

# **Success factors of developing asymmetric partnerships between technology start-ups and Dutch traditional media companies**

Student Name: Nurya Eileen Doorenbos

Student Number: 479048

Supervisor: Daniela Bartosova

Master Media Studies - Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master Thesis

*June 2018*

SUCCESS FACTORS OF DEVELOPING ASYMMETRIC PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY  
START-UPS AND DUTCH TRADITIONAL MEDIA COMPANIES

**Abstract**

The traditional media industry is urged to ensure innovation in order to keep up with the fast pace of digital developments and compete with the growing number of digital offerings. Apart from in-house innovation processes traditional media companies can also turn to external sources of innovation like start-ups. The new interdependency illustrates the *innovation ecosystem* where actors aspire to create innovative opportunities together which could not have been done separately. Partnerships between start-ups and established firms are referred to as *asymmetric partnerships* because of the partners' significant differences in terms of size, resources, organizational characteristics, market power and so on. The differences can be beneficial for the asymmetric partners, but make it, however, by no means easy to work together in an effective manner. On top of that, the cross-industrial innovative activities between traditional media companies and technology-based start-ups can possibly be accompanied by the presence of *cognitive distance* between the partners, which may hinder the *cross-industry innovation* efforts. Thus, even though partnerships between traditional media firms and technology start-up have the potential of creating innovative opportunities, they are definitely challenged to succeed. Considering that previous research has argued that the partnership development stages are crucial in generating successful partnerships, this thesis is interested in identifying the critical partnership development stages for asymmetric partnerships and assess their role in developing partnerships between traditional media companies and technology-based start-ups, which appears to be an understudied research field. This research is in collaboration with the Hilversum-based company Media Perspectives, more specifically the Media Matters program, which aspires to connect Dutch traditional media firms with technology start-ups and can therefore be considered as the *innovation intermediary*. This thesis aspires to answer the following main research question: "*How can Dutch traditional media companies and technology start-ups succeed in developing partnerships?*". We adopted a broad research question to address the different aspects of partnership development, which are specified in sub-questions that explore the identification of differences between established firms and start-ups, the identification and assessment of the critical stages in asymmetric partnership development and the role of an innovation intermediary and the cognitive distance in partnership development. The preferred method

is qualitative semi-structured interviews with both representatives of Dutch traditional media companies and start-ups in order to gain insights in both ends of the asymmetric partnership. The findings suggest that asymmetric partners should take each stage into consideration before continuing the partnership development and should avoid inconsistencies or instabilities within each stage of partnership development. Furthermore, it seems that a large gap between the start-up's solution and the media firm's problem lowers the chances of succeeding in partnership development.

KEYWORDS: asymmetric partnerships, partnership development, innovation eco-system, cross-industry innovation, cognitive distance, innovation intermediary

## Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Research background.....	1
1.2	Motivation.....	2
1.2.1	In cooperation with MediaMatters.....	3
1.3	Scientific relevance.....	3
1.4	Societal relevance.....	4
1.5	Research question.....	5
1.6	Outline.....	7
2	Theoretical framework.....	9
2.1	Innovation ecosystem: the setting for new interdependencies.....	9
2.2	Asymmetric partnerships.....	10
2.2.1	Intrinsic differences between established firms and start-ups.....	11
2.2.2	Alliancing differences between established firms and start-ups.....	13
2.3	Partnership development processes.....	14
2.3.1	Stage 1 - Awareness.....	14
2.3.2	Stage 2 – Initiation: evaluate and select potential partner.....	15
2.3.3	Stage 3 - Interaction processes.....	18
2.3.4	Potential role of an innovation intermediary.....	22
2.4	Cognitive distance in cross-industry innovation.....	23
2.5	Conclusion.....	24
3	Methodology.....	25
3.1	Qualitative approach.....	25
3.2	Research design.....	25

3.3	Purposeful sampling.....	26
3.3.1	Representatives of the Dutch traditional media companies.....	26
3.3.2	Representatives of the technology start-ups .....	27
3.4	Data collection method: semi-structured interviews.....	28
3.5	Operationalization .....	28
3.6	Data analysis: thematic analysis.....	30
3.7	The contributions of MediaMatters .....	32
3.8	Quality of this research .....	32
3.8.1	Dependability.....	32
3.8.2	Transferability.....	32
3.9	Conclusion .....	33
4	Results.....	34
4.1	Stage 1: Awareness.....	34
4.1.1	Fitting partnerships with start-ups into daily practices .....	35
4.1.2	Need for organizational support.....	36
4.1.3	Need for strategic motivations as opposed to coincidence-based motivations 39	
4.2	Stage 2: Initiation.....	41
4.2.1	Task-related selection criteria of media companies .....	42
4.2.2	Partner-related selection criteria of technology start-ups .....	43
4.3	Stage 3: Interaction.....	45
4.3.1	Clear communication to manage expectations .....	45
4.3.2	Goodwill and competence as antecedents of trust.....	47
4.3.3	Discrepancy between the adaptations of media firms and start-ups .....	48
4.4	Role of MediaMatters in partnership development.....	52
4.4.1	Creating awareness among media firms.....	52

4.4.2	MediaMatters as the start-up recruiter .....	53
4.5	Cross-industry innovation: gap between media firm problems and start-up solutions .....	54
4.5.1	Solution before problem?.....	54
4.5.2	Prior experience in counterparty’s industry opens doors.....	55
5	Conclusion .....	57
5.1	Answer to the research question .....	57
5.2	Limitations & Future Research .....	60
5.3	Managerial implications .....	61
	References .....	63
	Appendices.....	71
A.	Interview guide .....	71
B.	Informed consent form .....	73

## **1 Introduction**

This section addresses the research background, the twofold motivation for conducting this study, the scientific and societal relevance, the research questions and ends with the thesis outline.

### **1.1 Research background**

The Dutch media landscape has drastically changed over the past decades. The days where traditional media companies monopolized the media industry are long gone given the growing number of digital offerings. Since technological developments led to changing media behaviours and new forms of competition, traditional media firms are urged to keep up with the fast-paced changes and ensure innovation in order to reach the digital consumer (PwC, 2016; 2017).

Recently, the Dutch media industry started to explore a new path to ensure innovation, namely partnerships with start-ups (MediaMatters, 2018; Rogmans, 2017). Partnerships with start-ups are a proven way to strengthen or improve a firm's innovative capabilities (Bannerjee, Bielli & Haley, 2015; Mocker, Bielli & Haley, 2015; Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015; Kanbach & Stubner, 2016; Usman & Vanhaverbeke, 2016).

Partnerships between start-ups and established firms are defined as asymmetric because established firms and ventures show significant differences in size and age (Freeman & Engel, 2007). Moreover, the asymmetry refers to differences in resources and skills but also managerial processes and culture (Blomqvist, Kylaheiko & Virolainen, 2002; Minshall et al., 2008; Minshall et al., 2010). Asymmetric partners benefit from each other's resources and skills while sharing the mutual objective of generating innovation (Blomqvist et al., 2002).

Asymmetric partnerships illustrate the interdependencies that emerge in an innovation ecosystem. An innovation ecosystem consists of an interdependent network in which entities aim to achieve innovation-driven goals (Adner, 2006; Valkokari, 2015; Gomes et al., 2016; Pelikka & Ali-Vehmas, 2016). Firms establish interdependencies or interconnections aiming to create new customer value propositions together which could not have been done separately (Adner, 2006; Gomes et al., 2016).

However, many firms fail in their attempt to succeed in ecosystem innovation successful outcomes rely not only on the firm's own efforts but also on the firm's partner

(Adner, 2006, Adner & Kapoor, 2010; Gomes et al., 2016). Asymmetric partnerships, as a specific interdependency within innovation ecosystems, exemplify the challenge of realizing the potential value creation as both academia (Minshall, 2006, Minshall et al., 2010; Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015; Usman & Vanhaverbeke, 2016) and practitioners (Mocker, Bielli & Haley, 2015; Kanbach & Stubner, 2016) point out the difficulties of achieving success in asymmetric partnerships. So, how can start-ups and established firms make a partnership a sustained success?

Researchers suggest that partnership development processes are crucial in the successful implementation of partnerships (Doz & Hamel, 1998; Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Kelly, Schaan & Joncas, 2002; Iyer, 2002; Langfield-Smith, 2008; Mandjak et al., 2015). A first critical stage of developing partnerships is considered to be the recognition of the potential added value that a partner can bring to the table (Iyer, 2002; Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987, Mandjak et al, 2015). After that, firms are advised to tactfully select an appropriate partner keeping in mind that the realization of the potential value is shaped by the partner's capabilities (Dwyer et al., 1987; Iyer, 2002), which is based on a critical evaluation of critical success factors: the partnering fit and the task fit (Cummings & Holmberg, 2012). Once the appropriate partner is selected, the partners start to design the objective of the partnership (Ford, 1980; Dwyer et al., 1987; Wilson, 1995; Iyer, 2002), which is done through informational interaction process as well as social interaction processes (Spekman & Mohr, 1994; Mandjak et al., 2015). Possible success in this interaction stage relies on the alignment between partners on an objective but also subjective level (Spekman & Mohr).

Based on these assumptions, we aspire to assess how these stages play a role in the successful development of partnerships between technology start-ups and Dutch traditional media companies. We wish to identify the success factors of developing a strong foundation for the asymmetric partnership.

## **1.2 Motivation**

The motivation to conduct this research is twofold. On the one hand, our Master of Science in Media & Business stimulated us to conduct this study. On the other hand, this research project was initiated by MediaMatters which will be discussed more comprehensively in the section below.



### **1.2.1 In cooperation with MediaMatters**

MediaMatters is part of the Hilversum-based company 'Media Perspectives' that aims to foster media innovation and guide the Dutch media sector through digital transformations by sharing knowledge and organizing events for the various institutions to meet (Media Perspectives, n.d.). The MediaMatters program (Media Perspectives, 2018) organizes MatchMaking-events twice a year where technology start-ups can pitch their ideas to Dutch traditional media firms and where both parties have the opportunity to connect. The parties that decide to work together are referred to as a 'match' (MediaMatters, 2018). Rick van Dijk and Bert Kok (personal communication, November 28, 2017), the founders of the MediaMatters program, observe an increasing interest from the Dutch media industry in partnerships with technology start-ups, but also see how matches made during the MatchMaking-events often fail to actually develop a partnership. Therefore, the MediaMatters founders aspire to gain knowledge about why the development of certain partnerships is discontinued and what the success factors are of translating a match into a partnership. This paper provides Media Matters with valuable insights to aid or strengthen the MediaMatters activities.

### **1.3 Scientific relevance**

This section addresses the theoretical relevance of our research. First of all, researchers identified the challenges of managing asymmetric partnerships and formulated guidelines for successful management (Minshall et al., 2008; Minshall et al., 2010; Usman & Vanhaverbeke, 2016). However, the development processes that go ahead of the partnership remain unexplored. Although the literature on partnership development in general is extensive (Ford, 1980; Dwyer et al., 1987; Doz & Hamel, 1998; Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Kelly et al., 2002; Iyer, 2002; Langfield-Smith, 2008; Mandjak et al., 2015), the significant differences in size, age, resources, skills, management and organizational characteristics are likely to present specific challenges in developing asymmetric partnerships (Blomqvist et al., 2002; Freeman & Engel, 2007; Minshall et al., 2008; Minshall

et al., 2010). We aim to gain insights into how the peculiarities of asymmetric partners play a role in the development processes.

Secondly, academics address the concept of asymmetric partnerships within one particular industry (Minshall, 2006, Minshall et al., 2010; Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015; Usman & Vanhaverbeke, 2016), but cross-industrial. Our research focuses on asymmetric partners who originate from different industries, namely the media and the technology industry. The Dutch media firms aspire to derive innovative solutions from the technology-based start-up community (MediaMatters, 2018) which academia refer to as cross-industry innovation (Enkel & Gasmann, 2010; Enkel & Heil, 2014). Although cross-industry innovation offers indeed the potential transferral of innovative solutions from one industry to another, the cognitive distance, which refer to a different way of thinking and believing, between partners can potentially complicate the innovative activities (Jeppesen and Lakhani, 2010; Enkel & Gasmann, 2010; Enkel & Heil, 2014). In this sense, we argue that the cognitive distance between media companies and technology start-ups may hinder the partnership.

#### **1.4 Societal relevance**

Besides the theoretical gaps that our research addresses, we also contribute for societal reasons. Over the past decade, matured firms increasingly turn to start-ups as a source of innovation while start-ups, too, recognize the value of working with an established firm. In the Netherlands, more than 80% of the matured firms acknowledge the need to work together with start-ups aiming to create innovative opportunities and keep up with the fast-paced technological developments (KPMG N.V., 2014). Similarly, approximately 70% of start-ups believe that collaborating with corporates is a must for success (KPMG N.V., 2014, 2015a). Thus, the historically competitive mindset of 'them' versus 'us' seems to be changing into a collaborative mindset (Imaginatik, 2016).

However, the motivations of both start-ups and established firms are tested once they actually enter the partnership. Both asymmetric partners identify problems that potentially slow down or threaten the effectivity of the partnership. Start-ups experience difficulties with approaching the right people, with differences in perception of the partnership's importance (Minshall et al., 2010), with the corporate slow decision-making (Minshall et al., 2010; Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015; Usman & Vanhaverbeke, 2016), with the differences in

organizational culture (Minshall et al., 2010; Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015) and with the changing points of contact (Minshall, 2006). Established firms, on the contrary, encounter problems with the lack of commercial experience, the financial instability (Minshall et al., 2008; Minshall et al., 2010) and the fast pace (Minshall et al., 2008; Minshall et al., 2010; Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015). Thus, though asymmetric partners are motivated to work together, the reality is that they face numerous challenges that withholds them from working effectively.

