4 main themes with a number of introductory, directing, supporting or specifying questions (see appendix A for interview outline). In the course of the interview the use and order of the questions and themes were flexible. Some questions were left out when the respondent covered the issue under some other question. Additional questions were formulated and asked where the interviewer deemed necessary. The main themes of the focused interviews were:

1. Media relations today

The aim was to find out how the concept “media relations” is understood, whether it is mostly related to the relationship with journalists or is it seen more broadly. Why an organization needs media relations in the first place? Also, the possible impact of the personal relationships between public relations professionals and journalists was of interest in the first theme-block.

2. The change of media relations

The purpose was to find out what has changed in media relations in the past 5 years (approximately the time period when social media was introduced in organizational communication). Do the respondents refer to the impact of social media? What kind of developments do the interviewees point out?

3. The role of social media

What is the function of social media for organizational communication? What kind of value does social media bring to the organization? How does it differ from the communication with traditional media?

4. The future of media relations

The respondents were encouraged to predict what media relations would be like in 15-20 years. They also were asked to visualize the future of media relations by drawing. The aim was to see how important the traditional media and social media are perceived in the future perspective and how/where these would be placed. The interest was to see if some aspects of the drawings would cumulate among the different respondents, in order to make some future predictions based on it.

3.2.2 Limitations of the method

Although focused interview was the most appropriate method for finding the answers for the research questions of this thesis, the method has also its limitations. These limitations will be taken into account in the assessment part of the research in chapter 5.2.

One of the weaknesses of the method is that interviewees sometimes respond to interviewers through the use of familiar narrative constructs, rather than by providing meaningful insights into their subjective view (Miller & Glassner 2004: 127).

The Sociology Central's method evaluation document about focused interview (<http://www.sociology.org.uk/methfi.pdf>) points out that the interviewer may give out unconscious signals or cues that guide the interviewee to give answers expected by interviewer. Also, the method evaluation document suggests that the depth of qualitative information may be difficult to analyze (for example, deciding what is and is not relevant). Further, the method evaluation by Sociology Central suggests that the personal nature of the interview may make findings difficult to generalize as the respondents may effectively be answering different questions.

In addition, the reliability of the focused interview tends to be low because every interview is unique and difficult to repeat. Also, in focused interviews the samples tend to be small (<http://www.sociology.org.uk/methfi.pdf>).

Another downside of the method is that having been given the time to reflect on something they did, the respondents try to make sense of their behaviour by rationalising their actions. With hindsight their explanation for their behaviour may be very different from what they actually felt at the time (<http://www.sociology.org.uk/methfi.pdf>).

All in all scientific methods have their strengths and weaknesses. Being aware of the limitations of the method helped the researcher to take them into account when conducting the interviews and analysing the data.

3.3 Visual data

In order to diversify the research data and increase the validity of the thesis the study combined visual methods with focused interviewing. The aim of using visualization as a research method was to offer the respondents a more expressive way to answer the question about an abstract future. The idea was to analyze the drawings based on the theory of the research and looking for some similarities or special traits among them.

Bohnsack (2008: 3) acknowledges that pictures have the methodological status of self-referential systems. "The totality of images encloses all meaning elements which constitute the symbolic unit as a whole and represents them all at once." (Imdahl 1980, Raab 2007 cited in Schnettler & Raab 2008: 9). Mason (2002: 106) states that visual documents, visual records, objects, artefacts and phenomena, or visualization as a process more than a thing can provide or count as evidence of this social world. Some people have the view that words and text cannot express all of the elements of the visual in which we are interested, and therefore a research must involve processes of visualization (Mason 2002: 107).

Bohnsack finds that there are two ways of understanding pictures – communication about the pictures (explaining pictures through texts) and understanding through the pictures. The latter approach is used in this research and it means that our social reality is represented by; constituted or produced by pictures (Mitchell 1994, cited in Bohnsack 2008: 3).

Using visual methods in this research is backed with the assumption expressed by Mason (2002: 106) that one can trace or “read” aspects of the social world through documents, records, objects, visual or spatial phenomena or aspects of social organization.

In this study the interviewees were asked to visualize the media relations of an organization in the future. Future is a difficult topic to imagine and talk about. Therefore the visualization of the matter may have helped the respondents to organize and clarify their ideas.

However, one has to bear in mind that visual images are always constructed versions of reality, so none of these is directly and straightforwardly evidential or representational (Mason 2002: 107). The goal of analysing the visual sketches was not to get a realistic picture of the future media relations, but rather to look for the common trends and how the respondents interpreted the topic. The analysis of the sketches drew on the knowledge from the theoretical part of this study.

3.4 Sample

The sample of this study consisted of 8 Estonian communication specialists from the organizations that use social media in their communication activities. The overlying idea for choosing the interviewees was that the most suitable communication workers to talk about the possible impact of social media on media relations are the people who have actually experienced it by using social media in their organizational communication. So, the knowledge the

respondents possess goes further from plain speculations or theorizing, as it is based on personal experience. Therefore, the meanings and interpretations of the interviewees reflect reality more. Also, the public relations specialists who are familiar with the various ways of modern communication are more likely to take the current and coming trends into account when making predictions about the future of media relations.

Other criteria for sampling were that the organizations would be well-known in Estonia and have operated long enough to have sufficient experience also with traditional media relations.

The researcher first made acquaintance with the population of the research by reading Estonian blogs and websites that deal with social media and internet marketing. Then the sample was sorted out by using the Metrix.Station portal (<http://metrix.station.ee/>) which draws together the statistics of Estonian websites, including Facebook and Twitter accounts and the business blogs of Estonian organizations. The concrete organizations were picked out based on the researcher's personal assessment of the organizations' suitability based on the criteria placed for the sample.

During the data gathering process the chief communication officers and -in case there was no public relations officer in that organization- marketing specialists of 7 organizations were interviewed. (The marketing specialists were also taking care of media relations in their organization.) The interviewees were:

- Karin Kahre, communications manager of Elion (largest telecommunications and IT provider in Estonia) www.elion.ee

- Ilona Eskelinen, PR director in Estonian Air (Estonia's national airline, the home base is Tallinn Airport) www.estonian-air.ee
- Kettrud Pai, marketing assistant of Photopoint (chain of retail stores for digital technology and IT products and services, owned by Nordic Digital) www.photopoint.ee
- Kaja Sepp, public relations manager in EMT (the biggest mobile network operator in Estonia) www.emt.ee
- Merit Välbe, Baltika public relations manager and Kairit Järvekald, Monton marketing manager representing Monton (quality fashion brand by Baltika Group, the fashion retailer corporation operating in the Baltic States, Central and Eastern Europe) www.montonfashion.com, www.baltikagroup.com
- Hiie Aru, marketing manager in Kaleva Travel (second largest travel agency in Estonia offering services in both business travel and leisure travel) www.kalevatravel.ee
- Tiina Shein, PR and marketing specialist of Eastern European markets in Addinol (the Estonian branch of the German high-performance lubricants developer and producer) www.addinol.ee

The size of the sample is deemed sufficient because the saturation point of information was reached. For the convenience of following the text in the analysis phase the respondents will be referred to by the name of the organisation that they represented.

The sample was sorted out by looking for organizations which use social media. However, the emphasis of the interviews was not on the organizations and their comparison, but rather on the communication activities related to media

relations and social media, as well as on the meanings and interpretations behind these activities.

Although the organization's size, history, fame and the type of products and services it provides might have an effect on the studied issues, in this study these effects were not analysed.

3.5 The research process

The interviewees were contacted by e-mail and telephone. In order to get consent from the potential interviewees, they were explained that the information resulting from the interview will be used in a master's thesis. Some respondents wished to see the questions beforehand. The decision was made that seeing the questions might tempt the interviewees to talk about social media more than they normally would and thus influence the results of the research. No questions were provided to the interviewees in advance. However, as Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002: 75) recommended, the respondents were told what kind of topics will be discussed during the interview. The topics were media relations, their change and future, and social media.

Before starting with the formal interviews a test interview was carried out with the public relations specialist of Tartu University. The aim was to test the course of the interview, how the questions were understood and how long could the interview approximately last. After the interview the researcher asked some feedback from the respondent. Based on the feedback and the knowledge gained through this experience some minor adjustments were made to the interview layout.

The interviews with the sample were conducted in the cities of Tallinn and Tartu in Estonia during four days. The interviews were carried out in neutral surroundings. The in-house cafeteria of Elion was a peaceful place picked out by the respondent. The interview with the representative of Addinol was conducted in a cafeteria because she works as a freelancer from Tallinn and does not have an office there.

Organization	Date	Town	Location	Interview length
Elion	9.3.2010	Tallinn	in-house cafeteria	1 h 5 min
Estonian Air	9.3.2010	Tallinn	personal office	53 min
Photopoint	10.3.2010	Tartu	personal office	58 min
EMT	11.3.2010	Tallinn	personal office	41 min
Monton	11.3.2010	Tallinn	personal office	56 min
Kaleva Travel	11.3.2010	Tallinn	meeting room	40 min
Addinol	15.3.2010	Tallinn	Cafeteria	50 min

Table 3. Date, location and durations of the research interviews

The interviewees answered orally to most of the questions. In the end of the interview all respondents were asked to predict the future (in ~15-20 years) of media relations. After answering this question they had to sketch the future of media relations on a paper (see Appendix B for the sketches). In order to simplify the demanding task the interviewees were given hints about what matters they could consider before drawing the sketch (i.e. who are the senders and who are the receivers of the information; what kinds of parties are involved; which directions do the communication flows move to; what kinds of channels are used

etc.). Also, the interviewees were asked to explain orally what they had drawn on the paper. In the analysis phase this helped to understand what and how the respondents wanted to express on the sketches.

The interviews were carried out in Estonian language. All interviews were recorded and transcribed word-to-word.

3.6 The analysis of the research data

The analysis of the research means transforming research data into statements that describe, explain or predict something what the researcher has studied (LeCompte & Schensul 1999, cited in LeCompte 2000: 146). The relevant items in the whole set of data should be identified and organized. Items are the specific things in the whole volume of data that the researchers code, count and assemble into research results (LeCompte 2000: 148). According to Mason (2002: 79), deriving data from qualitative data can be done in literal, interpretive or reflexive manner. In this thesis the interpretive approach is used. An interpretive reading will involve the researcher in constructing or documenting a version of what he/she thinks the data mean or represent, or what he/she thinks can be inferred from them (Mason 2002: 149).

The data from focused interviews can be analyzed by using thematizing. This means that from the data these items will be examined which stand out from several interviewees' answers (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000: 173). These items are usually based on the themes covered by the interview. However, Hirsjärvi and

Hurme add that often many other themes stand out which might be even more interesting than the initial themes (2000: 73).

3.6.1 Analysis of focused interviews and visual data

In this study first the transcriptions of the interviews were read through several times to identify the research items. After that the relevant items from every interview were marked with a different colour and moved to a separate document. In that document the data was organized under the themes derived from the interview outline. The analysis themes were media relations today, the change of media relations, social media and its role for PR, the future of media relations.

Next, the thematized research data was analysed based on the research questions and the theoretical aspects from the study's previous sections:

- The definitions of media relations provided in the theory part of the thesis were considered when analyzing the data

- Media relations' functions for public relations (Wragg, Theaker & Bland 2005; Johnston 2007; Larsson 2009; Horton 2009) were bunched up from the theory part in order to see to what extent they overlap with the knowledge gained from the interviews.

- The Intereffication model (Bentele, Liebert & Seeling 1997) with its induction and adaption elements and characteristics of journalists and public relations

workers' relationships (Larsson 2009) were considered when looking for the answer to the question whether the relationship between journalists and public relations workers have changed with the advent of social media.

- Indications were sought from the data to evaluate Grunig's suggestion (2009: 9) that strategic management approach in public relations (fostered by social media) does not necessarily mean that it would influence traditional media relations. This was linked to another purpose of the analysis to find out whether Grunig's (2009) assumption of digital media advancing strategic management in public relations could be true or not. This was done by comparing the research data with the characteristics of strategic management approach. These characteristics, suggested by Grunig (2009), were listed in the theory part (chapter 2.2.2).

- The theme of future media relations was analysed based on the transcribed data as well as on the drawings. The theoretical starting-points of the thesis were considered when interpreting the sketches.

When analyzing the sketches drawn by the respondents, the positioning of traditional media and social media on the drawings were of interest for the researcher. The explanations of the sketches that had been transcribed from the recordings were considered when interpreting the drawings. The sketches were compared to each other by studying whether there were common traits in the drawings. The findings were compared to the scenarios presented by the researcher in the theoretical part of the thesis to find out which scenario seems most probable.

4. RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the research. At first, significant results are displayed according to the themes of research questions. A number of quotations are used to exemplify the results. After that the four research questions set up in the beginning of the thesis are answered.

4.1 Results of the research

Despite the fact that during the interviews numerous different issues were discussed, in this section only the results relevant for the research questions are presented. The interviewees are referred to by the name of the organization they work in. The numbers in brackets refer to the number of respondents. The quotations are freely translated to English by the researcher. The original quotations in Estonian language are presented in the appendix B.

4.1.1 Media relations today

In this section the results concerning the concept of media relations as well as other aspects related to the issue (i.e. the tools of media relations, the nature of the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners) are presented.

Most of the respondents (5) understood media relations primarily as the relationships with journalists/press who mediate the message to the publics/readers. Two of the interviewees noted that media relations involve representing the organizations' goals and interests.

EMT: Media relations are communication with journalists with the intention that they would communicate with the readers. So it's in some way mediated communication, that I reach my target audience through someone else.

Monton: I already explained a bit. I'd say that after all PR is an information source primarily for journalism, for the media in general terms. Media relations mean sharing info and representing company's or brand's interest.

When explaining what are media relations two respondents expanded the meaning of the concept by referring to social media more or less directly. One respondent divided media and thus media relations in two – traditional and social media, while the other had the opinion that media relations mean communication directly with the consumer.

Addinol: For me media relations are actually not only the journalist or the media list, but media is for me when I communicate in Addinol mainly directly with the customer.

When asked to name the media channels that they use in their media relations four respondents mentioned social media channels (blogs, Facebook, Twitter, forum) among them.

Elion: Definitely trade literature, the press, technology- and IT-media: magazines, dailies' special sections and it definitely includes blogs and the whole social media.

When talking about receivers of their press releases, two respondents mentioned blog writers among journalists. Press releases are also sent to different kinds of portals. One might argue that opinion leaders of the field who have popular blogs are acknowledged as important and influential information distributors as journalists.

EMT: I have asked some [bloggers - author] personally if they want to get that information and some have asked to be added to that list. Of course there's this line between a blogger and a journalist. Mostly the bloggers use their blogs to write [newspaper -author] articles based on it. They have been the people interested in technology, they're somewhere in between. Their main channel is the blog, but they also try to sell the material created there.

4.1.2 The functions of media relations and social media

When comparing the functions that media relations have according to the interviewees with the functions mentioned in the theory part, several functions mentioned overlap (Table 4). Overlappings in the table are marked with italics.

Functions of media relations (theory)		Functions of media relations (interviews)
- Enhance reputation of the organization and products (Wragg, Theaker & Bland 2005; Horton 2009)		- Enhance reputation of organization (3) and brand (3)
- Inform/ build awareness (Wragg, Theaker & Bland 2005; Horton 2009)		- Inform / build awareness (4)
- Influence and persuade target audiences (Wragg, Theaker & Bland 2005; Juholin & Kuutti 2003; Larsson 2009)		- To reach the right customer (1)
- More credible than paid advertising (Johnston 2007)		- Credible source (1)
		- Notify about problems (1)
		- Increase sales (4)
		- Publicity (2)

Table 4. The functions of media relations according to the theory and the interviewees (figures in the brackets refer to the number of times the characteristic was mentioned)

The fact that media relations are not mentioned by the respondents as a facilitator of two-way communication may indicate that with the advent of social media, media relations are not considered to encourage two-way communication, as it does not enable dialogue and interaction in a way social media does. Also, one may note that the communication officers were quite straightforward when suggesting that the media relations' function is to increase sales. This could refer to the fact that in many organizations communication activities are still often considered to be a marketing tool. On the other hand, three of the interviewees deal also with the marketing questions in their organizations hence this result may be influenced by that.

Monton: To create the right image for the brand and when it's created, then maintain it, to reach the right customer through communication, to enlarge the client database, to communicate our brand, products, news. This all is, in turn, to enlarge sales.

Estonian Air: To be visible, to make the brand more known and reputation...it's one of the tools of managing reputation.

The respondents were asked to point out the disadvantages and advantages of traditional media compared to social media and vice versa. The results of it are drawn together in Table 5.

	Traditional media	Social media
+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reaching big audiences (4) - Objectivity→credibility (4) - The information has longer 'duration' (1) - Accessible to everybody (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interaction, close contact (4) - No limitations on the content (3) - Users open-minded and interested in you (2) - Enables giving feedback (1) - A new & interesting channel (1) - Fast way to spread information (1)
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No dialogue with publics (3) - Journalists' gatekeeping (3) - Hard to pass news threshold (1) - Time-consuming (1) - Anonymity of publics (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reaches rather small and specific groups (3) - The constant information flow "buries" your messages (3) - Time-consuming (2) - Not objective (1)

	- No control over the information once it's "out there" (1)
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Table 5. *The advantages and disadvantages of traditional media vs social media. (Figures in the brackets refer to the number of times the characteristic was mentioned.)*

Table 5 shows that most of the interviewees agreed on the top advantages and disadvantages of both media. One can note that time-costliness is mentioned as a disadvantage of both types of media. Here the respondents focused on different time dimensions. According to the respondents, the social media is time-consuming in long-term because it needs constant attention once starting to use it. Traditional media can be in short-term time consuming because preparing a press release or answering to the journalist's inquiry takes more time and effort compared to posting a status-update in Facebook or Twitter.

Elion: You have the two-way communication with the journalists, but you don't have it with the readers who are actually the target audience of the whole message. The journalist is more as a mediator. Mostly you really don't get that direct contact with the audience through journalism.

Kaleva Travel: The new media gives one an opportunity to spread your message very fast. I think it's one of the main advantages of it. And the other is that it gives you interactivity, that you can contact people, hear their voice, see their picture. It's a very big advantage.

Monton: Journalism, uhm, the advantage of journalism is that it should be based on facts, as close to the truth as possible, and objective. At the same time social media makes it possible to communicate what you want to say yourself, the journalist is like a filter and you can't always get pass it. In the social media it's possible.

All of the respondents affirmed during the interviews that it is important to retain relationships with journalists. Why? The answers were quite pragmatic and can be partly derived from the advantages of traditional media in table 4: different groups of people consume different kinds of media, thus it is important to be present in all of these channels; the journalistically edited text gives a certain value to the message which adds its credibility; and people shape their opinions based on the information of traditional media.

Kaleva Travel: People use very different media sources. Who prefers what? And it depends on age what kind of channels one prefers to use. So the new and hip or modern variants are going to stay, also the traditional things are going to stay and also print media, because after all, sometimes it is necessary to be in the traditional media, it's the print media or outdoors commercials or TV. You can't prefer one over another.

EMT: But media has a really strong audience and additionally, an article by a journalist is many times more reliable than a commercial text. People love to read from media and formulate their beliefs based on it.

When enhancing reputation of the organization and building awareness are the functions of traditional media relations then what is the function of social media? The advantages of social media in table 5 suggest that interactive dialogue and no limitations on the content could be the key words. Accordingly, when describing the benefits of social media, the interviewees (7) mentioned most often the opportunity to enter a dialogue, to gather feedback and opinions. Some more practical benefits were mentioned too, for example a better rank in the search engines. One might conclude that the function of social media is the two-way communication between the organization and its publics.

Kaleva Travel: If someone has a question then he can get an answer quickly, so that it wouldn't stay there for a long time. The goal of the whole thing is mutual communication.

One respondent said that for them monitoring blogs and other social media is an important activity. Frequently (4) the direct communication through social media channels is used to solve problems that the clients might have.

Estonian Air: [Social media is used - author] To react as quickly as possible to problems, to see them through and then direct our efforts to where we can fix something.

Elion: But naturally we follow also other areas, blogs of certain opinion leaders and definitely all those blogs, where they talk about us. We have the opportunity to monitor it in this way, we can see what's going on in the whole social media. We follow them quite actively all the time. And actually we solve a lot of consumer issues through it.

What is more, the respondents pointed out that using social media helps to present the values and to show the openness of the organization. Also, it moves the organization closer to the clients; it reveals the people behind the anonymous facade of a brand and it shows that the organization cares about the opinions, problems and feedback given to them. Two respondents used several times the term "community", thus it can be inferred that social media is also used for community-building purposes.

Elion: It is [social media - author] very important and the gain is that we show that we exist, that we care what is being said in this channel.

Monton: It's such a community thing. When you're a part of something you have certain privileges. [...] The right person can connect with us and feels the joy of recognition and at the same time he gets some added value for why he should be there. So it's important for us to strengthen the role as a trend setter and opinion leader in fashion. And empowerment is very important, this is something that Monton does super well.

According to the interviewees social media and journalism are two separate things. They said that although social media is a new communication channel for the organization, the tasks of journalism (traditional media) and social media do not overlap. Thus one cannot replace the other, rather they complement each other. Two respondents said directly that social media is a place for direct and client communication.

Elion: All kinds of forums, Facebooks, Twitters, blogs and that whole world - we have actually looked at it more as an opportunity to gain information and as a tool or a place for client service.

EMT: I don't consider social media to be media, it's just being called that way. Or, it would be better to say that I don't consider social media to be journalism. It's more a channel like a home page, but it has a new and fresh format that is popular at the moment. Social media isn't an alternative for media relations, but it's just another way to communicate directly. [...] We have journalists here on my [Facebook -author] list as well, but I don't communicate with journalists as journalists through social media. [...] It is integrating one message into several channels and now, just a new channel has appeared.

4.1.3 The change of media relations

When asked about the change of media relations in past five years (this is approximately the time when many social media environments emerged), three respondents answered that the media relations in itself (relationships with journalists, communication mediated by traditional media) have not changed.

Photopoint: I'd say that when it comes to the traditional media, it has stayed pretty much the same. Communicating with the media, the standards and the procedures are still the same.

However, the respondents noted that the importance of online media has grown tremendously, which, for one, offers more opportunities for organizations to get their message published, secondly, has boosted up the speed of making news, which influences the quality of the journalistic work and sets extra pressure on public relations officers' work.

Kaleva Travel: Maybe five or more years ago it wasn't so easy for you to forward your message, but thanks to the new online environment it's possible for a company to send its messages, news and press releases to online-media and they are also published there.

Monton: From the changes' point of view I would emphasize, well...naturally thanks to these new channels the media relations and information mediation have become more operative. All the news run over you very quickly and actually they disappear from the spotlight as quickly, so you must fight all the time to stay in the spotlight. The competition is a lot stronger.

One respondent had the view that the era of one-way press release communication is over and many other communication opportunities and activities have been picked up.

Monton: This is one-way versus two-way communication. In earlier years the two-way communication was more a theory and a pretty text in a textbook, it wasn't actually practiced much. As I said, you would send out a press release and wait what will happen and if something happened it was either a crisis or a reason to be happy. The whole process in between, you wouldn't really intervene in it or wouldn't dare or wouldn't want to, or I don't know what was the actual reason [...] But today there's more personal communication, there's such, uhm, pre-communication, which means all kinds of exchange of e-mails, videos, sharing photos, blogs, home pages. Well, their role, importance, quality of content and quantity of it has increased tremendously.

6 respondents pointed out that one of the remarkable changes has been the introduction of social media. The boldest argument presented was that thanks to social media PR has changed to the extent that there is no need for a journalist anymore to do media relations.

Addinol: PR has changed, it has taken a completely new direction that it's not anymore directed towards journalists, but actually PR is directed directly to the customer.

The blogs, Twitter, Facebook. I can start a direct conversation with a client, it's a very big change. Before you had to wait for the journalist's approval and maybe even lick his boots, that he would put it in the paper, if he liked it. So the very big change is that the filter of the journalist has disappeared. So actually you can have good media relations without the journalist.

Although several respondents had said there have been no direct changes in the media relations, one can note several issues that change or add to the traditional

media relations practices. As one interviewee noted, the classical roles of a journalist and PR-person are beclouded in social media.

Elion: So when I say something in Twitter, let's say when I'm a journalist and say something in Twitter that very particularly refers to a certain company or whatever, even a political situation, when I say it am I then a journalist or am I just a citizen? So, these kind of questions definitely arise with the rapid growth of social media.

Also, the communication officers using social media now (may have to) take into consideration that the followers of their blog or social networking site may be journalists who can use the information for writing news. An interviewee added that due to social media there are more news creators than just the journalists. The comments by regular people or discussions in social media environments may grow into journalistic stories and the PR people do not only have to react to the issues in traditional media, but also in the social media.

Monton: Because you have all opportunities to share information then journalists also use all these opportunities to gather that information and they expect that you offer them all variants, a perfect set to them.

