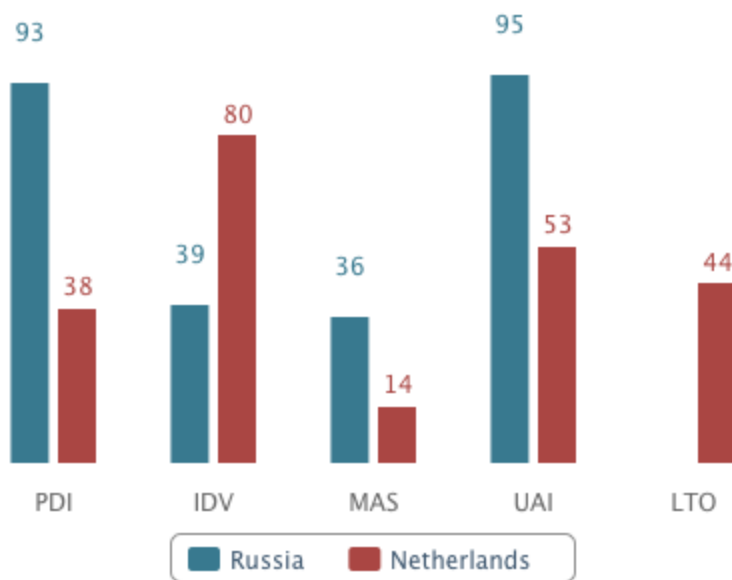Maria Dahman
Assignment 7.1
Global HCI

Social Media Analysis for Russia and the Netherlands

Cultural Dimensions

An insight to begin this discussion is how Russia and the Netherlands compare in Hofested's five cultural dimensions (Cultures and Organizations):

http://geert-hofstede.com/russia.html

We can see that Russia is much more collectivist, masculine, uncertainty-avoiding and has a greater power distance than the Netherlands. Conversely, the Netherlands is, generally, more individualistic, feminine, has a small power distance index, and is more comfortable with uncertainty.

Cultural Schema and Design Considerations:

Power distance describes the "emotional distance that separates subordinates from their bosses," (Hofstede, Chapter 2) and people in low PDI cultures such as the Netherlands value equality, freedom, independence in their offspring (children become friends of parents) and privacy.

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To speak to these qualities, a Social Network for the Netherlands should include a forum for asking questions or gathering advice, as well as assessing the advice by responding to what is perceived as "good" or "bad" advice. The ability to comment on a post and respond to comments is of particular importance: since people are equal, their voices should be equally heard.

A social network for the Netherlands should be cross-generational, i.e., include a wide age-range, rather than being marketed to one age demographic. To accommodate older readers, this means that text should be large and easy to read, and navigation should not require extreme dexterity.

Power distance is very high in Russia, making sharing information with "superiors" uncomfortable; this should require something like the "circles" in Google+, where users can decide with whom their information is to be shared. A feature like this is not necessary in the Netherlands, where the power distance index is very low.

Collectivist societies tend not to use social media as much as individualist societies, in part because while social media is ostensibly about "sharing with others," it is more often about bragging about yourself. This is not a habit that is encouraged in collectivist cultures such as the Russia. There would need to be some other features that would entice Russians, such as a calendar of "meet ups," or other very obvious ways that the service makes the interaction not about self-promotion, but about real socializing.

The masculinity and femininity scale of Russia and the Netherlands is not that dramatically different; a feature that would support a feminine cultural disposition would be something that encouraged the actual betterment of the users, and provided nurturance and support.

The difference in uncertainty avoidance is noticeable between Russia and the Netherlands (second only to the difference in power distance). A feature of a social media site that would speak to uncertainty avoidance would be a very structured, orderly site that did not make room for serendipitous discovery.

For the Netherlands site, the comfort with uncertainty lends itself to serendipitous discovery within the application, as well as surprises and delights. The site content can be very dynamic, such as a "ticker tape" of current activity on the site (a feature that facebook currently uses), or, if there are no timely posts from friends, the site could feature recommended articles instead. However, for Russia, this sort of feature is not recommended. The quality of not knowing what the site might look like when you come back to it is very unsettling to a culture of high uncertainty avoidance.

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PERSONAE

Boy van de Crommert, Netherlands

Boy has been living in Amsterdam since he graduated university, and can't imagine going back to the rural area he was raised in. While he thrives on the bustle and activity of Amsterdam, he does miss the kind and tender people whom he left, especially some of his secondary school friends and his grandparents. His parents make the trip to the city often enough that he sees them every other month or so, but his grandparents are getting too old to make the trip comfortably, and many of his school friends now have small children.

Keeping in contact with a multi-generational set of people he loves has been a challenge. His grandparents are a little too hard-of-hearing for Skype or telephone calls. He had been writing letters (they don't care much for email), but found that he didn't like the time delay and the one-sided communication--he would send them cards, but would usually be working on another letter before he heard back from them. He also knows that writing is becoming more challenging for them.

When he visited his family last Christmas, he set his parents, grandparents and school friends up with the new app called "Socialize."

By using Socialize, his friends and family can check in with Boy more regularly, either privately by sending him a photo or chat, or publicly, letting all of the family know about a particular event.

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It is also easy to exclude people from a particular conversation; for example, Boy wanted to surprise his grandmother for her birthday by showing up unexpectedly. He coordinated the arrival and party with his brothers, grandfather, and parents, yet was able to exclude his grandmother on these communications. The surprise was kept.

Another feature that Boy appreciates about the app is that the content changes, even if his friends and family haven't posted recently. Socialize will pull in articles based on his listed interests, and photos based on his travel list. The content continually surprises and delights him. Finally, Boy is able to organize his calendar for the Animal Care League that he volunteers for in Amsterdam via Socialize.

Vladamir Balandin, Russia

Vladamir is starting a new job in Moscow. The change in jobs caused a lot of anxiety, as his previous job was decent, but he knew eventually there will be more opportunity in this new position. Still, the transition has been unsettling.

Vlad started using a new app called Socialize at the prompting of his little sister Kristina. She wanted to see what his new life in Moscow would look like, and knew that Vlad wouldn't have the patience to start a blog or email photos to the family regularly. What Vlad has noticed, however, is that many of the people has met in Moscow at professional associations have also invited him to join them on Socialize. The opportunity to network with like-minded people in this new city, and possibly expand his working network, is very exciting to Vlad.

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He sees a feature to broadcast what he is thinking about; the concept seems a little strange to him; why would anyone care what he thinks? He is no great philosopher, and is still so young that he has no exceptional achievements. Why should someone listen to him? Then he notices two things: that he can essentially send group emails with the feature, targeting it only to a couple people that he wants to talk to, and secondly, that people use it to invite others to join them somewhere, rather than to pontificate.

Vlad uses the site to contact his parents and send them a photo, or let Kristina know that he appreciates an article she sent. He stays connected to his family network, which, being away for the first time, he didn't realize was so important to him until now!

The more he uses the site, the more familiar it becomes and the more he likes it. The photos that Christina post for him make him smile, but the opportunity to meet with other young professionals has made the site invaluable. The "let's schedule lunch" feature is very good; it is a friendly, unobtrusive reminder that the site is meant to encourage interactions in the real world.

He still feels uncomfortable posting things about himself, but he sees how this can be a nice tool, especially since he doesn't need to rely on email addresses or phone numbers. Now, he can simply type a name in the app, and the person can become accessible to him.