To tackle the potential barriers challenges and foster the partnerships between start-ups and established firms, we aim to identify the success factors of developing partnerships. Our study provides practitioners of valuable insights and also recommendations to overcome potential challenges and help build strong partnership foundations by focussing on partnership development.

Additionally, our research contributes to the MediaMatters program. The founders of the MediaMatters program (R. Van Dijk & B. Kok, personal communication, November 28, 2017) find that the number of partnerships resulting from the MediaMatters program is inconsistent with the number of initial matches made during the MatchMaking-events. This study attempts to understand why initial matches are discontinued and specify the problems that cause a discontinuation of partnership developments.

## **1.5 Research question**

Though asymmetric partnerships have the potential of creating innovative opportunities (Bannerjee, Bielli & Haley, 2015; Mocker, Bielli & Haley, 2015; Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015; Kanbach & Stubner, 2016; Usman & Vanhaverbeke, 2016), thno guarantee to succeed in developing a partnership as both start-ups and established firms experience difficulties of working together (Minshall et al., 2008; Minshall et al., 2010; Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015; Usman & Vanhaverbeke, 2016).

Considering that success is shaped by the partnership development processes (Doz & Hamel, 1998; Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Kelly et al.; Iyer, 2002; Langfield-Smith, 2008; Mandjak et al., 2015), our research aims to investigate how these play a role in successfully implementing asymmetric partnerships. We formulate the following broad research

question which allows us to take a broad approach and take different aspects of partnership development into consideration:

*RQ: How can technology start-ups and Dutch traditional media companies succeed in developing asymmetric partnerships?*

To answer this question, we formulated four sub-questions. First of all, we wish to define what asymmetric partnerships are by identifying the asymmetries between established firms and start-ups, because research suggests that these asymmetries are likely to present a specific set of challenges (Minshall et al., 2010; Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015; Usman & Vanhaverbeke, 2016). Das & He (2016) pose that asymmetric partners show differences that are inherent to each organization and differences that emerge when entering a partnership. In order to define what these differences are we pose the following sub-question, which will be answered with a literature review:

*SQ1: What are the differences between start-ups and established firms?*

As mentioned before, we are interested in identifying the success factors of developing asymmetric partnership, based on the assumption that partnership development processes are a critical aspect of successful partnerships (Doz & Hamel, 1998; Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Kelly, Schaan & Joncas, 2002; Iyer, 2002; Langfield-Smith, 2008; Mandjak et al., 2015). The next sub-question is concerned with identifying the critical stages of asymmetric partnership development and how these affect the successful development of asymmetric partnerships. This question is partly answered by a literature review and partly by our primary research.

*SQ2: What are the critical stages in developing asymmetric partnerships and how do these play a role in successfully developing partnerships between technology start-ups and Dutch traditional media firms?*

Furthermore, the partnerships between Dutch traditional media firms and technology ventures are developed with the help of an innovation intermediary. Considering that the

innovation intermediary is part of the interdependency between the partners, the outcomes of the partnership become also dependent on this actor (Adner, 2006; Adner & Kapoor, Gomes et al., 2016). Thus, in order to give a complete image of the partnership development processes, we therefore also assess the role of the innovation intermediary:

*SQ3: What is the role of the innovation intermediary in developing asymmetric partnerships between Dutch traditional media firms and technology-based start-ups?*

Lastly, the fact that our asymmetric partners aim to transfer innovative solutions from the tech start-up community to the Dutch traditional media industry, is defined as cross-industry innovation (Enkel & Gasmann, 2010; Enkel & Heil, 2014). Researchers point out the challenge of overcoming the cognitive distance between different industries who aim to innovate together (Enkel & Gasmann, 2010; Enkel & Heil, 2014). Similarly, Jeppesen and Lakhani (2010) argue that external problem solvers have less affinity with understanding the core of the problem compared to internal problem solvers. In this case, we wish to address the following sub-question:

*SQ4: What role does the cognitive distance play in developing asymmetric partnerships between Dutch traditional media firms and technology-based start-ups?*

## **1.6 Outline**

After this introduction this thesis continues with a theoretical framework, the methodology chapter, the results chapter and ends with a concluding section which includes an answer to our research question, the limitations and suggestions to future research and the managerial implications.

The theoretical framework starts with the concept of the innovation ecosystem, which is considered to be the overarching research domain since asymmetric partners illustrate a specific interdependency within the ecosystem. Next, we focus on the asymmetries between start-ups and established firms. Subsequently, we address the different stages of partnership development while integrating asymmetric partnership literature. Additionally, we propose

the potential role of an innovation intermediary in partnership development. Lastly, we discuss the concept of cross-industry innovation.

After that, we address the preferred methodology. We chose semi-structured interviews in order to gain insights in the perspectives and interpretations of both start-up and media firm representatives. We took a purposeful sample that comprises of five start-up and five media firm respondents. We conducted ten interviews, each being between 40 minutes and 1 hour and 10 minutes. The interviews are taped and transcribed. Additionally, we explain the operationalization and the overall interview guide. After that, we address the analysis method which is thematic analysis followed by an examination of the research quality.

Subsequently, we discuss the results that are organized according to the main themes of our research. Lastly, we make conclusions based on the results, formulate the limitations of our research and ideas for potential future research.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

In this section we first address the overarching research domain of innovation ecosystems, followed by a thorough examination of the concept asymmetric partnerships. After that we propose a framework to assess the asymmetric partnership stages. We end this chapter with the concept of cross-industrial innovation.

### **2.1 Innovation ecosystem: the setting for new interdependencies**

This section addresses the broader context of partnerships between traditional media companies and start-ups aiming to innovate together. Traditionally, innovation was an in-house process. Innovative activities used to be restricted to the company's boundaries but now a more open approach is adapted (Chesbrough, 2003). As a result, different actors including firms, suppliers, customers and regulators have become part of the innovation processes (Adner, 2006; Gomes et al., 2016). In other words, openness results in new interdependencies and interconnections (Adner, 2006). The network that emerges is defined as an 'innovation ecosystem' (Gomes et al., 2016).

The concept innovation ecosystem is literally decomposed by the terms innovation and ecosystem. Many scholars discussed the term innovation, which led to a wide spectrum of interpretations. The well-known economist Schumpeter (1934) claims that innovation is the force behind economic development. Baumol (2002) adds that innovation mechanisms are generated by capitalism. According to Simmonds (1986), it is the process of identifying new opportunities. Conceptualizations of innovation are discussed in terms of individuals and organizations and in attributes and effects (Popa, Preda & Boldea, 2010). Still, all definitions agree on the centrality of new ideas.

The term ecosystem refers to the interdependencies and interconnections between actors. Gomes et al. (2016, p. 16) define the interdependent network within innovation ecosystems as follows:

“It is composed of interconnected and interdependent networked actors, which includes the focal firm, customers, suppliers, complementary innovators and other agents as regulators. This definition implies that members face cooperation and competition in the innovation ecosystem; and an innovation ecosystem has a lifecycle, which follows a co-evolution process” (Gomes et al., 2016, p. 16).

Thus, the environment of an innovation ecosystem includes both cooperation and competition. When entities decide to partner, they aspire to jointly create value which could not have been separately (Adner, 2006). Accordingly, they become dependent on decisions and practices of others (Adner, 2006; Pellikka & Ali-Vehmas, 2016). Still, research finds that developing an innovation ecosystem is beneficial for a company's competitive advantage (Rohrbeck, Hölzle & Gemünden, 2009). Valkokari (2015) adds innovation ecosystems combine the activities of business and knowledge ecosystems. He states that the focus of a business ecosystem lies on creating value for the customer whereas a knowledge ecosystem aims to generate knowledge.

In conclusion, innovation ecosystems consist of an interdependent network of actors. Entities find themselves in a cooperative as well as competitive environment. Interactions with others emerge when they seek to create value that could not have been done separately. The partnerships between traditional media companies and start-ups are a specific interdependency that emerges within an innovation ecosystem. In this study, the partnerships are established with the help of the intermediary, another agent within the interconnected network.

## **2.2 Asymmetric partnerships**

Asymmetric partnerships consist of established firms and start-ups (Minshall et al., 2010). We refer to established firms as matured and large companies (Freeman & Engel, 2007) and to start-ups as new ventures or entrepreneurial firms that are designed to innovate under extreme uncertainty (Eric Ries, 2010).

Researchers point out the asymmetries between the two parties. The most obvious asymmetry concerns the differences in size and age between start-ups and established firms (Minshall et al., 2010). Additionally, Blomqvist, Kylaheiko & Virolainen (2002, p. 10) state that asymmetric partners show "differences in skills, resources and power as well as management and culture of actors". To be more precise, start-ups possess capabilities in terms of being flexible, agile and innovative while established firms have resources and market power (Vossen, 1998; Dean, Brown & Bamford, 1998). Interestingly, asymmetric partners can benefit from each other's differences in the sense that the strengths of established firms are commonly the weaknesses of start-ups and vice versa (Vossen, 1998).

To address the asymmetries more in-depth, we address two categories within differences between start-ups and established firms that are distinguished by Das and He



(2006). 'Intrinsic factors' refer to differences when perceiving the parties as singular organizations whereas 'alliancing factors' capture differences when the parties form a partnership. The table below gives an overview of the intrinsic and alliance-making factors that summarize the differences between start-ups and established firms, which we discuss comprehensively in the next two sections.

### **2.2.1 Intrinsic differences between established firms and start-ups**

With regard to intrinsic factors, Das and He (2006) formulate nine ways in which entrepreneurial firms and established firms differ from each other. First of all, established firms have sufficient financial and human resources to finance, manufacture and promote their products or services whereas start-ups have a shortage (Das & He, 2006).

Secondly, ventures are more innovative compared to mature firms (Das & He, 2006). Freeman and Engel (2007) explain the different level of innovativeness by distinguishing two approaches to innovation processes: the Corporate Model and the Entrepreneurial Model. The former, that is concerned with established and large companies, slows down innovative activities due to low levels of resource flexibility and risk exposure whereas the latter, that refers to start-ups, involves the opposite (Freeman & Engel, 2007).

Next, entrepreneurial firms and established firms are in a different status of competition. Start-ups offer innovations that can potentially overshadow existent products or services of established firms. In this manner, they are seen as challengers in competition while mature firms rather take on a defending role (Das & He, 2006).

Furthermore, entrepreneurial firms have less legitimacy compared to established firms (Das & He, 2006). A firm is considered to be legitimate when it meets the social norms and expectations and is in other words socially accepted (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). Start-ups are advised to acquire legitimacy in order to grow and globalize (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002; Bailetti, 2012), which can be done by developing partnerships with well-known and reputed firms (Rao, Chandy & Prabhu, 2008), investing in networking activities (Shaw, Wilson & Pret, 2017), positioning the venture in a favourable location (e.g. Silicon Valley), or introducing new creations that are accurate to the social context (e.g. Netflix' introduction of on-demand streaming services) (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002).

Also, established firms have a track record or history whereas ventures still have to position themselves on the market (Das & He, 2006). The poor track record means that stakeholders are uncertain about the quality of the start-up's products or services (Das & He,

2006). Besides that, scarce or absent past performances imply a rather poor reputation, which means a firm is considered less desired compared to other firms (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). To build a reputation, start-ups can invest in symbolic activities (e.g. attend conferences), in human capital (e.g. recruiting an employee with a confirmed track record), in social capital (e.g. building strong relationships with stakeholders) and in product development (Petkova, Rindova & Gupta, 2009).

Subsequently, the obtained position of mature firms in the market may provide them with economic and political power to affect their environment while ventures have fewer impact on their environment (Das & He, 2006). Similarly, Dean, Brown and Bamford (1998) point out that established firms possess the capability and resources to influence their environment. That is, "large firms possess large financial and human resources, and the ability to compete on broad-based strategies and reputation, to exploit patents, and to exert bargaining power over suppliers and customers" (Dean et al., 1998, p. 724). In contrast, the lack of power of start-ups allows them to anticipate swiftly and flexibly to environmental developments (Dean et al., 1998; Das & He, 2006).

Another difference between established firms and start-ups concerns the organizational characteristics. First of all, mature businesses have embedded governance structures that are designed to give each employee a specific job occupation whereas ventures operate with little bureaucracy (Vossen, 1998; Das & He, 2006). Secondly, the communication processes of start-ups tend to be more informal and quicker than mature businesses (Das & He, 2006). Finally, the decision-making processes of established firms are decentralized over the different levels and rather slow compared to start-ups (Vossen, 1998; Das & He, 2006; Minshall et al., 2010). Busenitz and Barney (1997) make some additional distinctions between entrepreneurs and managers of large businesses with regard to decision making: (1) entrepreneurs face more decision uncertainty due to little reflecting possibilities (e.g. past performances and market information) and pending market's acceptance, (2) entrepreneurs often rely on personal confidence while managers in large businesses base their decisions on factual data and (3) entrepreneurs base decisions on generalizations of smaller samples compared to large businesses.

Established businesses and entrepreneurial businesses also differ from each other in terms of their business focus. The former aspires to expand or grow by means of the diversification of current business or the acquisition of other businesses while the latter

focuses on creating a market (Das & He, 2006). Start-ups concentrate on 'new entry', which Lumpkin and Dess (1996: p. 136) refer to as the central act of entrepreneurship and "can be accomplished by entering new or established markets with new or existing goods or services." Though existing firms can also create new entry (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996), start-ups are compelled to create a new market in order to survive which is therefore considered to be a start-up's main business focus (Das & He, 2006).