Kaleva Travel: At the moment, nowadays, it's very good to spread your message through social media. Because we don't always know exactly who's the follower or the member in the fan club, it can be media person as well, who picks up the message from that channel.

Estonian Air: What has also changed, let's say, five years ago when journalists were making a story and their companies tried to lead it, now in the social media, too, there are actually certain groups of people among the users who create news and then you must react and follow all of them at the same time. So in that sense today...in a way it's a little bit more complicated and requires

faster reaction. [...] That someone flew with us, he's got an experience, whether it's positive or negative, he writes about it and this gets picked up from somewhere by a journalist for example, and then they turn to us. Or a discussion develops in a certain small group in the social media channel, where we can react and answer or explain, if that's necessary.

According to two respondents, sometimes even pre-information or tips on possible scoops are slipped in the social media on purpose to get the attention of media.

Estonian Air: (...) we try to add themes to our blog or Facebook that we know journalists are following or people interested in aviation are following, and sometimes these stories will start a life of their own in there.

4.1.4 The future of media relations

The answers of this theme consist of two types of data – the interviews with the interviewees as well as the sketches that the respondents drew.

First of all, when talking about the media relations in the future, all respondents assured that the traditional media channels and journalism will remain also in the future. The parallel was drawn with how the radio and television have survived until today while new channels have emerged. Two interviewees assumed that journalism might take some other form or move to some other channel, but the need for edited and objective information will not cease.

Monton: I don't think that press media will die, radio didn't die when TV came and so on.

EMT: I'm one of those who think that journalism as we know it won't disappear. Its forms might change. [...] But journalists will stay, media relations will stay and journalism in the sense that it is edited information will also definitely stay, I believe.

Another thing the respondents noted was that in the future the need to communicate fast and directly with their publics remains. So the communication mediated through different e-channels will preserve. Most of the respondents counted social media to these channels and assumed that social media probably will grow and develop even further.

Photopoint: Even more people have started to realize the same thing, the importance of the blog, Facebook, communication with clients there; then the client database, how important it is actually that you have the contacts and not just for the sake of having the contacts, but for actually using them. [...] To conclude, I can just say that the usage of Internet will definitely become more important.

Three respondents thought that the social media sites that are „in“ now may easily become unpopular and there will be something new. But the organization should go with the flow in order to communicate with its publics. Two respondents assumed that mobile phone's importance as information carrier and mediator will grow in the future and probably there will be special adjustments for that purpose.

Estonian Air: We don't know if it's [social media- author] going to be actively used in five years time. Maybe it's going to be replaced by something new, that we can't even imagine yet.

EMT: No-one is very sure at the moment where social media is heading in the future. But since it's getting a lot of hype at the moment, it's definitely worth to go along with it. [...] For example

the mobile phone will apparently take a bigger role as an information carrier, that means that the role of computers will rather decrease and a gadget what a person is always carrying with him will become a lot more important as a channel for receiving and sending information.

Two of the respondents stated that social media will not replace traditional media, but it is just one additional channel for communication. And it becomes more important to integrate organization's messages to all of the different channels.

Elion: But that doesn't mean that the role of journalism would decrease manyfold. More likely it'll become a strong alternative. (...) It's more like an alternative to receive certain kinds of information from the social media. [...] Yes, I think, that it can be a new, rather a growing trend to look at the big picture, not just to work narrowly in a single channel like for example with the journalists, but the messages must be covered as a whole in different areas and according to the specifics of that certain channel.

Monton: It'll become more important, the communication and overlapping of networks or information fields.

Another interesting point was that the respondents (3) mentioned that the organizations have their own media channels. Two respondents said that in the future, and even now, one can even talk about the organization as a media in itself or about a media field in the meaning that there are so many different communication channels -organization's own homepage, a forum, a blog, Flickr and Youtube accounts, Facebook, Twitter accounts- where they produce and distribute their own material (videos among others). Hence, when an organization produces so much information and material (like videos) on their own, one might talk about an organization as an autonomous media channel.

Addinol: Our blog... well I think a blog is very much a media channel, it's like a company's own media channel, where you can write everything and about everything you want to.

Monton: In some ways you can say that Monton is like a small media, it depends how you define „media“, that if we count our four blogs and Facebook and other things, then, well, we have created our own little media field in here.

What is more, three respondents emphasized the importance of videos and producing them in the organizational media relations in the future.

Addinol: I think that video is going to be a pretty important thing... already now there are these online press conferences and all kinds of forms of media, I think a lot of it is going into the Internet.

It stood out from the interviews (3) and drawings (4) that the importance of interpersonal communication via social media will definitely grow. It is linked with the rise of opinion leaders or so-called super-users who strongly contribute to the gatekeeper activities in social media environment. The position of opinion leaders stood out especially from the drawings. According to one respondent, the opinion leaders or super-users are active members and communicators in the organization's community. They take part in discussions, initiate topics, help to solve problems, post comments and link the organization's materials to their own pages or blogs and share that information with their own networks.

Monton: Well, it's part of PR, if the message starts living its own life so to say and in a positive way, if we can get for example some coverage or we organize a cool event or a successful project

that people start sharing with each other [...] that coverage comes by itself, we don't have to do anything, it was enough that we initiated it and it goes on by itself.

Elion: And they [super-users - author] are at the same time very important opinion leaders through whom important messages move. Definitely they act mostly in social... uhm, let's say in e-media, e-channels. [...] So I think super-users are so-called agents who help to disseminate organization's messages just out of their own fanaticism. So I think this is a separate new target group where organizations will probably move to and where we are moving, too. Even today they exist for our organization, but we don't know how to manage this so systematically yet.

Also, the interviewees (2) pointed out that the two-way communication and empowerment of the people in their activities and product development will expand in the future due to the new communication channels.

Addinol: A lot, I think, it's going to go the way that there's more communication and more direct communication. The client will help you to create products, clients will help you to improve products, a direct discussion with the client is going on. It's not only marketing and sales departments, but actually the clients are those who do the marketing. A kind of word-of-mouth form so to say.

It is worth to mention that when the respondents were asked to draw a sketch of the media relations in the future, all of the drawings depicted extensive communication fields comprising the relationships with most of the stakeholder groups. Hence the respondents see media relations broader than just the relationship between media representatives and organization.

Many aspects noted in the previous sections were depicted also on the drawings (see Appendix C). It might be due to the fact that the orally presented ideas could

be transmitted on the paper right away. For example, one could find videos mentioned on two drawings; also, the opinion leaders (or super-users, content creators, blog writers who carry the same function) could be detected on four sketches.

Traditional media or journalists were presented on 6 drawings (see Appendix C), usually next to social media (or its different platforms like Twitter, Facebook etc.). Only one drawing depicted journalism as a broad field which incorporated the communication field of the organization as well as the individuals creating content. So, it can be concluded that traditional media/ journalism is regarded as one of the many communication possibilities for an organization. Journalism seems not to have a special status compared to the other channels. It also seemed not to be directly connected to social media (e.g. as a source for information).

Two sketches depicted communication with all groups as two-directional (two-sided arrows), two drawings saw the communication as fields which overlap and influence each other, hence, one can talk about mutual influence in communication. On one sketch the communication activities in social media channels and face-to-face were depicted two-directional, while sending out press releases and communication with the press was presented as one-directional process. On two drawings out of seven all arrows were one-directional. Overall, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents see the communication in the future rather as two-directional and some even sense the difference between the interactional properties of social and traditional media. The Grunigian (2009) viewed social media with dialogical, interactive, relational and global properties as advancing the symmetric communication in the strategic management paradigm. One may suggest that with the popular use of social media in the

future public relations may move a step closer to strategic management approach. This, however, does not mean that the asymmetric communication characteristic of symbolic interpretive approach would be discarded by the PR practitioners.

4.2 Answers to the research questions

1. What are media relations today?

Here the meaning of the concept of “media relations” is under consideration. Relying on the research data it can be said that when specifically asked for the meaning of the concept then the respondents referred to the communication with the journalists/ press and with the audience through the mediation of journalists.

On the other hand, it seemed that the meaning of the concept was not so clear, because when asking the respondents to explain what are media relations for them several interviewees asked for a precision of what was meant by media relations. Furthermore, when talking generally about different communication channels, the changes or the future of media relations, the respondents tended to expand the meaning of the concept and talked about traditional media as well as about social media.

2. What are the functions of social media in organizational communication?

Based on the respondent’s answers, social media and journalism/ traditional media are totally different in their nature. For them, social media is a place for direct communication with clients and other publics; it is a place for gathering feedback, opinions and having discussions, a place for solving upcoming issues

and an arena for community-building. Social media does not replace traditional media but rather offers an additional channel for communication, whereas the two types of media complement each other. All of the respondents deemed journalism and traditional media very important because it helps to reach broad groups of people and because of the trust that people have towards the journalistically edited text.

2.1 What are the functions of media relations after the introduction of social media? What are the functions of social media in the organizational communication?

The most important functions of traditional media relations (Table 3) seem to be enhancing the reputation of the organization and the brand as well as informing and building awareness. Increasing sales was also mentioned several times, but this is more related to the organizational profit goals and thus not so relevant in this context. Contrastingly, the most important function of the social media seems to be enabling two-way communication between an organization and its publics. It is interesting that according to the theory (Wragg, Theaker & Bland 2005) this characteristic has been attributed to traditional media relations, too.

3. Have media relations changed with the introduction of social media?

The respondents pointed out some changes in media environment which were mostly related to the grown popularity of online media. These changes were not caused by the introduction of social media, though. When considering purely the relationships with journalists and communication procedures within the traditional media then it seems that media relations in themselves have not changed with the introduction of social media.

However, the emergence of social media was noted as a big change. The need to consider that journalists (may) follow the postings of the organization in social media was mentioned by the respondents. The communication officers have to be cautious with what and how they say in the social media environment because that information could be picked up and used for story-writing by journalists. In addition to that, also the comments and critics by members of publics in social media may now be a subject for news. With the advent of the social media not only journalists can produce news, but the regular people as well. An organization has to react to those issues using the same platform. Hence, it can be concluded that social media has an effect on the media relations because it adds a whole new environment where a PR person and a journalist interact in work-related issues and pick up ideas.

4. What is the future of media relations?

Based on the answers and drawings about future media relations it can be said that the media relations in the future are seen very broadly. It does not only comprise the communication with journalists or social media, but the different ways and channels of communication for the whole range of organizations' stakeholders.

One thing that all respondents agreed of was that journalism and traditional media channels will definitely stay. Most of them also calculated that social media will develop and become even more popular in organizational communication in the future. These two types of media were mentioned by all interviewees when talking about the future of media relations.

What is more, the respondents shared the opinion that in the future it is important to be present in many different types of media and the messages distributed in these channels will be more integrated. In the future one may even talk about an organization's own media or media field because of the number of different mediums it uses. Further, it was predicted that producing videos becomes more important for organization in the future.

Lastly, the interviewees predicted that in the future two-way communication will become more common thanks to the social media environment. This, in turn, advances the empowerment of the stakeholders in organizational decision-making. Another point mentioned by the interviewees was the extensive use of so-called e-gatekeeping (gatekeeping in new media environment) in the future, which will be facilitated by the opinion leaders or so-called super-users who actively engage in communication with the organization and who also share the information with their peers.

5. CONCLUSIONS

For the Estonian communication experts, who were interviewed for this research, the primary meaning of media relations has remained the same even after the introduction of social media. Yet, there are indications of a possible change in the meaning of the concept to the direction that “media relations” would involve media activities within different channels, including social media.

One could learn from the study that the functions of journalism which is practiced mostly in the traditional media channels differ from the functions of social media. The main functions of traditional media relations today are enhancing the reputation of organization and its brand(s), informing people and building awareness among them, whereas the main function of social media is enabling two-way communication. Thus, social media does not replace traditional media (and the relationships with journalists), but they rather complement each other.

The emergence of social media has not changed the way media relations (in the primary meaning of the concept) are practiced within the traditional media, but in the view of the interviewees the introduction of social media has been a change in itself. The interaction between journalists and PR-workers takes place also in the social media environment. It seems, though, that the mutual interaction processes (induction and adaption) follow the same pattern in social media environment as in the traditional media channels. However, the way how journalists use social media in their data gathering and news writing process is a topic for another study.

The future of media relations is deemed diverse according to the predictions of communication specialists. The journalism with traditional media channels will stay, but the different social media platforms will strongly be present, too. The organization will have more power over the information published about it. Due to the diversity of different media that the organization can manage itself, in the future one might even talk about an organization itself as a media.