Finally, established firms have a relative stable position on the market which allows them to adopt a long-term planning horizon (Das & He, 2006). Start-ups, on the contrary, miss the luxury of time and are pressured to prove their position on the market, which ultimately results in short term planning horizons (Das & He, 2006). Since planning horizons play a crucial role in the strategies and actions of firms (Das, 1991), Das and He (2006) suggest that start-ups are likely to engage in rapid product or service developments whereas established firms feel less pressure to hurry.

### **2.2.2 Alliancing differences between established firms and start-ups**

Besides the intrinsic differences, start-ups and established firms also show differences that emerge when entering a partnership (Das & He, 2006). Firstly, both asymmetric partners are expected to want the control over the technology (Das & He, 2006). On the one hand, the mature business is tempted to capture the technology (Das & He, 2006; Perez & Cambra-Fierro, 2015). On the other hand, start-up CEO's have strong attachment and commitment to their technology because they invented it (Freeman & Engel, 2007). Perez and Cambra-Fierro (2015) explain the competition for control through the concept of power by arguing that the powerful partner in asymmetric partnerships will attempt to take a bigger share of the value and give in to opportunistic behaviour. Although the established firm is expected to exploit power because of its size and large amount of resources, the start-up also possesses power in terms of specialist knowledge (Perez & Cambra-Fierro, 2015). Hence, both asymmetric partners have the potential power to retain control over the technology which will cause tension between them.

Secondly, established firms have less faith or confidence in the feasibility of the new technology in comparison to the start-up (Das & He, 2006). The latent thought is that established businesses generally try to avoid risky or uncertain situations (Freeman & Engel, 2007). Acquiring a new and unfamiliar technology, however, is characterized by a great amount of uncertainty because the start-up capabilities have yet to be proven and the

established firm's own capabilities to implement a new technology are tested (Wadhwa & Basu, 2013).

Thirdly, the people responsible for managing the asymmetric partnerships is consistent at the start-up side but is often discontinuous at the established firm in the sense that decision makers are divided over different levels (Das & He, 2006). Ultimately, start-ups recognize the complex allocation of decision makers as a challenge to work effectively (Minshall et al., 2010).

Fourthly, whereas the partnership is a matter of growth and survival for the start-up, the survival of established firm is less dependent on the partnership (Das & He, 2006). When a partnership is unsuccessful or fails, the established firm can usually fall back on other partners for alternative resources (Narula, 2004).

### **2.3 Partnership development processes**

In this section we present a framework for the development stages of a partnership. Our framework is based on an analysis of the large amount of literature that is subjected to business relationship development. We take different contributions of the existing literature into consideration rather than focusing on one model of partnership development. Above that, we take the peculiarities of asymmetric partnerships into account. We divided our framework into three stages proposed by Mandjak et al. (2015): (1) awareness, (2) initiation and (3) interaction. We chose this structure because it takes the evolutionary process of developing partnerships into account: "from the cognitive (awareness) to tangible individual activity (initiation) through to collaboration (interaction); from the simple to the complex" (Mandjak et al., 2015, p. 37).

#### **2.3.1 Stage 1 - Awareness**

The first step of developing a partnership is recognizing the need for it (Iyer, 2002; Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987, Mandjak et al, 2015; Mandjak et al, 2016). At this stage, potential partners are unconscious of each other's existence (Mandjak et al, 2015). The consciousness arises when partners recognize the potential competitive advantage that a partnership can offer (Iyer, 2002).

The awareness stage of developing asymmetric partnerships aligns with the open innovation paradigm which will be discussed in the next section.

### 2.3.1.1 Recognizing potential of open innovation

Historically, innovative activities were restricted to the organizational boundaries or an in-house process. Over the last two decades, companies increasingly acknowledge the value of external relationships to create new innovative opportunities. The change from solely performing in-house innovation to establishing innovation-driven external relationship is referred as the shift from closed to open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003; Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke & West, 2006). Enkel, Gassmann & Chesbrough (2009, p. 311) add that “once the notion of inter-organizational innovation collaboration has entered an industry, everyone who does not participate will cope with serious competitive disadvantages.” Thus, once the idea of open innovation enters an industry, everyone is expected to follow.

Developing asymmetric partnerships between start-ups and matured media companies is an open innovation strategy (Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015). While companies in the technology and industrial sector have been partnering with start-ups for approximately two decades now (Chesbrough, 2003, Enkel, Gassmann & Chesbrough, 2009, West & Bogers, 2016), this innovation strategy is relatively new to the traditional media industry. Given the increasing amount of initiatives aiming to connect the start-up community with the media sector (Young, 2015; Rogmans, 2017; Clover, 2018), we observe a growing interest or awareness of the media industry in this open innovation strategy.

In conclusion, the first stage of developing an asymmetric partnership is recognizing the need for it. Recently, the traditional media industry is gaining more awareness about the opportunities that external relationships with start-ups can offer.

### **2.3.2 Stage 2 – Initiation: evaluate and select potential partner**

The next step is the initiation process where companies assess and select the potential partners (Ford, 1980; Wilson, 1995; Iyer, 2002; Dwyer, et al., 1987; Mandjak et al, 2015). In this stage, firms identify partners who have the potential to create new capabilities (Iyer, 2002). In other words, companies evaluate the potential value of counterparties’ offerings or the new opportunities they create (Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987).

An important aspect of the initiation phase is the identification of perceived benefits that a firm will derive from a partnership (Iyer, 2002). Potential benefits are gaining competitive advantage (Iyer, 2002), knowledge or market access (Wilson, 1995). A lack of mutual benefits can possibly lead to a failed partnership (Lambert, Emmelhainz & Gardner, 1999). When both parties gain from the relationship, it is less likely that one party takes

advantage (Caceres & Papparoidamis, 2007). In other words, firms have to define the potential relationship value for both sides (Wilson, 1995).

Cummings and Holmberg (2012) propose critical selection criteria or critical success factors (CSFs) that firms use to assess potential partners. Task-related CSFs refer to the level of resource complementarity while partner-related CSFs reflect the relational elements. High congruence on both CSFs increases the potential of achieving success. We discuss both criteria more in-depth in the following sections.

#### 2.3.2.1 Task-related critical success factors

Task-related CSFs are based on the potential benefits that a firm can derive from a partner (Cummings & Holmberg, 2012). According to Sarkar et al. (2001), the reason that firms engage with potential partners is to complement their weaknesses. Moreover, they found that a high level of complementarity between businesses has a positive effect on the performance of and the commitment to the partnership. Thus, companies seek partners whose strengths and resources will add value and contribute to their existent resources (Johnson et al., 1996). Additionally, Parkhe (1991, p. 580) found that a minimum of resource complementarity “is essential to the formation and maintenance of an alliance, and their erosion destabilizes the partnership.” In other words, the resource complementarity is the foundation of the partnership’s existence.

In terms of asymmetric partnerships, Blomqvist (2002) argues that the resources of start-ups and established firms can complement each in three ways. First of all, the strong innovative character of start-ups presents an opportunity for established firms to explore new ideas. The large firm does not necessarily have the same expertise about new products and services compared to the start-up. However, the established firm’s strength lies in the coordination of a variety of products and services whereas the start-up’s focus often lies on one innovation. Second, start-ups’ strength lies in the knowledge creation, but struggle with finding physical and financial assets. On the contrary, established firms have difficulties with generating radical innovations, but have sufficient resources. Also, they have strong commercial skills and marketing know-how. Thus, they complement each other in terms of resources and knowledge. Lastly, start-ups are overall good in idea creation, experimenting and prototyping whereas large firms’ capabilities lay in the actual product or service launch.

In summary, resource complementarity is concerned with strengthening a firm's own resources. The resources of start-ups and established firms can complement each other in terms of knowledge, financial assets and skills.

#### 2.3.2.2 Partnering-related critical success factors

Partnering-related CSFs refer to the relational elements that shape successful outcomes (Cummings & Holmberg, 2012). Researchers also address this partner selection criterion as the perceived cultural and operational fit (Parkhe, 1991; Sarkar, et al. 2001).

Parkhe (1991) identifies five elements that shape the relationship between actors. First, societal culture plays a role in the perception and interpretation of behaviours and thoughts. Second, the national context mainly emphasizes the industry structure and the governmental policies. Thirdly, corporate culture reflects the cultural values of companies. In order to effectively integrate the partnership, it is important that companies try to understand each other's corporate culture. Fourthly, strategic directions refer the evaluation of the partners' ability to fulfil the strategic goal of the partnership and their motivations. In case of the latter, companies assess "whether there may exist probable areas of conflict due to overlapping interests in present markets or future geographic and product expansion plans" (Parkhe, 1991, p. 589). Lastly, the management practices and organization include the management styles and organizational structure.

In case of asymmetric partnerships, the compatibility in terms of partner characteristics is likely to be low given the significant differences in structure (Vossen, 1998; Blomqvist, 2002), organizational culture (Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015; Minshall et al., 2010; Weber & Weber, 2017) and procedural coordination (Minshall et al., 2010; Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015; Usman & Vanhaverbeke, 2016; Bannerjee et al., 2016).

#### 2.3.2.3 Summary

In conclusion, the selection process is shaped by the opportunities to achieve a set of goals like gaining competitive advantage or knowledge. Mutual benefits foster a sustained partnership. Firms screen the potential partners based on their resource and partner complementarity. We discussed two CSFs or partner selection criteria: task- and partner-related CSFs. In case of resources, asymmetric partners complement each other in various ways including knowledge, financial resources and skills. In case of partner characteristics, we observe significant differences between asymmetric partners with regard to structure, culture and procedural coordination.

### 2.3.3 Stage 3 - Interaction processes

After the selection process partners enter an exploratory stage where the objective of the partnership is negotiated and defined (Dwyer et al., 1987; Ford, 1980; Wilson, 1995; Iyer, 2002). This interaction process starts with exchanging information followed by social interactions (Mandjak et al. 2015). Thus, designing the partnership occurs both on an objective and subjective level (Spekman & Mohr, 1994).

In this stage, partners get to know the internal environment of the counterparty. Whereas the previous stage was concerned with unilateral learning process, the partners evolve towards a mutual learning process in the interaction processes (Iyer, 2002)

In case of asymmetric partnerships, we distinguish three processes that are important in asymmetric partnerships: communication (Blomqvist, Kylaheiko & Virolainen, 2002; Zott & Huy, 2007; Ulvenblad, Berggren & Winbord, 2013), trust (Blomqvist et al., 2002; Hurmelinna et al., 2005; Hasche, Linton & Öberg, 2017) and adaptation (Blomqvist & Stahle, 2000; Blomqvist et al., 2002). The next three sections define each process more in-depth.

#### 2.3.3.1 Communication

The first interaction process is communication. According to Mohr and Spekman (1994, pp. 138-139), communication in partnerships consists of three elements: “communication quality, extent of information sharing between partners, and participation in planning and goal setting”. The first one refers to accurate and timely informational exchanges. The next one indicates the information flow between partners. When firms are knowledgeable about their counterparty, the partnership will turn out more effective. The last one implies that partners define the objective and planning together.

Agarwal, Croson & Mahoney (2010) studied the role of communication in strategic alliances. They argue that a single focus on economic incentives stands in the way of achieving the full potential value creation. The findings illustrate that clear communication increase the chances of achieving success. Moreover, “communication approximately doubles the rate of strategic alliance success” (Argwal et al., 2010, p. 428). To be precise, communication is beneficial for alliance outcomes in two ways. On the one hand, communication fosters the ability to coordinate and cooperate. When parties know each other’s incentives, there is more clarity about the expected outcomes. On the other hand, communication is an important factor of trust-building and developing social capital



(Agarwal et al., 2010). In fact, high communication quality is likely to increase trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

With regard to the communication of entrepreneurs when engaging with other stakeholders, Ulvenblad, Berggren and Winborg (2013) identify three important skills all entrepreneurs should have. First of all, 'other orientation' means the ability to consider the possible outcomes for the counterparty. Second, 'openness' refers both to receptive and responsive communication. On the one hand, an entrepreneur should be able listen and thus be open to new insights and thoughts. On the other hand, he can show his interest or willingness to learn by asking questions. Thirdly, 'adaptive behaviour', referred to as a form of communication, is the level of entrepreneur's flexibility.

Additionally, Zott and Huy (2007) found that strong communicative skills of entrepreneurs are especially relevant in situations of uncertainty. When it is unclear if the product or service of a start-up will be successful on the market, clear communication with stakeholders is a must. In other words, start-ups without a track record or low credibility are advised to put considerable effort in exchanging information.

#### 2.3.3.2 Trust

The next interaction process is trust-building. Although significant differences between firms make it difficult to build trust (Hurmelinna et al., 2005), it is a crucial element of asymmetric partnerships (Hasche, Linton and Öberg, 2017). In fact, trust is essential in all business relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Johnson et al., 1996; Rousseau et al., 1998; Mandjak et al, 2015).

Trust is defined as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another" (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 385). Thus, putting trust in another means that you position yourself in a more vulnerable position. Additionally, Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 23) believe that trust "is existing when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity".

Rousseau et al. (1998) argue that trust emerges under two conditions. First, the relationship is in a state of risk or uncertainty. Langfield-Smith (2008) distinguishes two types of risk: relational and performance risk. The former refers to the possibility that the counterparty poorly cooperates and the latter to the possibility of not reaching the partnership's objective.

The second condition is that the parties are interdependent and thus rely on one another (Rousseau et al., 1998). Johnson, et al. (1996) found the level of interdependence between actors influences the level of trust. When a relationship receives minimal attention and the level of strategic integration is low, the interdependence level and vulnerability is low as well. In this case, the trust between firms is not as crucial compared to situations where the firms highly depend on each other.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) believe that trust and commitment are related. When a party is found to be trustworthy, it is likely that the firm is more committed to the relationship. They distinguish several elements that shape the trustworthiness of a partner. First of all, the partner is expected to add value and create new and beneficial capabilities. Second, the presence of shared visions or objectives plays a positive role in the relationship. Third, communication strengthens a partner's ability to trust the other one. Lastly, a firm taking advantage or engaging in opportunistic behaviour will negatively impact the trust between the parties.

Mandjak et al. (2015) oversee two main criteria in evaluating the trustworthiness of a partner: credibility and benevolence. When partners score high on these dimensions, there is a development of whole bonding trust which is "fundamentally important condition for establishing an emerging (new) business relationship" (Mandjak et al., 2015, p. 36). They argue that bonding trust occurs on both the individual and the organizational level during interaction processes.

Hasche et al. (2017) address the role of trust in collaborations with start-ups. They describe trust as a crucial element of the collaboration's duration and even continuation. Their study indicates how the antecedents 'competence' and 'goodwill' shape the trust-building processes between start-ups and the collaborating firms (figure 1). Competence reflects a company's ability to live up to the counterparty's expectations with regard to the capabilities. Goodwill refers to meeting the expectations on an emotional level. The findings show how collaborating firms discontinue the relationship due to lacking competencies while start-ups do so due to a lack of goodwill. Furthermore, previous experiences of both start-ups and the collaborating firms play a role in forming expectations of both parties.

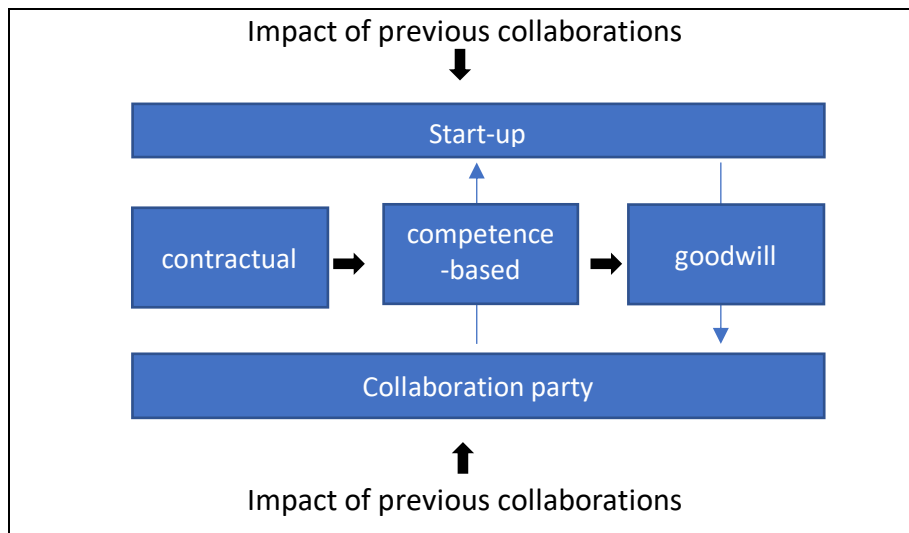


Figure 1. Patterns of trust antecedents in open innovation processes of start-ups with collaboration parties (Hasche, Linton and Öberg, 2017, p. 45).

To conclude, trust is an essential aspect of business relationships including asymmetric partners. Trust is present under the condition that partners are in a state of risk and interdependence. Additionally, the level of commitment is expected to be higher when the counterparty is perceived as trustworthy. The trustworthiness is shaped by the potential added value, goal alignment, communication and the presence of opportunistic behaviour. Mandjak et al. (2015) identify two overarching criteria for assessing a partner's trustworthiness namely benevolence and goodwill.

### 2.3.3.3 Adaptation

The next interaction process is adaptation which relates to the above-mentioned interaction process trust. The investment in an exchange relationship is a way to gain trust from the counterparty. Adaptational behaviour demonstrates the trustworthiness and thus fosters trust-building processes between firms (Hallen et al., 1991; Brennan et al., 2003).

Adaptations are defined as "behavioural or organizational modifications at the individual, group or corporate level, carried out by one organization, which are designed to meet the specific needs of one other organization" (Brennan et al., 2003, p. 1638). In buyer-seller relationships this means that the buyer takes the supplier's capabilities into consideration while the supplier adapts its product or service to the specific needs of the buyer (Hallen et al., 1991). Research suggests that mutual adaptation enhances the operational performance, allows partners to create a better fit between them and fosters collaborative behaviour (Hagberg-Anderson, 2006, Nyaga et al., 2013).

Adaptation behaviour can be distinguished in two types. On the one hand, firms can customize their product or service to the other firm's needs or alter production processes (Hallen et al., 1991). On the other hand, adaptations may also present themselves as behavioural or organizational alterations like changing the organizational structure or adapting human resources. Firms make these type of adaptations when they aspire to gain trust from the counterparty or to strategically integrate the partnership (Schmidt & Tyler, 2007).

Furthermore, Brennan et al. (2003) suggest firms are overall more aware of self-adaptation. Companies portray the adaptations of the counterparty as expected while their own ones go beyond expectations. For researchers it is therefore suggested to assess both perspectives of an interfirm relationship. Managers are advised to put effort in observing the counterparty's adaptation

Scholars relate adaptation behaviour in business relationships to the concept of power relations (Hallen et al., 1991; Brennan et al., 2003). A situation of power emerges when a firm depends on the other firm's resources (Hallen et al., 1991). The presence of dependence can potentially trigger the powerful partner to exploit its power and behave opportunistic (Perez & Cambra-Fierro, 2015). Brennan et al. (2003) studied power relations and adaptation behaviour in buyer-seller relationships and found that the buyer power plays a role in the supplier adaptations but not vice versa. In asymmetric partnerships, Blomqvist and Stahle (2000) argue that the established firm may be tempted to exploit its power in order to gain authority. However, Perez and Cambra-Fierro (2015) disagree with the fact that the power imbalance is in favour of the large firm. Whereas the established company is powerful in terms of size and resource quantity, the start-up possesses power in regard to specialist knowledge which can potentially create competitive advantage (Perez & Cambra-Fierro, 2015). In this manner, both asymmetric partners have a source of power.

#### **2.3.4 Potential role of an innovation intermediary**

In this study, the partnerships between the traditional media companies and the technology-based start-ups emerge with the help of the innovation intermediary 'MediaMatters'. The intermediary offers start-ups and media companies the opportunity to connect and is thus related to both parties. The connections between the three entities exemplify the interdependent network within innovation ecosystems.

According to Howells (2006, p. 719), innovation intermediaries have two main functions: “the information scanning and gathering function and the communication function.” Thus, they seek opportunities for companies to work together and initiate the communications between the parties. Ultimately, intermediaries operate as a bridge between firms who were initially unconnected (McEvily & Zaheer, 1999).

#### **2.4 Cognitive distance in cross-industry innovation**

In our study the asymmetric partnership emerges in a cross industrial context. The media firms belong to the media industry who’s core activity is content creation whereas the technology ventures are part of the technology industry.

Cross-industry reflects the transferral of innovative solutions from one industry to another (Enkel & Heil, 2014). These solutions vary from technologies to knowledge and even business models (Enkel & Gasmann, 2010). Nooteboom et al. (2007) find that an alliance between parties with a different background initiate can potentially develop insights that a firm could not have generated alone. In other words, high cognitive distance can potentially play a positive role in the innovation performance of an alliance.

According to Enkel & Gasmann (2010), the objective of developing a cross-industry innovation partnership can either be to achieve explorative or exploitative innovation. The former refers to the creation of new knowledge. The latter reflects the improvements or increased efficiency of existing processes or skills which results from adopting the innovative solutions of the cross-industrial partner. In other words, exploitative innovation emerges from a firm’s existing needs and gives a firm new insights into current activities while explorative innovation aims to obtain novelty value. Nooteboom et al. (2007) add that large and established firms benefit less from exploratory innovation and gain more advantages in exploitative innovation.

However, Jeppesen and Lakhani (2010) investigated the role of external problem solvers in internal firm problems. Their findings suggest that allowing external entities to search for solutions can bring new insights and perspectives on the firm’s problems. The participation of external entities, especially from marginalized groups, in problem solving process gives a firm new knowledge and potential solutions. However, external problem solvers are less familiar with the core of the problem which implies a high cognitive distance. In this case, the cognitive distance can occur as an obstacle for cross-industry innovation.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Our theoretical framework consists of four sections. First of all, we explained the overarching research domain of innovation ecosystem. Innovation ecosystems are driven by innovation and comprise of an interdependent network of actors. Asymmetric partners exemplify a specific interdependency in this ecosystem. We addressed the asymmetric partners by identifying the intrinsic differences and the alliancing differences as suggested by Das & He (2006). Intrinsic differences are inherent to the each organization while alliancing differences specifically emerge when entering a partnership. After that, we addressed the development stages including awareness, initiation and interaction processes. Additionally, we evaluated the potential role of an innovation intermediary in these partnership development processes. Lastly, we addressed the concept of cross-industry innovation, which is defined as the transferral of innovative solutions from one industry to another. The potential challenge of cross-industry innovation is bridging the cognitive distance.

### **3 Methodology**

In this section we address the preferred methodology for sampling, collecting and analyzing the data.

#### **3.1 Qualitative approach**

The goal of this research is to identify the critical stages in developing partnerships between media firms and tech start-ups. We aim to define a framework that fosters the successful implementation of asymmetric partnerships. In order to build this model we looked into both the start-up and media firm perspective of these partnerships. We adopted a qualitative approach because we are interested in the way both parties interpret and experience the partnership developing processes. Qualitative research allows us to access insights and get a thorough understanding of people's social world (Bryman, 2012).

#### **3.2 Research design**

Knowing that we adopt a qualitative approach, we now discuss our research design that functions as our guideline for collecting and analysing data. Our research question is interested in hearing the perspectives of both start-ups and Dutch media firms on developing asymmetric partnerships. More specifically, we focus on start-ups and media companies who are part of the MediaMatters program.

Considering that our research focus lies on a specific group of people, we opted for a purposeful sampling (Barbour, 2001; Bryman, 2012). Our sample consists of two groups of respondents namely five start-ups and five media firm representatives.

After sampling our research participants, we collected our data by means of semi-structured in-depth interviews. This research method allowed us to address the theoretical concepts while also offering the opportunity for a dialogue or conversation. In other words, we were able to dive deeper into interesting statements or arguments. The interviews lasted between 40 and 1 hour and 10 minutes, were taped after permission and transcribed.

The last phase of our research design concerns the data analysis in which case we chose thematic analysis as our preferred method. It provides a flexible and accessible way of identifying themes. We followed the six phases of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). These are discussed in the section data analysis.

### 3.3 Purposeful sampling

The sampling method in our study is purposeful sampling because we sampled our respondents by no means in a random or probability-based way rather used specific criteria to select them (Barbour, 2001; Bryman, 2012).

Our research is interested in Dutch media companies and tech start-ups who are part of the MediaMatters program. Since we are interested in the perspectives of start-ups and media companies, our sample consists of two groups. Together with Rick van Dijk and Bert Kok, the founders of MediaMatters, we selected five media firm representatives and five start-up representatives. All participants are part of the MediaMatters program. The next sections will give a more in-depth explanation of the two groups within our sample.

#### 3.3.1 Representatives of the Dutch traditional media companies

Our sample consists of five participants that represent the media company perspective. The media firm respondents are all part of the MediaMatters program. We included participants who work for publishers, broadcasters and media holdings. Some of the media firms are public whereas others are commercial. We also address the size of the media company since it mattered with regard to the people responsible for partnerships with start-ups. In case of smaller companies, the respondents are part of the managing board. In case of the larger firms, the responsibilities of partnerships with start-ups are assigned to a specific department like digital or innovation.

The table below gives an overview of the respondents who represent media companies. The respondents of two commercial media holdings preferred to stay anonymous which is why referred to them as 'Respondent A' and 'Respondent B' and not mention the name of the media company.

*Table 1.* Respondents who represent the Dutch traditional media firms

	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Media Company</b>	<b>Position of respondent</b>	<b>Size of media company</b>
<b>1</b>	Respondent A	Commercial media holding	Director Digital Sales Development	+/- 3000 employees
<b>3</b>	Respondent B	Commercial media holding	VP Broadcast & Production Technology	+/- 4000 employees



<b>3</b>	Johan Groeneveld (Respondent C)	Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau	Chief Editor	250 employees
<b>4</b>	Eric van Stade (Respondent D)	AVROTROS	Managing Director	395 employees
<b>5</b>	Rinder Sekeris (Respondent E)	Nederlands Dagblad	Publishing Director	96 employees

### 3.3.2 Representatives of the technology start-ups

The other half of our sample consists of participants who represent the start-up perspective. We selected five respondents who were all CEO's or founders of the start-up. In order to give a more specific description, we address the specialization of each start-up and the location given the fact that the MediaMatters start-up database is internationally-based. The table below gives an overview of the respondents. Most of them preferred to be anonymous and are therefore referred to as 'Respondent X'. The start-up companies' names of anonymous respondents are replaced with the specialization field of the start-up.