Already now there is a whole set of different social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Youtube etc.) that an organization can take advantage of in its communication activities. In social media platforms the organization can manage the information itself and does not need journalists as mediators. However, in social media platforms new kind of gatekeepers and mediators appear. An organization has to take note of these super-users and opinion leaders in internet. The relationships and communication with these gatekeepers have to be managed and enhanced strategically.

6. DISCUSSION

In this chapter the results of the research are discussed and interpreted more thoroughly by setting the results into the framework of the theories presented in the first half of the study. Next, the validity and reliability of the study will be assessed and lastly, the importance of the study and its outcomes are considered.

6.1 The results from theoretical perspective

All-in-all, the concept of “media relations” seemed to have a varying meaning. When asking directly about media relations, the typical answer involved communication with press /journalists, which is how the concept has traditionally been defined in the textbooks. For instance, here is the Business Dictionary’s definition of media relations: “linkages with the media personalities and resources that facilitate an organization in getting a favourable, timely, and widespread editorial coverage.” (<http://www.businessdictionary.com/>). Probably

this classical definition of the concept is rooted in the conscious of the communication field workers, so when specifically asked they automatically provide the popular definition of the concept.

However, after hearing the question, several respondents asked from the interviewer what is meant by media relations. They asked for specification whether it is communication with the journalists or with broader groups of people. Furthermore, when asked about the future of media relations, all respondents mentioned social media.

How does this correspond to the prior result? One explanation for it could be simply the fact that the respondents did not pay much attention to their use of words or there was a problem with construct validity in the research. The other option could be that social media (and other Internet-mediated communication utilities) are considered as a part of the media relations in the future. Another explanation could be that the meaning and understanding of the concept “media relations” is slowly broadening as there are now (and in the future) more actors and channels involved in the organizational communication processes than just traditional media.

It is possible that in the future, when using social media becomes even more common in organizational communication, the concept “media relations” will describe the communication processes within all kinds of media, not just with a certain people i.e. journalists. The overlying idea remains the same – media relations are used to reach the stakeholders. Whether they are reached through the traditional channels of journalism or through some other (e.g. social media) channels should not make a difference. Overall, from the public relations’ point

of view the relationships with stakeholders should come first. The possible shift in the concept of media relations would just stress this point of view. It would help to guide the emphasis from the relationships with media organizations (the mediator) to the relationships with stakeholders.

In the theoretical part of the thesis Grunigian statements in chapter 2.2.2 served as the basis for the problem whether using social media could advance strategic management approach in organizational communication. Relying on the data from the focused interviews and based on the characteristics of PR activities in strategic management approach (Grunig 2009:13-15), it can be concluded, that social media could foster the following strategic management characteristics:

- building relationships with stakeholders through different communication programmes
- dialogical, interactive and global communication with publics
- organisational listening and learning
- environmental scanning
- anticipating and dealing with issues and crises
- measuring relationships and reputation

As for other strategic management characteristics mentioned by Grunig, social media narrowly is probably not the most appropriate environment for segmenting stakeholders and publics because the communities there are rather small. Digital media as a whole would be more suitable in this case. It did not occur from the interviews whether social media are now already used for facilitating dialogue between management and organization's stakeholders before the decision-making. Based on the interviews it could be expected that

now the dialogue takes place rather after the decision-making, but there are signs that it could move to that direction in the future. Also, it seems that social media is more likely a tool for a communication officer than for the members of organization's management. Since most of the characteristics (Grunig 2009) of strategic management approach that can be met by using digital media could be ticked, it can be concluded that Grunig's statement about digital media advancing the strategic management approach in public relations is supported by the results of this study.

If the symbolic-interpretive public relations approach (Grunig 2009) emphasizes media relations and publicity, but the symmetric two-way communication (strategic management) approach should be preferred in communication, then what is the position of media relations in this context?

Based on the knowledge gained from the research, it seems that traditional media and social media both have quite specific and distinct functions for organizational communication.

One can distinguish a broad and anonymous body of stakeholders that can be best reached through the mediated communication with a journalist using traditional media. Traditional media usually covers big masses and, as it occurred from the results, its main functions are enhancing the reputation of brand/ organization, building general awareness and informing people.

Then there are smaller publics (or communities) that have shown interest towards the organization. These publics are tightly bound to the organization due to the interactive communication between them and the organization in social media environments. The main function of social media is two-way communication.

The interviewees affirmed that journalism will not cease to be. They stressed the different functions of using journalism and social media and stated that one will not replace the other. As noted in one of the scenarios in theory chapter, Aitamurto (2010) has pointed out in her 2009 report about journalism trends in the U.S. that journalism will not fade because of social media. The reason is that social networks do not create journalistic content, but just mediate it. After all, the world will need edited and impartial news also in the future.

Traditional media and social media reach different groups of people and the purpose as well as the quality of the communication (interactional versus one-way) in these types of media differ from each other. The tasks of journalism and social media do not overlap, but rather add to each other, forming a more sophisticated and complex field of communication around the organization. To conclude, it seems that the data supports also another Grunig's (2009) statement that the strategic management approach does not exclude media relations, but rather offers new effective types of communication for the organization.

Although the data indicated that the organizations use social media for the purpose of two-way communication, still the question arises what does it show? Even though social media enable two-directional communication it is still often used as a channel of unidirectional messaging. In social media people are more resistant to this kind of communication, so the organization is likely to lose its followers when disregarding the rules of communication in social media environment.

Furthermore, when an organization really practices two-way communication in social media environment, then does this automatically mean that the

organization is committed to its publics? The act of mutual communication in itself does not indicate that the organization empowers its publics in the evaluation and decision-making processes. In the interview the representatives of Monton fashion brand brought an example that their publics are empowered for instance by asking them to write poems about the brand. This is definitely not an example of stakeholder empowerment. The two-directional interaction with the members of public is often very superficial. It may help to build a community around the organization as the members of the public feel that they are connected to the organization. Despite that the organization can keep its publics at a distance when it comes to decision-making. However, several respondents mentioned that they gather feedback about the organization's products and services through social media, which is used for product and service development. So there is a fair chance that when used in a purposeful manner, two-directional communication can contribute to the organizational decision-making processes.

The respondents claimed that media relations have not changed since the introduction of social media. This is when looking at the media relations only in its classical environments of newspapers, magazines, radio, TV. However, it occurred from the interviews that social media is not exclusively the platform for client communication and community-building. It is also a platform where the journalist and a PR person meet. Thus, the journalist-PR practitioner's relationship should be observed in this environment, too. As some respondents said, sometimes social media is used for posting some exclusive information while hoping that the journalists notice it and pick it up. This is an example of an inductive process on behalf of the public relations. The journalists monitor the environment for getting news ideas and other information. They assess and

select the information available in social media. However, they adapt to the channel, style, format and time the information is provided.

Considering the journalist-PR-practitioner interaction in Intereffication model (Bentele, Liebert, Seeling 1997), it seems that the concepts of adaptive and inductive processes are applicable in the case of social media, too. So, a statement could be made that the communication channel may change, but the mutual two-directional processes between journalists and PR workers remain.

The rules of the „game“ between journalism and PR are not so clear and straightforward in social media environment as they are in the traditional media channels. Maybe these rules can be set -at least from the organization's side- with the social media policy (Phillips and Young 2009: 130) as IBM has done (<http://www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html>) among many other notable organizations.

In the predictions about the future of media relations the growing importance of interpersonal communication in social media environments and the role of opinion leaders or super-users in the information spreading process were pointed out. These super-users are active members of the organization's community in the social media channels and share the news and information related to the organization with their social networks. Although in this case the public organizations were not involved, the similarity with Luoma-aho's concept of faith-holders can be seen. According to Luoma-aho (2005: 300), the concept of faith-holder includes the roles of customer, citizen and stakeholder, but with the aspect of high levels of trust and frequent contact with the organization. Faith-holders could be considered as organization's social capital. Similarly, the super-users can be regarded as social capital for the organization.

What is more, the function of super-users as information disseminators resembles to the opinion leaders from the Lazarsfeld and colleagues' theory (1944) of two-step communication flow (Maurer 2008: online). According to the theory of two-step communication flow, the opinion leaders can be found on every level of the society. They do not have differential characteristics compared to other people, but they are more exposed to mass media and more often try to convince others of their political ideas (Maurer 2008: online). Accordingly, the super-users are active users of social media and therefore more exposed to organization's messages. This indicates that the theory of two-step flow and its emphasis on personal influence could be applicable for the e-gatekeeping processes in social media environments and add a new angle to the old theory.

Looking at the role of super-users in e-word-of-mouth activities when sharing the messages of the organization, the parallel with gatekeepers can be drawn. When in media organizations the journalist is the gatekeeper of organization's messages then could super-users be considered as the organization's gatekeepers in social media environment? The super-users also select information in social media, allowing certain messages to pass and holding back the others as usually the journalists have done in traditional media (Wanta 2008: online). So far social media has been regarded as a totally free communication environment with no restraints and control. The activities of opinion leaders in social media environment one comes to the question if social media is so "free" after all. The opinion leaders and their gatekeeper function in the social media environments is a topic for future studies which could certainly help the PR officers to manage the communication in social media channels more effectively.

Bunching up the functions of faith-holders, opinion leaders and gatekeepers, it seems that super-users could be in a key position as organization's information mediators in social media. Thus, in the future the communication with super-users should be strategic and well-planned on behalf of the organization.

Thinking about the future scenarios and looking at the future predictions of media relations made by the interviewed communication specialists, one could see the tendency that in the future organizations will use and integrate as many different types of media to reach as many people as possible. Traditional media and journalism are just one option for it.

In the future the organization probably produces different types of content (blog posts, videos, photos) by itself and distributes it through different e-channels. Additionally, intense two-way communication (probably in social media environments) with different publics will be considered more important. Among of those smaller publics are opinion leaders whose importance as distributors of organization's messages in social media environments will be acknowledged more in the future.

Based on the predictions of communication specialists, one might argue that the scenario 2 -one next to the others- has the highest probability to become true. When a decade ago media relations in their traditional sense were one of the top activities for the communication officers then in the future (and possibly even now) journalism is regarded as one of the many ways to communicate with stakeholders and publics.

Considering the future predictions of media relations and thinking about the role of public relations professional then what is expected from PR people in the future? Could social media become such a powerful arena in the future to supersede the traditional PR activities and media relations as part of it? Are press officers needed at all in the future? In May 2010 the author looked at three randomly selected work advertisements in Internet for communications officers in Estonia. All of the work descriptions included managing media relations and writing press releases among other activities. In addition, two of the advertisements also included increasing the awareness and enhancing the reputation of the organization, which are the common functions of media relations, as it occurred also in the research. Yet, none of these three organizations required any skills of communication in social media. (Of course it has to be kept in mind that using social media is not so common yet among organizations.) In practice it seems that traditional media relations and its skills are still a firm part of the public relations work. This is also what the respondents assured.

When in the future there are more communication channels available for PR officers and one can even talk about a media field of an organization, then it means that the communication officers have to possess more skills and become more professional in order to be able to produce different kinds of material for different channels. The skills of writing press releases and communicating with the journalists are needed also in the future for the traditional media relations, but also when writing blogs. As the “news production” takes place more often in the organization, then multitasking is required from the PR person – they have to be able to write texts in a news format as well as to write stories of general interest for the blog; they have to edit videos and photos and upload the material

online. In addition they have to engage in direct two-way communication with publics via social media channels and sense the communication style in there. So the future of public relations work seems to be highly dynamic and multifaceted.

6.2 Assessment of the research

The research met the goals set in the theory part. All research questions found an answer and additionally some new aspects arose from the study. Hammersley (1990: 57 cited in Silverman 2005: 210) defines validity of the research as the extent to which a research accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers.

The validity of this study is sufficiently high because the theoretical basis of the research supported the course of the research data analysis. The interview outline was derived based on the theory and the research questions. A test interview was conducted and feedback was asked about the interview in order to improve the interview outline.

The Sociology Central (<http://www.sociology.org.uk/methfi.pdf>) has emphasized the high validity of focused interviews. The chosen research method enabled the respondents to talk about the studied issues in detail and depth. Combining the analysis of visual data as a second research method adds to the validity of the research. The interviews were transcribed word-to-word so that the original research data is available. Additionally, plenty of examples (quotations) were reported when presenting the results which enhance the validity of the research.

A critical point of discussion is why the respondents asked the interviewee at several occasions what she meant with media relations. Also, the question arises why the respondents often talked about the media relations in a very broad sense. The reasons for that were discussed earlier in this chapter. Now the possibility of the low construct validity of the research is discussed. The construct validity is related to generalizing. It shows to what extent the concepts used in the theory part are applicable in practice. According to the Research Methods Knowledge Base, the construct validity is a “labelling” issue. An example of the construct validity is brought – “when you measure what you term “self esteem” is that what you were really measuring?” (<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/constval.htm>).