*Table 2.* Respondents who represent the technology start-ups

	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Start-up</b>	<b>Position of respondent</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>1</b>	Respondent F	Narrated audio articles	CEO & Co-founder	Germany
<b>2</b>	Respondent G	Live video technology	CEO & Co-founder	The Netherlands
<b>3</b>	Peter Henebäck (Respondent H)	Collabrik	CEO	Sweden
<b>4</b>	Respondent I	Cross-platform video player	Global Director of Partnerships	Belgium
<b>5</b>	Paul Bojarski (Respondent J)	Scenic	CEO	United Kingdom

In summary, our sample consists of two subgroups with five media firm representatives on the one hand and five start-up CEO's on the other hand. In case of the former, we talked either to the managing director or head of digital or innovation. The person responsible for partnerships with start-ups was depended on the media firm's size. With regard to the start-ups, we sampled start-up CEO's from different countries.

### **3.4 Data collection method: semi-structured interviews**

In order to collect the data, we took semi-structured in-depth interviews. An in-depth interview is defined as "*conversation with a purpose*" (Webb & Webb, 1932, p. 130). The notion of semi-structured means that the interview is structured according to specific themes, but there is still space for a dialogue to emerge (Brinkmann, 2014). Thus, the interviewer is free to dig deeper into specific matters.

The questionnaire consists of open-ended questions determined by the specific themes (Ayres, 2008). By asking probing questions the respondent is likely to give more information than initially comes to mind (Diccio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). For example, we ask the interviewees to elaborate their arguments or statements by giving a specific example.

All interviews are taken between 23 April 2018 and 22 May 2018 and are between 41 minutes and 1 hour and 10 minutes. The interviews with respondents of media firms were face-to-face and took place in the respondent's office. Most interviews with start-up representatives were taken via Skype or Zoom, except for one as the start-up is located in the Netherlands. The interviews were recorded (after permission) and then transcribed.

### **3.5 Operationalization**

To address how the theoretical constructs of this study are operationalized, we first repeat the main research question followed by the sub-questions that we formulated to answer the main research question.

*RQ: How can technology start-ups and Dutch traditional media companies succeed in developing asymmetric partnerships?*

*SQ1: What are the differences between start-ups and established firms?*

*SQ2: What are the critical stages in developing asymmetric partnerships and how do these play a role in successfully developing partnerships between technology start-ups and Dutch traditional media firms?*

*SQ3: What is the role of the innovation intermediary in developing asymmetric partnerships between Dutch traditional media firms and technology-based start-ups?*

*SQ4: What role does the cognitive distance play in developing asymmetric partnerships between Dutch traditional media firms and technology-based start-ups?*

The first sub-question concerns with the concept of asymmetric partnerships and has already been answered by the literature review in our previous chapter. The second sub-question, which relates to the concept of partnership development, is partly answered by our literature review and partly answered by our primary research. In the theoretical framework, we identified three important partnership development stages that are suited for asymmetric partnerships: awareness, initiation and interaction. With regard to the latter stage, we divided this theoretical concept into three more specific theoretical terms: communication, trust and adaptations. The third sub-question is subjected to the theoretical concept of innovation intermediary followed by the fourth sub-question that asks about cross-industry innovation and more specifically cognitive distance. The following table shows the operationalization of each concept.

*Table 3.* Operationalization of theoretical concepts

Topic	Operationalization
<b>Awareness</b>	- Motivations to develop partnership
<b>Initiation</b>	- Benefits of developing a partnership - Partner selection criteria (Tasks/Partner characteristics) - Definition of a good partner
<b>Interaction</b>	- Design of the partnership's objective
- <b>Communication</b>	- Communicative skills of start-up partners/media partners

- Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Perceived risks of entering a partnership</li> <li>- Criteria to assess trustworthiness (competence/ goodwill)</li> </ul>
- Adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Type of changes made during partnership development: product, behavioural and organizational adaptations</li> <li>- Presence of power relations</li> </ul>
Innovation intermediary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Role of innovation intermediary</li> </ul>
Cross-industry innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- innovative solutions for existing problems</li> <li>- Problems with external problem solvers</li> </ul>

### 3.6 Data analysis: thematic analysis

We chose thematic analysis as our preferred method to analyze the interviews. This method provides a flexible and accessible approach to identifying patterns or themes in a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Also, the analysis method is less time-consuming compared to some others qualitative data analysis methods like grounded theory and therefore beneficial for larger datasets (King, 2004). We analyzed the data according to the six phases of thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) (figure 2).

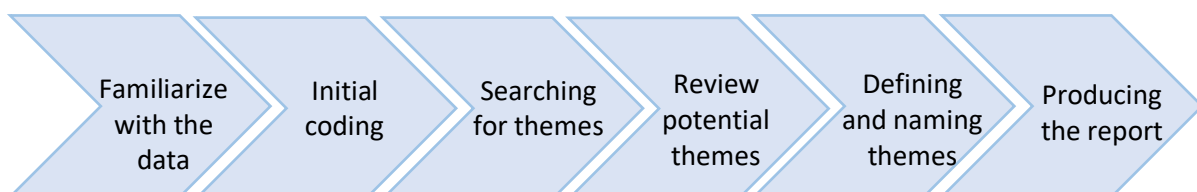


Figure 2. Six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### Familiarize with the data

The first step is to familiarize with the data in order to get an in-depth understanding of the content. Therefore, we took notes during the interview and wrote down the key subjects that the interviewee brought up. Besides that, transcribing interviews offered us a moment of reflection so we can filter our preconceptions and initial thoughts (Oliver, Serovic & Mason, 2005).

#### Initial coding

Secondly, we initially coded the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Charmaz (2006), initial coding is an open, spontaneous and comparative coding process where the

researcher stays as close to the data as possible. Thus, it forced us to look at the data in an analytical way with the aim to give us new insights compared to the respondent's interpretations. We used the computer software Atlas.Ti to initially code the interview transcripts in order to manage our data in a well-organized way.

### **Searching for themes**

Subsequently, we searched for themes in the initial codes which is the central activity of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme is a category that the researcher derives from the data source (e.g. interview transcript), relates to the research focus, is based on codes and gives the researcher insights into the research topic (Bryman, 2012).

First, we organized the initial codes according to theoretical concepts defined in our framework. Subsequently, we grouped the initial codes that had potential to be a theme. We searched for themes by for example looking at repetitions, theory-related material and similarities and differences among the respondents (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In order to assign the initial codes to a theme, we exported the code list from Atlas.Ti to an Excel file. Excel gave us a clear overview of all the codes so we could categorise them into a theme.

### **Review potential themes**

Fourthly, we reviewed our themes on two levels as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, we assessed whether the codes under a theme actually fit together. If there was no need to rearrange codes or create new themes, we continued to the second reviewing level. The second reviewing level involves an evaluation of the themes with regard to the entire data corpus. Thus, we looked at the relationships between themes and how they give meaning to our dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Defining and naming themes**

Once we reviewed and verified our themes, we defined and named them. The aim of this phase is to describe each theme and place in the bigger picture of our research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Producing the report**

The last phase is concerned with translating the identified themes in a report where we formulate arguments rather than descriptions. In the final report we will relate the themes to our main research question and sub-questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The report can be found in the 'results' section.

### **3.7 The contributions of MediaMatters**

Throughout the research, we worked closely with the founders of the MediaMatters program, Bert Kok en Rick van Dijk. They provided information about the objective and were involved in the selection of interviewees, in approaching representatives of the media partners

Since Bert and Rick were familiar with the potential respondents, we decided that they were the ones to approach the representatives of the media partners and thus initiate the first contact. This way, we aspired to showcase the legitimacy of the research and increase the chances of their participation. After that, we answered any further questions about the research and scheduled an appointment for the interview. Ultimately, we got a positive response of every representative of the media partners. With regard to the start-ups respondents, we reached out to them ourselves.

### **3.8 Quality of this research**

In this section, we propose the quality criteria for assessing our qualitative research. We discuss the criteria dependability and transferability which are the qualitative equivalent of reliability and validity (Bryman, 2012).

#### **3.8.1 Dependability**

To ensure the reliability or dependability of our research we adopted an auditing approach (Bryman, 2012). This means that we described and motivated all the decisions we made in this research (Mortelmans, 2013). In order to create an audit trail, we kept record of our notes and transcripts (Nowell et al., 2017).

Our interview transcripts are also valuable in the sense that they offer other researchers the opportunity to assess our analysis and thus do a secondary analysis (Bryman, 2012).

#### **3.8.2 Transferability**

The transferability or level of replication, also referred to as the external validity in quantitative research, is difficult to achieve because of the uniqueness of our research (Nowell et al., 2017). This study explored the development of asymmetric partnerships within the specific context of the MediaMatters program. By giving a detailed description of the MediaMatters context, we allow other researchers to evaluate the potential transferability of our research. This way of achieving external validity is defined as thick descriptions (Bryman, 2012).

### **3.9 Conclusion**

Our preferred method is qualitative semi-structured interviews. This qualitative method allowed us to gain insights into the perspectives of start-ups and media firms on partnership development processes. The semi-structured interviews enable the possibility to have a conversation. The interviewer is thus allowed to ask respondents to elaborate on a specific topic or go in to detail. Our sample comprises an equal number of respondents from both sides of asymmetric partnerships. All respondents are part of the MediaMatters program. The duration of the interviews ranged between 40 minutes and 1 hour and 10 minutes. The interviews are taped and transcribed.

We conducted a thematic analysis for analyzing the transcripts. First, we familiarized ourselves with the data through taking notes and transcribing. Next, we initially coded our data with an open approach which allowed us to detect the underlying meanings of the respondent's interpretations. Afterwards, we searched for overarching themes in our initial codes. Subsequently, we reviewed our themes based on the accuracy of codes grouped under the same theme and on the accuracy of the theme in relation to the entire dataset. Furthermore, we defined and named our themes. The last phase of thematic analysis is writing a final analysis report which will be done in the next section.

Subsequently, we discussed the contributions of MediaMatters to this research. We identified the interviewees together with the founders of the MediaMatters program. Finally, we addressed the quality of this research. The dependability is ensured by adopting an auditing approach and the transcriptions offer other researchers to conduct a secondary analysis. The transferability of our research is ensured by keeping record of thick descriptions.

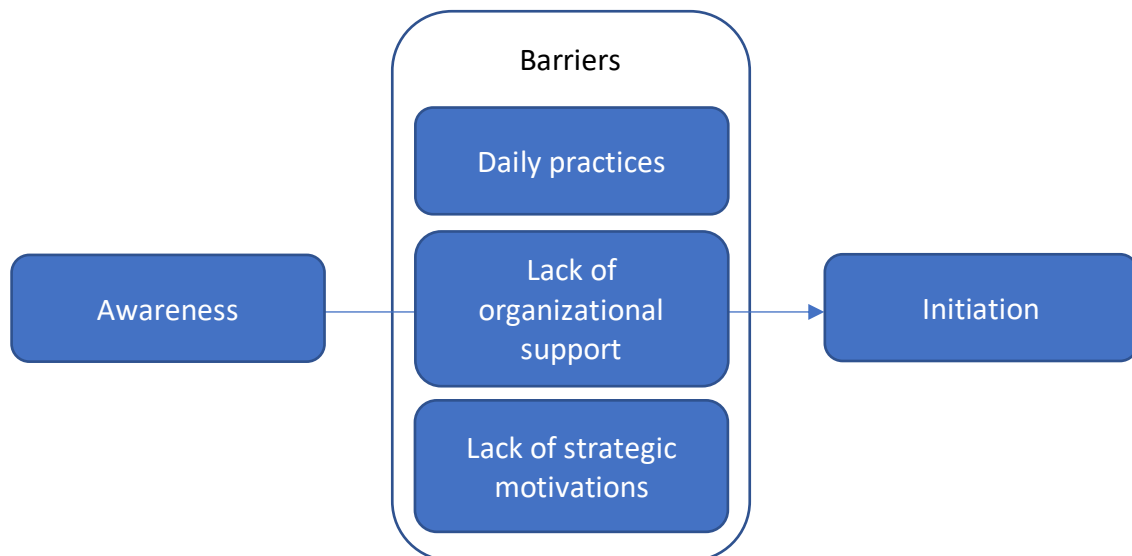
## **4 Results**

This section gives an analysis of the interviews with representatives of media firms and start-ups. We start with the three stages of partnership development, namely awareness, initiation and interaction. With regard to the awareness stage, we identified three barriers that media companies face to translate awareness into initiation: (1) daily practices, (2) lack of organizational support and (3) lack of strategic motivations. In case of the initiation stage, we found that media firm respondents primarily take task-related factors into consideration while start-up respondents perceive partner-related factors as important selection criteria. In the interaction stage, clear communication is suggested to be essential for managing the counterparty's expectations, goodwill and competence play an important role in trust-building scenarios and we identified a discrepancy between the adaptations of media firms and start-ups. After the partnership development stages, we discuss the role of an innovation intermediary in developing asymmetric partnerships. We point out two main functions: creating awareness among media companies and start-up recruiter. The last part of this analysis is subjected to the concept of cross-industry innovation where we identified a gap between the start-up's solution and the media firm's problem.

### **4.1 Stage 1: Awareness**

In this section we discuss the findings of the first stage of partnership development which is concerned with recognizing the need for a partner. All five start-up respondents were well aware of the fact that they need the media partner. The media partners are the start-up's clients which means the start-ups are financially dependent on the media partners. The media firm respondents also acknowledged the need for a partner in terms of strengthening the innovative capabilities. Although they were aware of the innovative opportunities of partnerships with start-ups and were willing to invest in them, the interviews illustrated that translating this awareness into further steps can be challenging. Based on the interviews, we identified three barriers that can hold media companies back from entering the initiation stage. Figure 3 illustrates how daily practices, lack of organizational support and lack of strategic motivations can form a barrier for media companies to translate awareness into initiation. We discuss the three barriers more comprehensively in the sections below.





*Figure 3. Three barriers media companies face to translate awareness into initiation*

#### **4.1.1 Fitting partnerships with start-ups into daily practices**

The job occupations of the media firm interviewees vary from managing directors to head of the digital or technology department depending on the size of the firm. Fitting the management of partnerships with start-ups into their agenda can be difficult as their profession comprises of managing a lot more than these partnerships. Looking at the respondents of smaller media firms, we find that their job function comprises of a lot more than managing partnerships with start-ups. Being a managing director or chief editor leaves them with numerous responsibilities and versatile job tasks. The main focus of the managing directors lies on the day-to-day running of the media firm. As a result, the division of their time investment over the various job occupations can be difficult. The following quote illustrates the varied job occupation of media firm respondent E.

“You propose the conditions for publishing the media products. This is very broad and includes staff management, making contracts, doing business with suppliers, following trends and developing a strategy” (Respondent E).

With regard to the larger media firms, the responsible person for partnerships with start-ups is the one in charge of the technology or digital department. Their job is concerned with the technological and digital aspects of media products. Media content of traditional media firms is nowadays increasingly becoming digital focused, which is why the large firm’s

respondents are ultimately involved in numerous projects (Respondent A, B). Respondent A addressed the challenge of balancing daily practices with innovative activities as follows:

“[...] It leaves you with little time for new things. That frustrates me sometimes too, because I actually want a ratio of 70-30: 70% existent and 30 % new activities”  
(Respondent A).

Thus, both respondents of small and large media firms are in charge of numerous tasks. The tasks with high priority are ultimately dealt with first, followed by the less important ones. The activities perceived as less relevant for generating turnover end up at the bottom of the priority list. In case of media firms, the turnover relies on their core activity namely media content production. As a result, the partnerships with start-ups risk being overshadowed and rather perceived as a side project.

#### **4.1.2 Need for organizational support**

Secondly, interviewees recognized the necessity of organizational support in order to develop asymmetric partnerships (Respondent A, D, E, F, G, J). Even though the interviewees recognized the added value that asymmetric partnerships can offer, a lack of organizational support can potentially be an obstacle for the further partnership development. To start with, we discuss how the colleagues of some media firm respondents perceive start-up projects as a side project. Additionally, we find that two media firm respondents link the lack of organizational support with a broader undervaluation of innovation. Lastly, we address that start-up respondents sometimes receive inconsistent support from the different media firm departments.

##### **4.1.2.1 Colleagues give partnerships with start-ups minor priority**

From the interviews with respondents of media firms, it became clear that all of the respondents recognized start-ups as a potential source of innovation, but in some cases the organization is depicted as unsupportive (Respondent A, D, E). Although colleagues and employees showed interest in the start-up projects, they perceived the partnerships as a test or side project rather than a potential source of added value. The media firm respondents' colleagues become unsupportive when start-up projects intervene with the productivity of other projects - often related to content production.

To illustrate this, Respondent A mentioned that a lack of organizational belief in partnerships with start-ups can possibly hinder the effectiveness of these partnerships. The fact that his projects intertwine with other departments that all have their own agendas and priority lists makes it difficult to focus on the start-ups. Although his colleagues show interest in partnerships with start-ups, they lose this interest as soon as the start-up projects interfere or threaten their own project's productivity. Thus, when colleagues fear that their own practices will fall short due to start-up projects, the start-up projects become less important in their eyes. In other words, start-up projects are seen as side projects and have less priority compared to other practices. Therefore, Respondent A, Director of the Digital Sales Development department, argues that there is a need for a top-down acknowledgement of partnerships with start-ups in order to make these partnerships possible:

“I think partnerships with start-ups need to be embraced on a top-down level. So, the idea that this will be an important component should be initiated by the CEO and adopted by every employee” (Respondent A).

The respondent identifies a lack of a top-down embracement of partnerships with start-ups as a barrier for the further partnership development. In the next section, we discuss how two media firm respondents relate the poor organizational support with a broader scepticism towards innovation.

#### 4.1.2.2 Lack of organizational support in line with scepticism towards innovation

Respondent D and E addressed the lack of organizational support in relation with a broader subject in the traditional media industry namely undervaluation of innovation. The traditional media content producers of the media firms, mainly referring to the older generations, perceive innovative activities as less interesting and important compared to content production. Respondent D, Managing Director of AVROTROS, mentioned how different departments with different age groups take on a different perspective towards innovative practices:

“We have an online and a social media department which is occupied by young people and who find innovative practices absolutely great. But the editorial office of

‘Een Vandaag’ comprises of a lot of old journalists who believe that present practices do not need changes” (Respondent D).

The respondent experiences scepticism towards innovative practices from the more traditional departments with older generations who find current practices good the way they are.

In order to tackle the scepticism and disinterest from certain departments towards innovation, respondent D and E took initiatives to bring more awareness about the opportunities of innovation. Respondent E, for example, believes that voice-controlled assistants are going to be the next big thing and will change the news consumption. In order to prepare and trigger his employees to think about the opportunities of the innovative smart speakers, the respondent bought a few smart speakers for his employees to take home and try out. In other words, he guides his employees to see the possibilities of innovation, which is in this case exemplified by smart speakers.

“I allowed everyone to take the Alexa home. [...] If innovative devices want to be accepted internally, employees are going to have to work with it and I think support is needed to build that awareness” (Respondent E).

The respondent triggers employees to consider the opportunities and benefits of innovative devices like a smart speaker. Similarly, Respondent D, Managing Director of AVROTROS, explained his way of creating awareness about innovation in his media firm:

“In order to let them [employees] think about innovations, we provided them with half a million euro to invest in their own ideas. The only condition was that it had to be online focused” (Respondent D).

By giving employees access to a decent amount of money, the respondent aspired to trigger innovative ideas from within the media company.

#### 4.1.2.3 Inconsistent support between departments in media companies

From the interviews with start-up interviewees, it also seems that an unsupportive media firm organization can complicate the development of asymmetric partnerships

(Respondent F, G, J). If the various organizational layers fail to recognize the potential added value or improved competitive advantages that the start-up can offer, a potential partnership may be off the table. Thus, even though the responsible person in the media firm may have genuine interest and motivation to work with the start-up, a lack of organizational support can obstruct a potential partnership. Respondent J, CEO of the start-up *Sceenic*, for example, said:

“We were approved by the head of business development, but then the head of products said: ‘No, this is not on my product roadmap or our vision, get lost’”  
(Respondent J).

Thus, even though one department recognized the potential added value of developing a partnership with the start-up of respondent J, the further development was discontinued due to insufficient support of other departments. In this case, respondent J was confronted with an inconsistent support between different departments.

In the next section, we discuss a third barrier for media companies that can possibly impede the further development of partnerships with start-ups.

#### 4.1.3 Need for strategic motivations as opposed to coincidence-based motivations

From the interviews with media firm respondents, it seems that the recognition of the potential added value of a partnership with a start-up occurs both on a strategic and coincidental basis. Four out of five media firm respondents argue that the motivation to develop a partnership results in some cases from a strategic objective while in other cases from a spontaneous situation.

In some cases, the media firm respondents work on specific projects for which they consciously recognize the need of a partner. The media firm is then unable to achieve the project’s goal on its own. In this sense, identifying the weaknesses of the media firm motivates respondents to start the development of a potential partnership. The following quote by Respondent B, VP Broadcast & Production Technology, depicts how the decision of seeking a start-up partner is based on a particular project:

“Whether we develop a partnership with a start-up often depends on the project we are working on. Very concrete. Either we are working on a project already and want

to start the execution [by developing a partnership with a start-up] or we think that we should initiate a project (Respondent B).

The respondent sketched what motivates him to develop a partnership with a start-up. Either he has an existing project or wants to initiate one, but either way he has a strategic objective to develop a partnership.

In other cases, respondents entered the awareness stage by coincidence. In this manner, the media firm is either approached by the start-up or the potential partners crossed paths. For example, during MatchMaking Days, media conventions or other similar events it can occur that potential partners meet and both recognize the potential value of working together, without the presence of strategic considerations. The following quote by Respondent A, Director Digital Sales Development, illustrates how a respondent recognized a potential partner on a coincidental basis at the MatchMaking days:

“Eventually all the guys had to do a presentation and afterwards you talk to them for a bit. Then I thought: Hey, that is something we are struggling with, we have not looked at that properly or that could help to accelerate for example the go-to-market - or the audio business” (Respondent A).

We find that the presence of a strategic objective does, however, increase the relevance of the partnership (Respondent A, B, D, E). When the media firm is actively seeking a potential partner to work with, the priority level of the partnership is likely to be higher compared to situations where respondents have no strategic objective in mind. The absence of a strategic objective means that respondents can miss a concrete project for which they require the help of a specialized start-up. In other words, the media firm may show interest in the start-up’s technology but lacks a concrete project. Respondent B, VP Broadcast & Production Technology, illustrates the difference in priority between a potential partnership with and without a clear strategic objective.

“If you look for example at MediaMatters [...] I certainly see the potential in parties and detect the interfaces we have. However, there is a need for that moment where you think: “Okay, now I actually have a project that I can do something with”.

Looking at all the start-ups we spoke to, we allowed only one start-up to enter our business while the others are still pending” (Respondent B).

Respondent C, Chief Editor of ANP, points out that exploring projects without a clear strategic objective is healthy for an organization. Instead of recognizing potential partnerships from a state of urgency or necessity, he finds it important that firms try out new things which he refers to as terra nova.

“When it is about innovations that are inspirational, it often has to do with the fact that you are exploring things where you do not have a feeling about yet. Call it terra nova or terra incognita. That is of course good and healthy for an organization to do that” (Respondent C).

All in all, respondents recognize start-ups as a source of innovation both with and without the presence of a strategic objective. In some cases, media firms are urged to attract a potential start-up partner because they lack the capabilities to continue a project on their own. In this manner, the media firm has a clear strategic objective to partner with a start-up. In other cases, the media firm is triggered to develop a partnership because it is approached by start-ups or crosses paths by coincidence. Hence, the partnership emerges from a spontaneous context.

#### 4.2 Stage 2: Initiation

Once asymmetric partners have recognized the added value of a partnership, they enter the initiation phase where potential partners are being evaluated and selected. Interestingly, we find that representatives of media firms primarily consider task-related selection criteria in partner assessments while representatives of start-ups are inclined to look at partner-related selection criteria, as illustrated in the figure below. We discuss both perspectives more in-depth in the sections below.

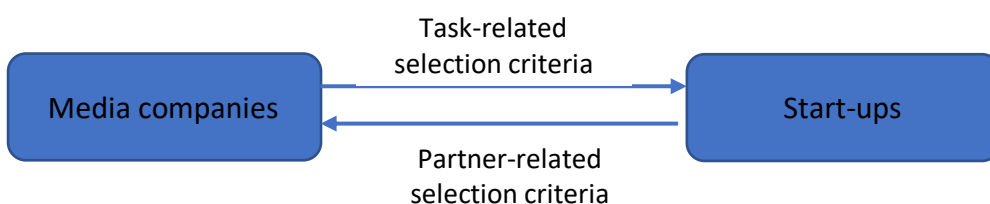


Figure 4. Partner selection process of media companies and technology start-ups

#### **4.2.1 Task-related selection criteria of media companies**

From the interviews with media firm respondents, it seems that start-ups tend to be assessed on task-related factors. This means that start-ups are evaluated on their ability to deliver expectations and fulfil the partnership objective. A first indicator that supports this finding is the fact that media firm respondents assess start-ups on their ability to enable efficiency improvements or access to new capabilities. Furthermore, the selection of start-ups which have a developed technology rather than an idea is another theme that illustrates how media firm respondents evaluate potential partners on the task-related criteria.

##### **4.2.1.1 Attraction of start-ups that increase efficiency and access to new capabilities**

All five representatives of the media firms mentioned to attract start-ups that can increase efficiency or provide access to new capabilities. Media firm respondents attract start-up's developed technologies aiming to increase the speed of current practices, foster automation and enable digital developments. The search for technological tools is to facilitate efficiency for in-house purposes and for better reach to the digital consumer. Additionally, media firm respondents select start-ups with the objective to access new capabilities. In this case, the media firm aspires to explore a new and unknown territory by developing a partnership with a start-up. Respondent D, Managing Director of AVROTROS, illustrated how start-ups can facilitate media firms with innovative opportunities and efficiency improvements:

“They [start-ups] can bring innovation, which a lot of media firms fail to do on their own. Besides that, you can just drive efficiency, because start-ups have often invented tools that make your life in the media landscape a whole lot easier and that allow you to focus even more on content” (Respondent D)

The respondent identifies new capabilities and efficiency benefits as desirable factors facilitated by the start-up. Cummings & Holmberg (2012) describe these factors as task-related critical success factors, which refers to partner selection criteria that shape the accomplishment of the desired partnership goal. In other words, the respondent is expected to assess potential start-ups on their ability to access new capabilities or to increase efficiency.