In this case one might ask if the concept of media relations is understood in Estonian in the same way as in English? In Estonian there are two words – “meediasuhted” and “meediasuhtlus”. There is a slight difference in the meaning when translating the words – “meediasuhted” mean media relations and “meediasuhtlus” means communication with the media. However, while the word “meediasuhted” probably is more correct to use in Estonian language, both of these words are interchangeably used for media relations. Looking at the search engine results, both words (“meediasuhted” and “meediasuhtlus”) indicate to the similar meaning of the words – the communication of the communication officers with the journalists.

During the interviews the interviewee used mostly the word “meediasuhtlus” (communication with the media). There is a possibility that there could have been a misinterpretation of the concept by respondents when hearing the word “meediasuhtlus” instead of “meediasuhted”. However, in the course of the

interview the respondents were asked to explain the concept of media relations and it appeared that the concept is understood the same way in Estonian and English languages. Therefore it is not very probable that the construct validity is low.

The limitation of this study is that three of the eight people of the sample were not primarily public relations officers, but marketing specialists. This set a certain angle for these respondents from which they answered the questions. However, in the phase of getting the consent for interviews the researcher asked whether the interviewees deal with the media relations in their organization. All the persons in question assured that they deal with the media relations in their organization, so the criteria for picking out the sample were met.

Reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Silverman 2005: 224). Basically reliability indicates if the research could be repeated with the same result. As in this research the interpretive approach was used, the role of the researcher in the interpretation of the results is important, hence the inter-observer reliability (<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/reotypes.php>) is estimated to be rather low. The Research Methods' Knowledge Base points out the test-retest reliability estimation method. If the research would be repeated after a while with test-retest estimation method the reliability may vary, because at the time of conducting the interviews the topic of social media was hyped in the Estonian public relations. Maybe in a few years time some other information channels have come and then the results would suggest something different than in the spring 2010.

Although the focused interview as a research method is not as reliable as for example a survey, the reliability of this research was increased by presenting the outline of the interview (appendix A) and by documenting the procedures of data gathering and analysis (Chapters 3.5 and 3.6).

6.3 The meaning of the research

From public relations' perspective this research provided a clearer view of the functions of traditional and social media from organization's communication perspective.

This research has indicated that already now and in the future even more so public relations work comprises more activities than it has so far. Years ago traditional media relations stood in the center of PR practitioner's work. It did not become clearly evident in this study whether the meaning of the media relations' concept will broaden in the future, including additionally the communication in social media sphere and other new media. However, it seems that we are moving in the direction where PR work involves multimedia publishing using all kinds of different media to communicate with publics. Journalistic publications will be just one of these. A future PR professional has to develop skills to master and take use of the special characteristics of different media.

Even when social media's popularity keeps on growing and the platforms enable to cultivate two-way communication with publics, it is advisable for PR practitioners to maintain the relationships also with traditional media because

agendas of traditional media and social media are interlinked. The connection of discussion topics in social media and in agenda in traditional media could be a subject for further research in the context of agenda-setting theory.

What is more, due to social media organization's communication becomes more open and the organization itself becomes more easily approachable. Before the communication officer of an organization had mostly contacts with journalists who acted as a filter between an organization and its publics. Social media enable direct communication between the organization and its publics. The organization moves closer to its stakeholders and vice versa. Two-way communication mediated by digital media brings an organization one step closer to the strategic management approach by Grunig (2009).

Although the study's main focus was not to test the Grunig's model of strategic management, the results of this research indicated that the Grunigian view (2009) of digital media (in this case more narrowly social media) advancing strategic management approach is quite realistic and finds practical use in public relations activities. The subject should be studied more thoroughly by future researches. In case social media will prove to advance the strategic management theory and more organizations would start to use social media professionally then it could be a great step closer to the "ideal" public relations practices that appreciate two-way communication and empowerment of the stakeholders in organization's decision-making.

The growing importance of opinion leaders / super-users in social media environment, who are engaged in the e-gatekeeping activities, was an interesting point that arose from the study. The question is how common these super-users

actually are for the organizations, how organizations perceive them and how the communication with them could be managed more effectively. This could be a subject for another research where one can make use of the theories of social capital, community relationships, internet culture, network-communication etc.

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APPENDIX A

Interview outline in Estonian

Sissejuhatuseks

Kui mitu aastat oled töötanud kommunikatsiooni alal?
 Kui mitu aastat olete olnud tegev ETTEVÕTTE NIMI?
 Kas terve see aeg kommunikatsiooni vallas?)
 Miks ETTEVÕTTE NIMI kommunikatsiooniga tegeletakse?
 Mida kommunikatsioonitegevustega saavutada soovitakse?

Esimene blokk – meediasuhtlus täna

Kui oluline osa kommunikatsioonitegevustest kuulub meediasuhtlusele?
 Kas see on peamine tegevus või pigem kõrvaltegevus?
 Kirjelda palun oma sõnadega, mida Sinu jaoks tähendab meediasuhtlus?
 Kirjelda palun, kuidas tavaliselt meediasuhtlus teie ettevõttes toimub?
 Kui tihti toimub meediaga suhtlus? Kui palju inimesi sellega tegelevad? Kes vastutavad?
 Miks ETTEVÕTTE NIMI meediasuhtlusega tegeletakse?
 Mis on meediasuhtlustegevuste eesmärk?
 Mis on peamised meediakanalid, millega suhtlete?
 Milliseid vahendeid meediasuhtluseks kasutate? (A'la pressiteade, intervjuu, pressikonverents, meediasündmus jne)
 Kuidas iseloomustaksite suhteid ajakirjanikega?
 Kas need põhinevad isiklikel tutvustel? Ametialasel heal koostööl?

Teine blokk – muutused meediasuhtluses

Lähme ajas umbes 5 aastat tagasi. Palun kirjelda, milline oli meediasuhtlus umbes 5 aastat tagasi? (millised tegevused, kellele jms.)
 Milline on olulisim(ad) muutus(ed) meediasuhtluses praegusega võrreldes?
 Kui soovisite tol ajal oma siht- ja sidusrühmadele infot jagada, kuidas seda tegite? Kuidas jagate oma sidusrühmadele infot paegu?
 Kui soovisite 5 aastat tagasi astuda kontakti oma siht- ja sidusrühmadega või koguda neilt tagasisidet, siis kuidas seda tegite? Kuidas kontakteerute oma siht- ja sidusrühmadega nüüd?
 Kui soovisite 5 aastat tagasi viia läbi turunduskampaaniat, kuidas seda tegite?
 Kuidas teete seda nüüd?

Kolmas blokk – sotsiaalne meedia ja selle roll

Kui palju kasutab ETTEVÕTTE NIMI oma kommunikatsioonis sotsiaalset meediat? (Milliseid kanaleid kasutate?)

Kirjelda palun, kuidas te sotsiaalse meedia vahendusel suhtlete? (abiküsimused: kellele suunatud, millist infot/materjali postitate, kui tihti postitate, kes tegeleb sotsiaalse meediaga)

Milline roll/eesmärk on sotsiaalse meedia kasutamisel teie ettevõtte kommunikatsioonis?

Kas see on võimalus oma teenuste/toodete reklaamimiseks või kasutate seda ka tagasiside saamiseks? Millisel viisil?

Milline on sotsiaalsest meediast saadav kasu/ tulu?

Millistel juhtudel kasutate sotsiaalset meediat, millistel traditsioonilist meediat?

Kui võrrelda omavahel sotsiaalset meediat ja traditsioonilist meediat, mis on ühe ja teise plussid ning miinused?

Neljas blokk – meediasuhtluse tulevik

Milliseid muutuseid ja/või arenguid meediasuhtluses ennustad tulevikuks?

Palun visanda skeem /tee joonis, milline on ETTEVÕTTE meediasuhtlus tulevikus?

Kas mõni oluline küsimus jäi intervjuus käsitlemata? Kas soovid midagi lisada?

Interview outline in English

Introduction:

How many years have you worked in the field of communication?

How many years have you worked in COMPANY NAME?

Have you been working with communication the whole time?

Why does COMPANY NAME deal with communication?

What are the goals of communicative / PR activities in your organization?

First theme: media relations today

How important are media relations in overall communication work?

Is it primary or secondary?

What does „media relations“ mean for you?

Please describe the regular ways of handling media relations in your company.

How often are you in contact with media?

How many people deal with it?

Who's responsible?

Why does COMPANY NAME handle media relations?

What is the aim of media relations in your organization?

What are the main media channels that your organization uses?

What methods are being used in communicating with media? (For example press release, interview, press conference, media events?)

How would you describe relations with journalists?

Are they based on personal relations or are they purely professional?

Second theme: the change of media relations

Let's go back in time five years. Please describe what media relations activities were like five years ago. (What activities, with whom etc.)

What is the most important difference(s) in media relations compared with today's situation?

If you wanted to share information with your stakeholders five years ago, how did you do it? How do you share information with stakeholders now?

If you wanted to get in contact with your stakeholders five years ago to get feedback etc., how did you do it? How do you contact your stakeholders now?

If you wanted to organize a marketing campaign five years ago, how did you do it? How do you do it now?

Third theme: the role of social media

How much does COMPANY NAME use social media for its communication?

What channels are being used?

Please describe how do you use social media for communication. (To whom, what information, how often, by whom etc.)

What is the role or goal of using social media in your company's communication? Is it an opportunity for marketing your products/services or do you use it for getting feedback? How?

What are the benefits you get from using social media?

In which cases do you use social media; in which cases traditional media?

When comparing traditional and social media – what are the pros and cons of both of them?

Fourth theme: the future of media relations

What changes or developments do you predict in the future of media relations?

Please draw a scheme: what would COMPANY's media relations look like in the future?

Was some important subject not dealt with in the interview? Do you want to add something?

APPENDIX B

The original quotes from the interviews in Estonian language.

The quotes are presented in the same order as they appear in chapter 4.1.

4.1.1 Media relations today

EMT: Meediasuhtlus on suhtlemine ajakirjanikega eesmärgil, et nad suhtleksid edasi lugejatega. Ehk siis ta on mingis mõttes vahendatud kommunikatsioon. Et jõuan sihtauditooriumini kellegi teise vahendusel.

Monton: Ma juba natukene seletasin, ma ütleksin, et see on ikkagi, PR on infoallikas eeskätt ajakirjandusele, meediale siis laiemalt ja meediasuhtlus tähendab info jagamist ja sealhulgas esindada ettevõtte või brändi huve.

Addinol: Et see meediasuhtlus tegelikult ongi, et see meedia minu jaoks ei ole ainult see ajakirjanik või just see meedialist, vaid see meedia on minu jaoks see, et kui ma suhtlen, tegelt Addinolis põhiliselt ikkagi otse tarbijaga.

Elion: Kindlasti erialane kirjandus, kogu ajakirjandus siis, kogu tehnoloogia, IT-meedia: ajakirjad, päevalehtede erirubriigid ja kindlasti on siin juures ka blogid ja kogu sotsiaalmeedia.

EMT: Osadelt ma olen ise küsinud, kas nad tahavad seda infot saada, ja osad on ise palunud ennast listi lisada. Muidugi seal on see blogija ja ajakirjaniku vaheline piir, et enamasti need blogijad kasutavad oma blogiväljundeid, et nad kirjutavad selle baasil artikleid ka. Need on need samad tehnoloogiahuvilised olnud, nad on kusagil vahepeal.

Blogi on nende põhikanal, aga nad püüavad seal loodud materjale ka honorari eest maha müüa.

4.1.2 The functions of media relations and social media

Monton: Luua brändile õige kuvand, kui see on loodud, siis hoida seda, läbi kommunikatsiooni jõuda õige kliendini, suurendada kliendibaasi, kommunikeerida oma brändi olemust, tooteid, uudiseid, mis siis omakorda, mille eesmärk on suurendada müüki.

Estonian Air: Olla nähtav, tõsta brändi tuntust, ja nii-öelda maine..., see on üks osa mainekujundamise tööriistast.

Elion: See kahepoolne suhtlus on küll jah ajakirjanikuga, aga sul ei ole lugejaga, kes on tegelikult kogu selle sõnumi sihtrühm. Et ajakirjanik on siis pigem nagu vahendaja sellel sealjuures. Et sellise avalikkusega sul läbi ajakirjanduse väga otsekontakti ju ikkagi enamasti ei teki.

Kaleva Travel: Eks see uus meedia annab võimaluse hästi kiiresti oma sõnumit levitada. Ma arvan, et see on tema üks hästi suur pluss. Ja teiseks see, et ta annab sulle selle interaktiivsuse, et sa saad inimesega sidet, kuuled tema häält, näed tema pilti. See on nagu see hästi suur pluss.

Monton: Et ajakirjandus, noh, ühelt poolt jah, et ajakirjanduse pluss ongi see, et ta peakski olema tõepärane ja võimalikult lähedal sellele tõe ja objektiivne. Samas sotsiaalmeedia võimaldab paremini kommunikeerida seda, mida sa ise öelda tahad, et ajakirjanik on selle filtrina nagu ees ja alati sealt läbi ei pääse ja sotsiaalmeedias on see jällegi võimalik.

Kaleva Travel: Inimesed kasutavad väga erinevaid meediaallikaid. Kes eelistab mida. Ja oleneb ka vanusest, milliseid kanaleid eelistatakse kasutada. [...] Nii et siin ikkagi jäävad need uued ja popid lahendused või modernsed variandid, jäävad need traditsioonilised asjad ja ka printmeedia, sest ikkagi aeg-ajalt on vajalik olla ka sellistes traditsioonilistes meediates, see on see printmeedia või välimeedia või tele, eks. Et sa ei saa nagu välistada ühte teisele.

EMT: Aga meedia on ju väga võimas auditoorium ja lisades veel selle, et ajakirjaniku artikkel on mitmeid kordi usutavam kui kommertslik tekst ja inimesed armastavad meediast lugeda ja selle põhjal oma seisukohti kujundada.

Kaleva Travel: ...et kui kellelgi on küsimus, siis saab kiiresti selle vastuse, et see ei jää sinna pikaks ajaks vedelema kuidagi. Selle asja eesmärk ongi vastastikune kommunikatsioon.

Estonian Air: Eeh, võimalikult, noh võimalikult kiiresti reageerida ka, noh probleemidele, näha neid läbi ja siis suunata nii-öelda jõupingutused sinna, kus annab midagi parandada.

Elion: Aga loomulikult me jälgime ka teisi valdkonna, ütleme et selliste arvamusiidrite blogisid ja kindlasti ka neid, kus on meist juttu. Et me saame nagu, et meil on võimalik monitoorida seda sellisel moel, et me näeme, mis toimub kogu sotsiaalmeedias. Et me jälgime neid päris aktiivselt kogu aeg. Ja tegelikkuses lahendame ka läbi selle mitmeid kliendijuhtumeid.

Elion: Et selles mõttes see on väga oluline ja see kasu ongi see, et me näitame, et me oleme olemas, et meile läheb korda see, mida selles ütleme kanalis nagu tervikuna räägitakse.

Monton: See on selline kogukonna teema, et kui sa kuulud kuhugi, siis sul on mingid privileegid.. [...] Jet õige inimene jõuab meieni ja tunneb seda äratundmisrõõmu ja samas ta saab sealt mingit lisaväärtust, et miks ta seal peaks olema. Et oluline on jah, tugevdada seda trendilooja ja moe arvamusiidri rolli. Ja väga oluline on see kaasamine, mida Monton superhästi teeb.

Elion: Et kõiksugu foorumid, Facebookid, Twitterid, blogid, kogu see maailm. Et no selles mõttes, et meie olemegi seda tegelikkuses vaadanud pigem kui info hankimise võimalust ja ka klienditeenindamise nagu vahendit või kohta.

EMT: Mina ei pea sotsiaalmeediat meediaks, seda nimetatakse lihtsalt niimoodi. Õigem oleks vist öelda, et ma ei pea sotsiaalmeediat ajakirjanduseks, et ta pigem on samasugune kanal nagu koduleht, aga ta on ainult uues värskes vormis ja praegu popis formaadis. Sotsiaalmeedia ei ole alternatiiv ajakirjandussuhetele, vaid üks lisavõimalus otsekommunikatsiooniks. [...] Meil on küll ajakirjanikud siin [Facebooki -autor] listis ka, aga ma ei suhtle ajakirjanikega kui ajakirjanikega sotsiaalmeedia kaudu. [...] Et täpselt samamoodi ta on ühe sõnumi integreerimine mitmesse kanalisse, ja nüüd on lihtsalt üks kanal juurde tulnud.

4.1.3 The change of media relations

Photopoint: Et noh, ma pakun, et traditsioonilise meedia puhul on see selles mõttes, et ta on jäänud pigem samaks. Et see meediaga suhtlemine, et samad standardid ja samad, võtted on ikkagi samad.

Kaleva Travel: Võib-olla kas viis aastat, aga rohkem tagasi see, ei olnud ise nii kerge oma sõnumit edastada, aga tänu sellele online-keskkonna tulekule on ju võimalus ettevõttel oma sõnumeid, oma uudiseid, oma pressiteateid ikkagi ka online-meediasse saata ja need pannakse seal üles.

Monton: Mina rõhutaksin nagu selle muutuste kohapeal just seda, noh, loomulikult need uued kanalid on ja tänu sellele on kogu see meediasuhtlus ja meediavahendus muutunud operatiivsemaks. Et kõik uudised tulevad ülikiirelt peale ja tegelikult sama kiirelt nad kaovad ka pildilt ära, et koguaeg sa pead nagu võistlema sellega, et suuta nagu kauem pildil olla. Et see konkurents on tunduvalt tugevam.

Monton: Noh, see on selline, ühesuunaline versus kahe-suunaline kommunikatsioon, et ma julgen öelda, et aastaid tagasi kahe-suunaline kommunikatsioon jäi pigem teooriasse ja sellise ilusa raamatuõpiku teksti, et väga palju seda ei praktiseeritud, et nagu ma mainisin, saadeti pressiteade välja ja oodati, mis juhtub ja siis kui juhtus midagi, siis oli noh kas kriis või oldi õnnelikud. Et see vahepealne protsess, sellesse nagu ise väga ei sekkunud või kas ei juletud või ei tahtud või ma ei oska öelda, milles see konkreetselt põhjus on. [...] Aga tänapäeval on ikkagi... on isiklikku suhtlust, on selliseid, noh eelsuhtlust, mille all ma pean silmas siis kõikvõimalikku meilivahetust, videode, fotode jagamist, blogid, kodulehed, noh nende roll ja tähtsus ja sisukvaliteet ja maht on nagu ääretult tõusnud.

Addinol: PR on muutunud, on võtnud nagu täiesti uue suuna, et ta ei ole enam nagu suunatud ajakirjanikele, vaid tegelt PR on suunatud nüüd otse kliendile. [...] Et need blogid, et see Twitter, et see Facebook, et ma saan sealt otse kliendiga seda diskussiooni nagu alustada, et see on hästi nagu selline suur muutus, et kui vanasti see oli nagu

ajakirjaniku heakskiitu pidid ootama ja nagu isegi võib-olla lipitsema, et ta paneks ta sinna lehte, kui talle meeldib. Et pigem ongi see hästi suur muutus, et see ajakirjanike filter on nagu sealt vahelt ära kadunud. Et tegelt noh sa võid head meediasuhtlust teha ilma ajakirjanikuta.

Elion: Et kui ma Twitteris siis ütlen midagi, ehk siis ma olen ajakirjanik ja ütlen Twitteris midagi sellist, mis puudutab väga konkreetselt mõnda ettevõtet või mis iganes, mingit poliitilist situatsiooni, et kas ma siis sel hetkel, kui ma selle välja ütlen, olen siis ajakirjanik või olen ma lihtsalt kodanik. Et noh mingid sellised küsimused kindlasti tõstatuvad seoses sotsiaalmeedia hooga kasvamisega.

Monton: Kuna sul on kõik võimalused nagu infot jagada, siis ajakirjanikud ka kasutavad kõiki võimalusi, et seda infot kokku koguda ja nad eeldavad, et sa pakud neile nagu põhimõtteliselt kõik variandid, et sellise täiusliku paketi välja.

Kaleva Travel: Ja pluss noh, praegusel hetkel, see on nüüd jällegi tänapäevane, väga hea on ju oma sõnumit sotsiaalmeedia kaudu levitada. Sest ega me täpselt ju alati ei tea, kes on see jälgija või kes on see fännklubi liige, et ta võib täpselt samamoodi olla mõni meediainimene, eksle, kes korjab selle sõnumi hoopis sellest kanalist üles.

Estonian Air: Mis on veel muutunud, et kui ütleme viis aastat tagasi tegid uudist, ajakirjanikud põhiliselt ja noh, nende ettevõtteid ise püüdsid seda juhtida, siis nüüd on tegelikult sotsiaalmeedias on nende kasutajate hulgas teatud seltskond inimesi, kes loovad uudist ja siis sa pead nii-öelda reageerima ja jälgima kõiki neid korruga. Et selles suhtes on nagu tänapäeval jah, ütleme... noh, teatud mõttes natuke keerulisem ja nõuab sellist kiiremat reageeringut. [...] Et keegi lendas meiega, tal on mingi kogemus, on siis positiivne või negatiivne, ta kirjutab sellest ja see nopitakse näiteks kuskilt ajakirjaniku poolt üles, siis pöörduakse meie poole. Või siis vestlus areneb seal teatud, no selles kitsas

ringkonnas sotsiaalmeedia kanalis, kuhu me siis omalt poolt reageerime ja vastame või selgitame, kui selleks on vajadus.

Estonian Air: (...) pluss siis me püüame ise siis oma blogisse või Facebooki panna ka üles mingeid teemasid, mida me teame ka, et ajakirjanikud jälgivad või siis lennundusest huvitatud inimesed jälgivad ja teinekord need lood hakkavad seal siis omakorda edasi elama.

4.1.4 The future of media relations

Monton: Et ma ei usu, et trükimeedia välja sureb, et ei surnud raadio kui televisioon tuli ja nii edasi.

EMT: Mina olen sellest parteist, kes arvab, et tavapärane ajakirjandus ei kao kuhugi. Tal võivad vormid teiseneda.(...) Aga ajakirjanikud jäävad, ajakirjandussuhted jäävad ja ajakirjandus selles samas toimetatud info mõistes minu meelest kindlasti jääb.

Photopoint: Aga järjest enam inimesed hakkavad avastama siis sedasama, blogi vajalikkust, Facebooki, seal klientidega suhtlemise vajalikkust, siis seesama kliendibaas, kui tähtis see tegelikult on, et sul need kontaktid on ja mitte niisama, et sul need kontaktid oleksid, vaid et sa kasutaksid ka neid kontakte. (...) Ma võin lihtsalt lõpuks öelda seda, et internet, internet kindlasti, läheb tähtsamaks selle kasutamine.

Estonian Air: Et seda, kas ta ka viie aasta pärast veel nii aktiivselt kasutusel on, noh, me ei tea seda. Võib-olla sinna asemele tuleb veel midagi uut, millest meil täna veel aimugi ei ole.

EMT: (...) keegi ole praegu väga kindel, et kuhu see sotsiaalmeedia tulevik tüürib. Aga kuna ta on praegu haibi laineharjal, siis tasub sellega kindlasti kaasa minna. [...] Näiteks seesama telefon ilmselt võtab selleks ajaks ühe suurema infokandja rolli ehk siis arvutite osakaal pigem väheneb, ja mingi seade, mis on inimesel kogu aeg kaasas saab tema info vastuvõtmise ja edastamise kanaliks oluliselt rohkem.

Elion: Aga see ei tähenda, et ajakirjanduse roll kordades peaks kahanema. Et pigem ta tuleb selline tugev alternatiiv lihtsalt kõrvale. (...) Et see on pigem nagu tõesti alternatiiv saada teatud liiki infot sotsiaalmeediast. [...] Jah, ma arvan, et see on ka võib-olla uus, ongi selline nagu pigem kasvav tendents, et vaadatakse nagu tervikpilti, ei tegutseta ainult ühes kanalis kitsalt. Et siis näiteks ainult ajakirjanikega, vaid et need sõnumid oleksid terviklikult kaetud väga erinevates valdkondades ja vastavalt selle kanali spetsiifikale.

Monton: (...) üha olulisemaks läheb jah, selliste erinevate võrgustike või infoväljade omavaheline suhtlus ja kattumine.

Addinol: Blogi, noh need on need meie enda..., vot ma pean blogi hästi palju nagu meediakanaliks nagu, et ta on ettevõtte enda meediakanal, kus sa saad kõike ja kõigest kirjutada, millest sa tahad.

Monton: Et noh, mõnes võib nagu öelda, et Monton on nagu omaette väike meedia, et oleneb, kuidas sa defineerid meediat, et kui me loeme siin neli blogi ja Facebook ja muud asjad, et noh siis meil on juba omamoodi selline väike meediaväli juba tekkinud.