#### 4.2.1.2 Preference for start-ups with developed technology rather than an idea

Another theme that illustrates the prominence of task-related selection criteria for media firm respondents is the preference for somewhat developed technologies over ideas. Three out of five media firm respondents express how they rather avoid start-ups with poorly developed technologies. Often, the start-up's technologies are still in the developing stage and therefore not go-to-market ready. As a result, media firms are unable to immediately integrate or implement the technology. The process of making the start-up technology suitable for the media firm requires tests and prototypes. Throughout this testing stage, which usually takes a couple of months, the media firm respondents are uncertain about the start-up's ability to realize the technological fit. To avoid the risk that the start-up technology eventually turns out to be unsuitable, unachievable or requires a longer time span, some media firm respondents' preference goes out to start-ups with a somewhat developed technology instead of just an idea. For instance, Respondent B recognizes start-ups that develop numerous prototypes as a risk and illustrated his preference for start-ups with a finished product in the following quote:

“There are a lot of start-ups that keep communicating in prototypes or ideas. I find it very important that they [start-ups] have a finished product because then you have something to talk about, something that works and that you can play around with” (Respondent B).

Thus, the respondent rather selects a start-up partner with a developed product and avoids start-ups that keep producing prototypes. When a start-up continues to produce prototypes, respondent B and E address how they are likely to discontinue the partnership. In this manner, the media firm respondents assess the development stage of start-ups' technology in order to evaluate the start-up's ability to deliver expectations.

#### **4.2.2 Partner-related selection criteria of technology start-ups**

From the interviews with representatives of technology start-ups, it appears that partner-related factors are a decisive element of the media partner selection. One finding that illustrates this is the search for media companies that share the same vision as the start-up. Besides that, we find that when start-up respondents portray media companies that do not share the same vision as a client rather than a partner.

#### 4.2.2.1 Vision alignment

Three out of five start-up respondents identified vision alignment as an important assessment criterion for selecting a media partner. Instead of looking at the media company's ability to accomplish partnership objectives, the start-up respondents evaluate the presence of shared visions. When the visions of the media partner and the start-up align, the partnership development progresses faster and easier. The reason for this is that the negotiating and designing processes of the partnership happen smoothly since the media partner and the start-up have similar ideas and thoughts. Respondent J, CEO of UK-based start-up *Sceenic*, mentioned that vision alignment has been a crucial element for his successful partnership with BT Sport:

“We are working with BT Sport here in England and they are absolutely aligned with our vision. I believe that watching sport should be a group thing and when I heard the CEO said something similar, I could automatically see that we are aligned on the same vision. We provide that service and they have the platform and the users. And it has been an amazing partnership, absolutely amazing” (Respondent J).

#### 4.2.2.2 Distinction between client and partner

Another theme that illustrates how partner-related factors are valuable to start-up respondents in the media partner selection is the perceived distinction between a partner and a client. Three out of five start-up respondents mentioned to differentiate partnerships from commercial agreements. A partner is defined as a company that shares the same goals and vision while a client is defined as company that buys a product or service. The alignment of visions and desired achievement of common goals is what distinct a partner from a client. Respondent H, CEO of Sweden-based start-up *Collabrik*, explained this differentiation as follows:

“With some companies you have a commercial agreement where you both get something out of it. This is not a partnership because then you would want to achieve the same goals or have the same vision on things. So, with some companies you do something together to make more money whereas with other companies you want to do something better. We [partners] don't know how to quantify it, but we believe -

because we have the same ideas- what should be done so we are going to do it together” (Respondent H).

The respondent addressed partners as companies that share goals and visions and desire to create value together. Clients, on the contrary, are defined by the respondent as companies that solely have commercial benefits. This distinction shows that the respondent takes partner-related factors (i.e. shared goals and visions) into account when assessing and selecting media partners. The respondent perceives a media firm as a partner when it matches the desired partner-related criteria.

### 4.3 Stage 3: Interaction

For this stage of developing partnerships between media companies and technology start-ups, we distinguished three important interaction processes based on academic literature. With regard to communication processes, we find that clear communication is a must to manage the expectations of the counter party. In terms of the trust-building scenario's, we identify goodwill as an antecedent of trust for start-ups and competence as an antecedent of trust for media companies. A third interaction process concerns adaptation behaviour in which we see a discrepancy between the adaptations of media firms and start-ups.

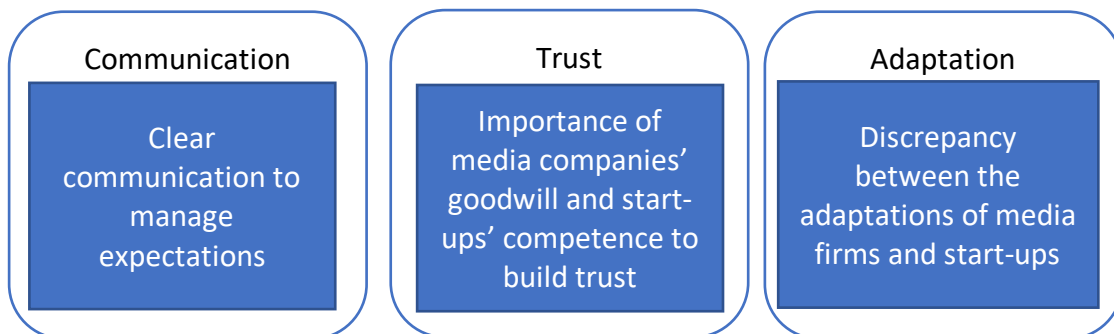


Figure 5. Three interaction processes between technology start-ups and media companies

#### 4.3.1 Clear communication to manage expectations

Both respondents of start-ups and media firms emphasize the importance of clear communication as it is found to be a vital element in managing expectations. From the interviews, we identify two situations where clear and open communication is a crucial element.

All respondents of start-up companies argue that media firms often fail to properly address whether they have interest in developing a partnership or not. Instead of specifying the chances of working together, media firms leave the decision of establishing a partnership up in the air. In this manner, transparency is presented as a key element of setting expectations as quoted by Respondent J:

“I’d rather hear: ‘No we are not interested in your solution, thank you very much’. I think transparency from the corporate, to learn to be transparent with the start-up and realize that the second-best word we can hear is a ‘no’, not a ‘maybe’”  
(Respondent J).

The respondent demands clarity from media firms when it comes to the further development of a partnership. Academia also propose clarity of the counterparty’s incentives as an important aspect of communication (Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Argwal et al., 2010).

Additionally, seven respondents address that clear communication is important in regard to meeting deadlines. In order to assess the technological fit, start-ups run tests and make prototypes. To foresee when tech developers will fulfil their tasks can however be difficult. Nevertheless, both interviewees from media firms and start-ups acknowledge that if the start-up is unable to meet a deadline, it is best to inform the counterparty and thus manage the expectations. The following quotes illustrate this finding:

“Be technically very specific and keep your numbers very strict. Just make conservative estimations rather than optimistic estimations” (Respondent F)

“In a case where you have a deadline today and you will not be able to meet it, we want you to inform us about this last week and not today or tomorrow. Some smaller companies find this difficult because they perceive this as failing” (Respondent B)

For these respondents, clarity and transparency about a deadline is preferred. The fact that the start-up product is still in development or is at least new to the market increases the level of uncertainty for the media firm. Therefore, clear communication is considered as a

key element to keep the media firm informed about the product developments. This finding aligns with Zott and Huy (2007) who argue that entrepreneurs should have strong communicative skills, especially when their product or service just recently launched on the market.

In summary, clear communication between start-ups and media firms is considered as an important aspect of developing a partnership. First of all, start-up respondents encourage media firms to be clearer about the possibility of a potential partnership. Furthermore, both start-up and media firm respondents find it crucial to communicate clearly about deadlines. If the start-up is incapable to deliver on a technological level or need more time develop, it is best to inform the media firm as suggested by Zott and Huy (2007).

#### **4.3.2 Goodwill and competence as antecedents of trust**

With regard to trust-building scenario's, we find that start-ups perceive goodwill as an important element of trust while media companies identify competence as a key element to gain trust. Our findings in regard to the topic of trust support the research by Hasche et al. (2017).

##### **4.3.2.1 The role of the media firm's goodwill in trust-building scenario's**

Looking at the interviews with start-ups respondents, it appears that goodwill operates as an antecedent of trust. Three out of five start-up respondents mention that sincerity and good intentions play a role in the perceived level of trustworthiness. Two of them addressed a situation – both during the MatchMaking-events – where they doubt the goodwill of one of the participating media partners. The media firm in question asked one start-up respondent to send over the slides and the other one permission to film and photograph his presentation. Both the start-up CEO's were sceptical about the media firm's intentions and questioned whether the media firm was genuinely interested in a partnership or was more concerned with obtaining information to develop the technology on its own. Respondent G, CEO of a Dutch-based start-up, who had a couple of meetings with the media firm in question after which the communication was discontinued, suspected the media firm of opportunistic behaviour and said the following:

“I thought they [the media firm in question] may still want to develop a partnership, but they just entered a candy store to look at every companies' offerings and then copy a bit from everyone” (Respondent G).

In this case, the respondent questions whether the media firm is more interested in gathering information to develop technologies by itself or genuinely keen to develop a partnership with a start-up. He is thus sceptical about the media firm's intentions and believes the media firm may reveal opportunistic behaviour. The start-up's trust in the media firm is in this case affected by the questionable goodwill of the media firm, which aligns with the research of Hasche et al. (2017).

#### 4.3.2.2 The role of the start-up's competence in trust-building scenario's

Goodwill as a sign of trust was also proposed by Hasche et al. (2017).

From the interviews with media firm respondents, it seems that the start-up's competence is considered as an antecedent of trust, as suggested by Hasche et al. (2017). Three media firm respondents mention that they are approached by a lot of start-ups but question the trustworthiness of the start-ups. The trustworthiness of a start-up is assessed by its ability to live deliver expectations or in other words a start-up's competence. Respondent A, Head of Digital Sales Development, explained how he was recently approached by a start-up, but had considerable doubts about them.

“They [start-up who approached him] tell you they developed a technology that automatically optimizes a campaign which would increase the efficiency with 30%. Enough people will go through with that, but if you do you some digging, you find out it is based on bullshit” (Respondent A)

Thus, the respondent does not immediately trust the start-up, which appeared to be justified after a background check. In this case, the screening of the start-ups showcased the low competency level of the start-up and consequently distrust of the media company (Hasche et al., 2017).

#### 4.3.3 Discrepancy between the adaptations of media firms and start-ups

With regard to adaptation behaviour as an interaction process between media firms and start-ups, we find that the adaptations done by media firms in order to support the partnership development with start-ups is rather poor. Media firm respondents indicated to be inspired by the entrepreneurial behaviour of start-ups and accordingly make small adaptations in their traditional behaviour. Besides this change in behaviour, we identified

two themes that indicate a lack of adaptation behaviour from the media firm. We namely find that media firms have a poor allocation of personnel and are tempted to take control over the start-up adaptations.

#### 4.3.3.1 Adopting entrepreneurial behaviours

From the interviews with media firm representatives, it seems that some respondents are inspired by the entrepreneurial behaviour of start-ups. The start-up approach involves a trial-and-error way of thinking and working. Four out of five media firm respondents mention that start-ups stimulate them to try out an iterative approach rather than a statistical and linear approach. Thus, they identify the start-up method as a potential added value instead of perceiving it as conflicting with the media firm's processes. For example, Eric van Stade, managing director of AVROTROS, addresses how he is adopting the start-up working method:

“I have to say that I catch myself more often [...] on saying ‘Let's not fix everything in advance. Just try it out. We will just make adjustments depending on whether it works or not.’ [...] Let's just try to look if it can arise organically” (Respondent D)

Eric van Stade illustrates how he explores the use of an iterative approach. Considering the fact that behavioural adaptation is proposed as a sign of gaining trust from the counterparty (Schmidt & Tyler, 2007), Eric's adaptations to the entrepreneurial behaviour can be considered as a form of trust-building.

#### 4.3.3.2 Poor allocation of personnel

From the interviews, it seems that media firms lack personnel that is fully dedicated to partnerships with start-ups. As mentioned before, the job occupation of the person in charge of partnerships with start-ups varies from head of innovation or digital in the larger firms to managing director in smaller firms. Considering that the responsibilities of partnerships with start-ups are assigned to people with a managing or executing position, the start-up projects are often overshadowed by other duties. Start-up respondents verify that a diverse job occupation of the responsible person in the media firm is an obstacle to effectively work together. Paul Bojarski, the CEO of a London-based start-up, emphasizes that having a responsible person for start-up projects is a crucial element of successful partnerships:

“The successful partnerships have been when the corporate has a person dedicated to running innovation projects, like a project lead. [...] So once the innovation project is approved, there is a person fully available to me. This person might work with two other start-ups, but it is definitely not the case that his day job is working and that I am the side thing that has been given to him on his desk. That is when it is failed” (Respondent J).

The respondent points out that successful partnerships emerge when the media firm has a responsible person for the start-up projects. When media firms have a poor personnel allocation, the respondent’s project receives less attention which potentially results in a failed partnership. The fact that media firms poorly invest in personnel shows a low level of commitment to or strategically investment in the partnerships with start-ups (Schmidt & Tyler, 2007).