Addinol: Ma arvan, et päris olulise suuna võtab kogu see videondus, et tekiavad...mis praegu on ka tegelt need online pressikonverentsid ja igasugused muud meediavormid, et ma arvan, et hästi palju läheb sinna veebi.

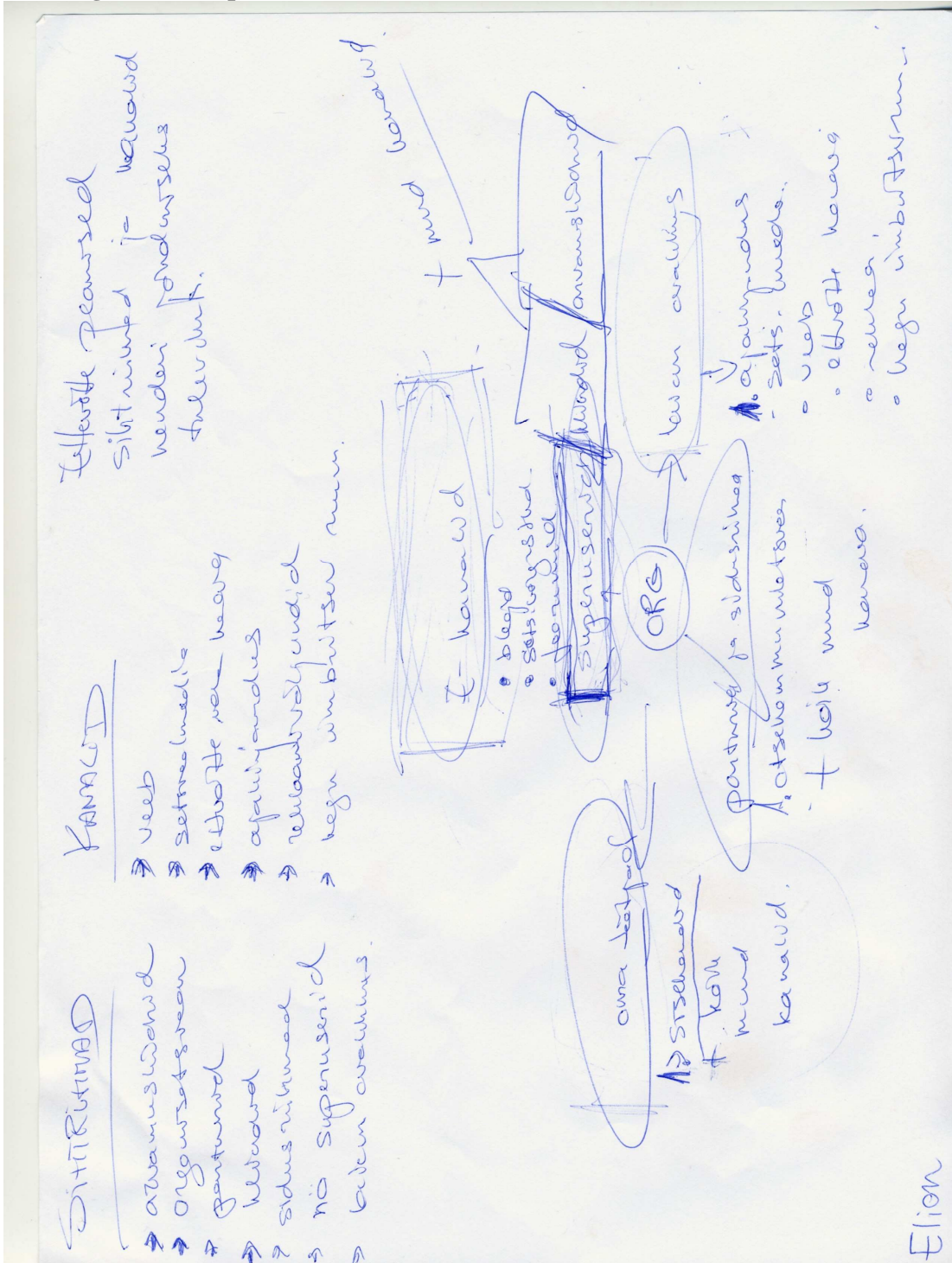
Monton: Ei noh, see on osa PR-st, et kui see sõnum hakkab elama oma elu nii-öelda ja positiivses võtmes, et kui me saame näiteks kajastuse või me teeme mingi kihvti ürituse või eduka projekti, et inimesed hakkavad seda jagama oma ringkondades. (...) see kajastus tekib juba iseenesest, et me ei pea enam ise mitte midagi tegema, et piisas sellest esimesest initsieerimisest ja siis nagu läheb ta ise edasi.

Elion: Ja nemad [super-userid - autor] on samas ka väga olulised arvamusliidrid, läbi kelle olulised sõnumid liiguvad. Ja kindlasti nad tegutsevad ennekõike, just sotsiaal-... ütleme nagu e-meedias, e-kanalites. [...] Et ma arvan jah, et see võib-olla, et see 'super-userid', kes aitavad tegelikult, sellised nii-öelda nagu agendid, kes aitavad ettevõtte sõnumeid edasi viia lihtsalt oma fanatismist, et see on ma arvan selline eraldi uus nagu sihtrühm, kuhu ettevõtted hakkavad tõenäoliselt liikuma ja ka meie oleme liikumas. Et noh täna, nad ka eksisteerivad meil, aga me ei oska lihtsalt nii süsteemselt kõike seda juhtida.

Addinol: Palju, ma arvan, et läheb just seda teed mööda edasi, et hakatakse suhtlema rohkem ja järjest rohkem klientidega otse. Et kliendid a'la aitavad sul tooteid kujundada, kliendid aitavad sul tooteid paremaks teha, et käib nagu otse diskussioon kliendiga, et ei ole ainult turundusosakond ja müügiosakond, et tegelikult on kliendid ongi need, kes edasi turundavad. Nii-öelda selline suust-suhu vorm.

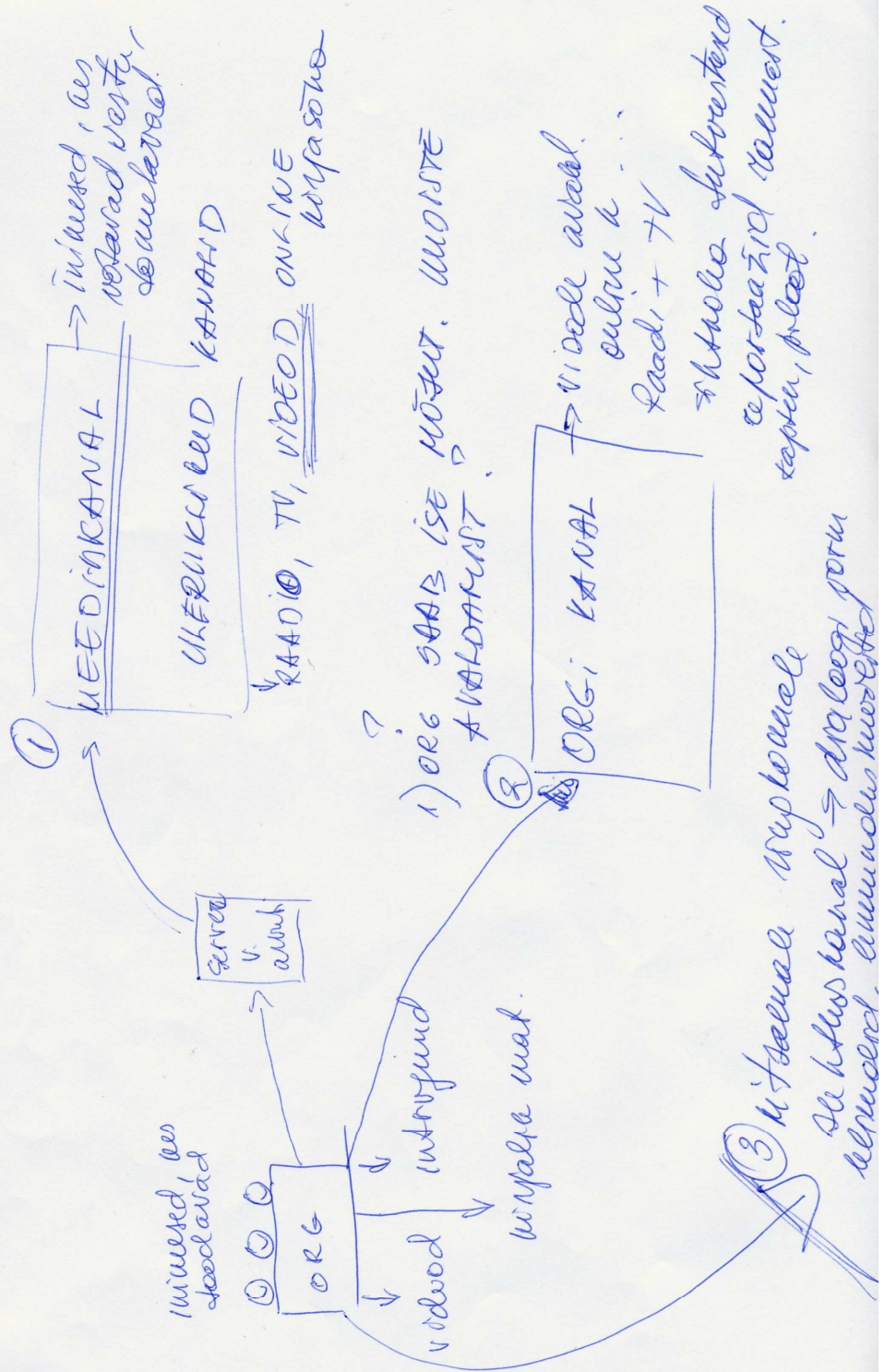
APPENDIX C

Drawings of the respondents. Elion

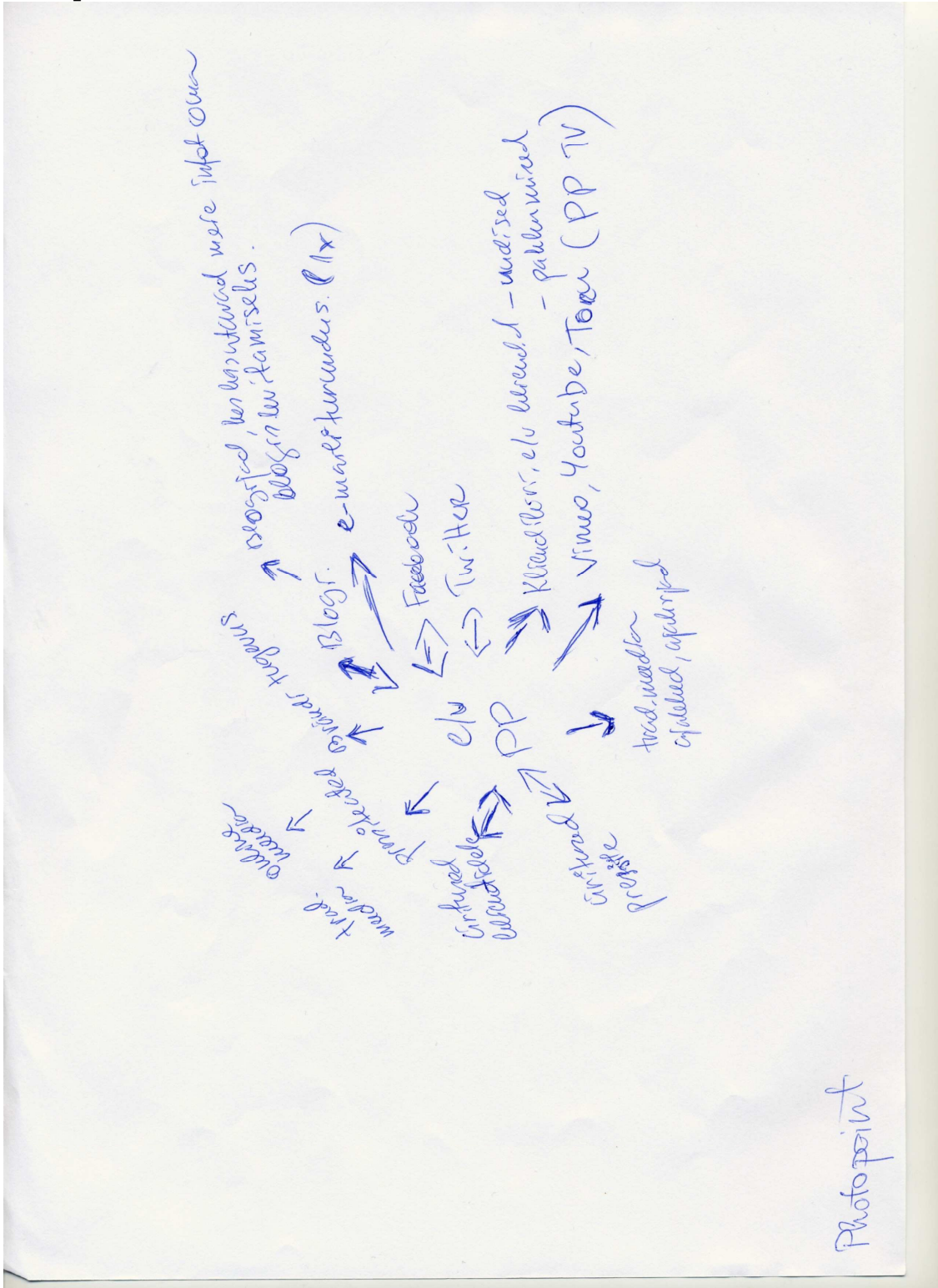


15.a.

ESTONIAN-AIR



Photopoint

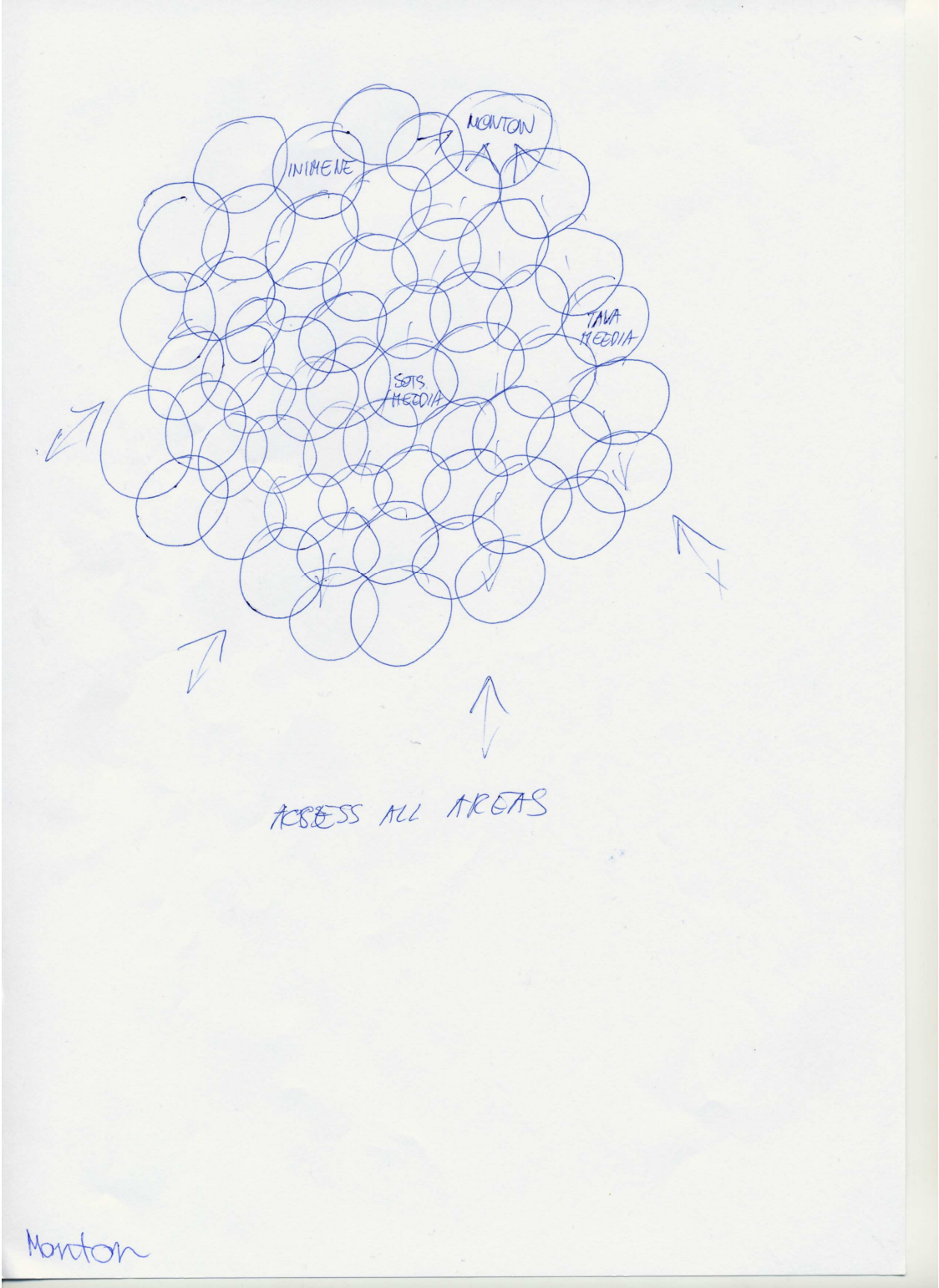


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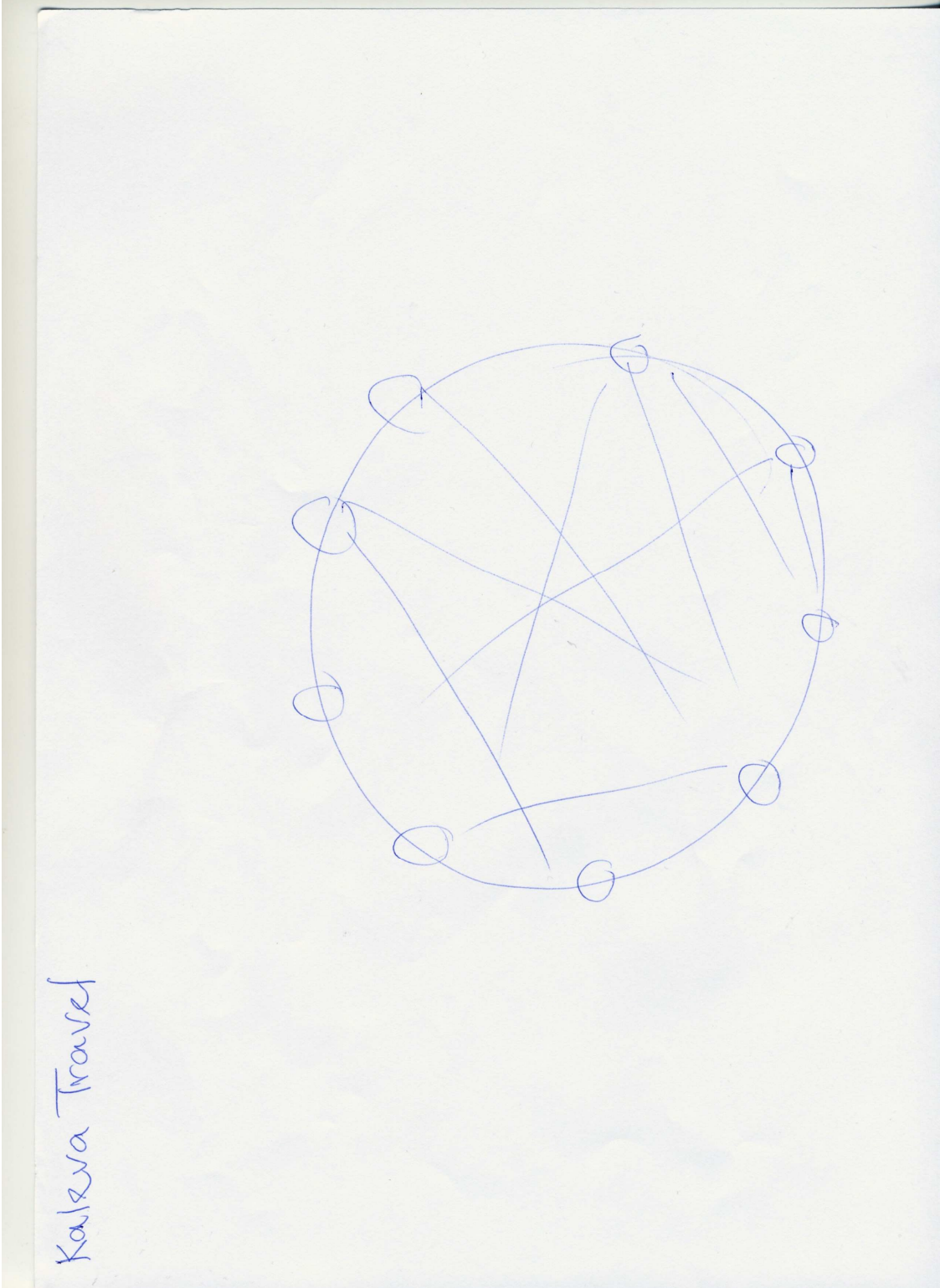
Elion



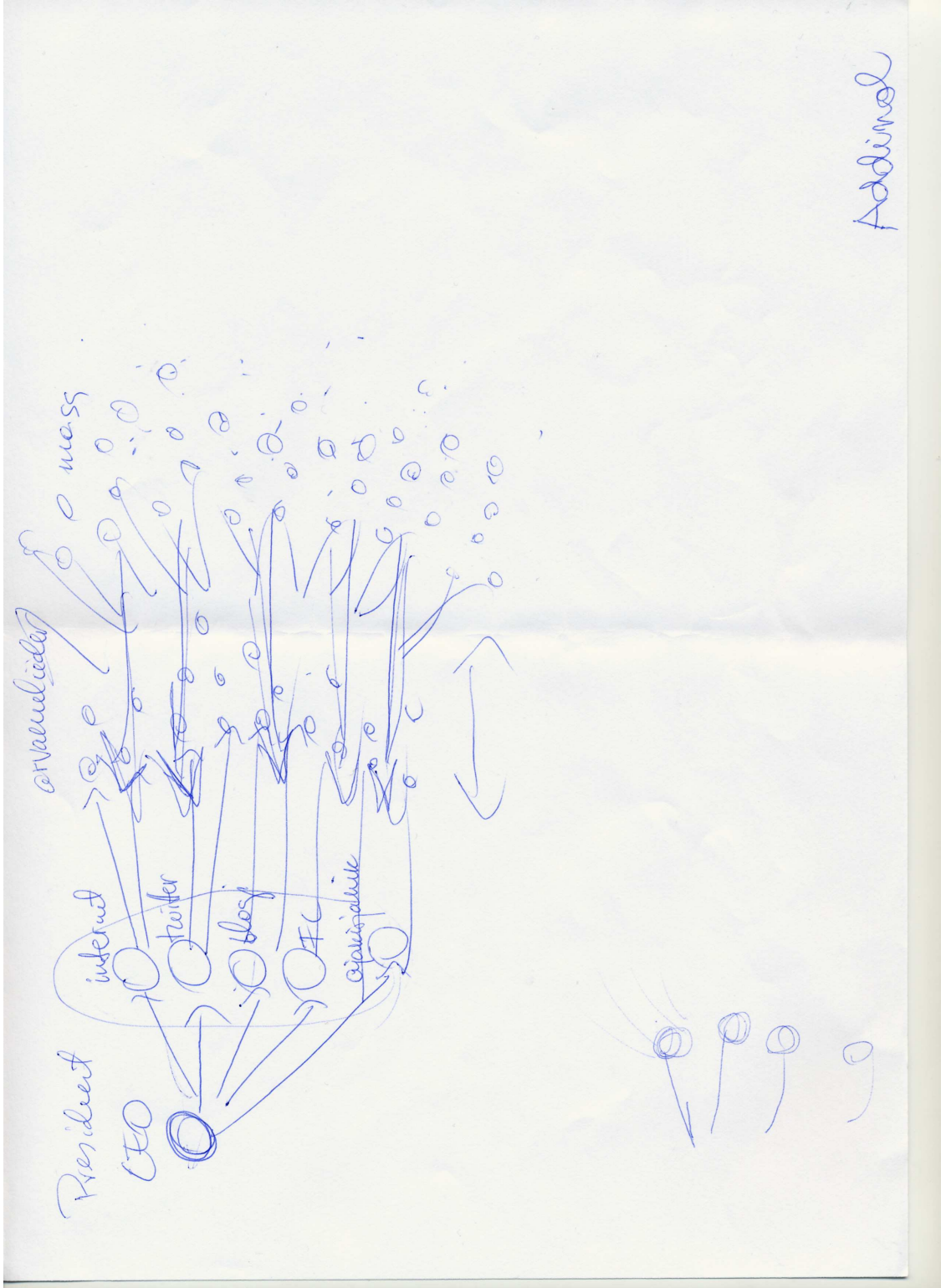
Monton



Kaleva Travel



Addinol



Addinol