#### 4.3.3.3 Media firms tempted to take control over technology start-ups adaptations

Another type of adaptation behaviour, as seen in the theoretical framework, is changing products which is typical for the supplier side (Hallen et al., 1991). Since the start-up functions as the supplier of technological tools in partnerships with media firms, we observe that start-ups change and customize their products according to the media firm’s needs. Eight out of ten interviewees addressed that start-ups adapt their product to the media firm. Ultimately, this is an expected form of adaptation since the start-up product is still in early stages of development and has to be matched with the media firm’s system. The danger is however that the media firm may be tempted to control the product adaptations. From the interviews with respondent A, B, D, G and I, it appears that the media firm can potentially take control over the start-up product.

The start-up respondents (G & I) mention that in some cases media firms show interest in the technology rather than a potential partnership. Respondent G, CEO of a Dutch-based venture, explains how he is approached by a media firm who solely felt attracted to the start-up technology:



“Someone asked us ‘Can we just use your software and technology without further involvement on your part?’ Then we said ‘No, we are a company that received already a lot of investment’” (Respondent G).

The respondent shows that the media firm aspires to leave out the start-up management and only continue with the start-up product. However, the respondent refused the offer. The media firm was in this case trying to have power of the respondent's offerings (Brennan et al., 2003).

From the interviews with media firm respondents (A, B & D), it seems that the respondents are indeed sometimes tempted to control the start-up product. The respondents were for example solely interested in the start-up technology. For instance, Respondent B, VP Technology & Broadcasting of a Commercial Media Holding, who is in some cases more interested in the start-up technology instead of the whole package that the start-up offers, said:

“They have a very interesting technology and they built some sort of service around it. However, I do not believe in the service [...] So I am discussing with them how I can potentially integrate their technology. I am less interested in the total package that they are selling” (Respondent B).

Instead of opting for the original start-up product, the respondent demands a special offer from the start-up by only wanting to integrate the technology. Thus, we find that the start-up is considering to go beyond adapting its original product offerings and solely offer its technology. In this case, the media firm respondent has definitely power over the start-up adaptations (Brennan et al., 2013).

Additionally, two of the five media firm respondents aspired to potentially take a stake in the start-up or to propose an acquisition depending on whether the technology is strategically worth it to integrate in the media firm's system. In this case, the respondents look to gain more or full power over the start-up. An important note is that these two respondents represent the large media holdings and probably have the financial resources unlike the other smaller media firms. Respondent A, Head of Digital Sales Development,

illustrates this finding by saying the following about the positioning of the partnerships with start-ups within his department:

“We have partnerships with [established firm X], we also have partnerships with [established firm X]. I call these regular partnerships, but you have next partnerships also acquisition of partnerships and integration which perfectly fits with the start-up environment” (Respondent A).

The respondent makes a clear distinction between partnerships with established firms and start-ups. He states that start-ups belong in the department of acquisition and integration rather than the partnership department. In this case, we find that the respondent aspires to take the complete power over the start-up.

Next, we discuss the role of an innovation intermediary in developing partnerships between technology start-ups and media companies

#### **4.4 Role of MediaMatters in partnership development**

We identified two main functions of the innovation intermediary MediaMatters. On the one hand, MediaMatters plays a role in creating awareness among media firms respondents about the opportunities of partnerships with start-ups. On the other hand, media-firms respondents portray MediaMatters as a start-up recruiter who scouts and preselects the potential start-up partners.

##### **4.4.1 Creating awareness among media firms**

All media firm respondents indicated that partnerships with start-ups is still a rather new domain for them. In case of Respondent A, C and D, the idea to partner with start-ups aiming to create innovative opportunities was more or less activated by MediaMatters. They had limited (Respondent A & C) or no (Respondent D) partnerships before participating in the MediaMatters program. Respondent C, Chief Editor of ANP, exemplifies how MediaMatters created more awareness about the possibilities of partnerships with start-ups:

We get of course in touch with start-ups who pitch us something. Here and there it already led to a form of partnership [...] MediaMatters has definitely contributed to that. (Respondent C)

In this manner, MediaMatters plays a role in the awareness stage of media firms. Turning to start-ups as an external source of innovation is rather new for the media partners. The opportunities that start-ups can potentially create is slowly entering the Dutch media industry. In cases where asymmetric partnerships are rather unexplored, we find that MediaMatters contributes to the creation of awareness.

#### **4.4.2 MediaMatters as the start-up recruiter**

All interviewees of the media partners consider MediaMatters as sort of a recruitment agency (Respondent A, B, C, D, E). More specifically, we find two main occupations of the innovation intermediary.

On the one hand, MediaMatters covers the act of scouting start-ups (Respondent A, B, C, D). The start-up community is constantly growing and therefore encompasses a big number of start-ups which can be overwhelming for the respondents. Since keeping up with this continual growth is a time-consuming activity, respondents experiences difficulties with finding spare time in their busy agendas. Hence, MediaMatters offers them a convenient alternative to access the start-up community and to stay informed about the latest trends. The following quote by Respondent B illustrates the scouting role of MediaMatters:

[...] it is very pleasant that there is a party who talks a lot with start-ups, knows where to find them or the start-ups know where to find MediaMatters. This way the access to start-ups becomes a lot easier (Respondent B)

On the other hand, MediaMatters carries out a preselection. As respondents are being approached by a lot of start-ups who wish to establish a partnership (Respondent A, B, C, E), it can be a time-consuming task to do a background check for all of them and envision the potential allocation of the start-up within the firm. For instance, Respondent A says the following about start-ups approaching him:

“From now on you can go to that party. Let them figure it out. They more or less know what our company needs” (Respondent A).

Briefly, respondents perceive MediaMatters as a recruitment agency that scouts and screens potential partners and makes a preselection of the enormous start-up community. The functions that respondents assign to MediaMatters align with the roles suggested by Howells (2006).

#### 4.5 Cross-industry innovation: gap between media firm problems and start-up solutions

With regard to the topic of cross-industry innovation, we find that there is often a gap between the media firm's problem and the start-up solution. Media firm respondents point out that start-ups are often too focused on the solution they offer without considering the problems that traditional media firms are facing. Prior experience in the media industry can possibly bridge the gap between the start-up solutions and the media firm problems.

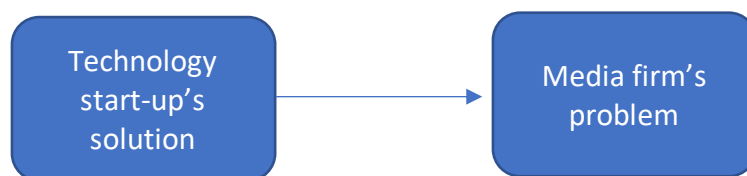


Figure 6. Start-up's solution as starting point rather the media firm's problem.

##### 4.5.1 Solution before problem?

All the media firm interviewees struggled with the fact that start-ups frequently offer a solution without recognizing the problems that media firms are facing (Respondent A, B, C, D, E). The challenges that the media firms are confronted with are related with the digitization of media content, the automatization of processes and the search for alternatives to traditional media products. Some start-ups do as a matter of fact facilitate convenient technologies that can possibly solve or at least alleviate these challenges. Others propose however rather irrelevant solutions.

For instance, respondents (A, C) were approached by a start-up who offers a technological tool for improving the payment model. Although their media firm can benefit from this technology, it fails to solve more urgent problems like the decrease in print. In this manner, the solution offered by the start-up is unable to solve a more relevant problem. The quote below demonstrates the mismatch between the media firm's problem and the start-up's solution.

"Sometimes there are people who come and pitch a payment solution or

something like that. Well guys, that is not the world we are in right now, consumer payments or micropayments beyond the consumer level. Not right now anyways, it can always change. [...] but then I tell them that I do not think we should do this now and that they are at the wrong address” (Respondent C).

The respondent addresses how start-ups often fail to understand the core problems of the media industry which is suggested to be a potential risk of cross-industry innovation by academia (Enkel & Heil, 2014; Enkel & Gasmann, 2010)

Respondent B and E point out that although start-ups sometimes fail to present a ready-made solution, the media firm can still detect the potential in the start-up solution. In other words, the start-up’s technology may seem irrelevant at first sight, but deeper thinking can change that first impression. However, brainstorming about the potential fit of the technology in the media company requires a certain skill set. The following quote shows that the media firm can potentially overcome the mismatch between the start-up solution and the media firm’s problem.

“I wonder if other media firms recognize that because they often go somewhere with a specific idea to look whether a start-up fit in there or not. What you then see is that a start-up gets rejected whereas if you think harder, you can potentially do something with it” (Respondent B)

#### **4.5.2 Prior experience in counterparty’s industry opens doors**

From the interviews, it appears that when respondents have work experience or a background in the counterparty’s industry, the respondent is more capable of understanding the counterparty (Respondent B, G, I, J). In other words, prior experience in the counterparty’s industry means a lower level of cognitive distance. As a result, respondents have more affinity with the dynamics of the industry. For instance, Respondent I mentions that the partner selection is affected by his colleagues’ experience in the video industry:

“Our founder, for example, is already for a couple of years active in the videoworld. [...] So, they immediately know the important players in the market” (Respondent I)

The fact the respondent's colleague worked in the media industry helped with the identification of potential partners. In this sense, the respondent's colleague has more affinity with the counterparty's industry.

## 5 Conclusion

The aim of our research was to assess how technology start-ups and Dutch traditional media firms can succeed in developing asymmetric partnerships. To accomplish our research objective, we conducted ten semi-structured interviews with an equal number of representatives of technology start-ups and representatives of Dutch traditional media companies. This section begins the formulation of an answer to the research question followed by a critical reflection, by means of an assessment of the limitations of our research and ideas for future research. Finally, we address the managerial implications of our research.

### 5.1 Answer to the research question

Though researchers studied the challenges of managing asymmetric partnerships and provided managerial guidelines, the stages that go ahead of the partnership remain unexplored. Academic researchers suggest that companies should pay close attention to the partnership development stages since these play a continuous role throughout the partnership. Based on this assumption, we formulated the following main research question:

*RQ: How can technology start-ups and Dutch traditional media companies succeed in developing asymmetric partnerships?*

In order to answer this question, we posed a first sub-question regarding the definition of asymmetric partnerships. To understand what specific challenges start-ups and established firms face when entering a partnership, we identified the differences or asymmetries between these parties. Based on Das & He (2006), we discussed differences that are inherent to the start-up or the media firm as well as the differences that emerge when entering a partnership. The identification of these asymmetries was necessary to understand the peculiarities of asymmetric partnerships and the specific challenges that asymmetric partnerships face. Also, it proves that asymmetric partners require a different approach than other partnerships.

For the above-mentioned reason, we posed a second sub-question that asked to identify the critical stages of partnership development, which are suitable for asymmetric partners. Based on a literature review, we identified three stage that are suited for developing asymmetric partnerships. Regarding the awareness stage, we identified four

barriers or obstacles media companies face to translate awareness into further partnership development. First of all, the partnerships with start-ups are currently assigned to the head of innovation or digital, to the managing director or chief editor. A second barrier concerns the lack of organizational support: colleagues giving minor priority to the start-up projects, a broader undervaluation of innovation within media firms and inconsistent support between different departments. A third potential barrier is the need for strategic motivations as opposed to coincidence-based motivations. When media partners initiated a potential partnership based on coincidence-based forces, the partnership lacked a strategic fit within the media firm and was therefore discontinued until a specific project emerges. All of these barriers show that partnerships with start-ups are still a new given and not structurally embedded yet.

Looking at the initiation stage where the potential partners are evaluated and selected, the results suggest that media company assess potential partner on task-related factors whereas start-up's do this on partner-related factors (Parkhe, 1991; Cummings & Holmberg, 2012). However, Cummings & Holmberg (2012) suggest that partnerships have more chances to succeed when partner align on task- and partner-related factors.

In the interaction stage, where the design of the partnership is negotiated and designed, we identified three important interaction processes that specifically apply for asymmetric partners, namely communication (Blomqvist et al., 2002; Zott & Huy, 2007; Ulvenblad, Berggren & Winbord, 2013), trust (Blomqvist et al., 2002; Hurmelinna et al., 2005; Hasche, Linton & Öberg, 2017) and adaptation (Blomqvist & Stahle, 2000; Blomqvist et al., 2002). With regard to communication processes, we found that clear communication is a key element in managing the counterparty's expectations. The start-up respondents pointed out that media firms often fail to inform them about the potential continuation of the partnership. However, research suggests that informing the counterparty with a firm's own incentives is crucial to work effectively (Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Argwal et al., 2010). Another issue regarding clear communication was related to meeting deadlines. Both start-up and media firm respondents acknowledged that a start-up best provides the media firm with accurate information on the technological developments. Similarly, Zott and Huy (2007) suggest that entrepreneurs should communicate clearly with stakeholders given the uncertainty level of the start-up product. Looking at the trust-building scenarios between asymmetric partners, we identified goodwill and competence as antecedents of trust, which



was also proposed by Hasche et al. (2017). Start-ups assessed the trustworthiness of media partners based on the intentions and sincerity whereas the trust criterion for media partners is based on the start-up competence. In terms of adaptation behaviour, we observed a discrepancy between the media companies and start-ups. Media partners have a poor allocation of personnel which is a sign of low strategic commitment to the partnerships with start-ups (Schmidt & Tyler, 2007). Although media companies fail to make organizational adaptations, they have changed their behaviour. A few of them mentioned to have taken over the entrepreneurial approach, which was referred to as the trial-and-error or iterative method. On the start-up side, we observed how the media firms were in some cases tempted to take over control. Media firms either asked for special product offers that deviated from the standard product packages or mentioned the possibility of taking a stake in start-up or propose an acquisition, which in both cases reflects the presence of power plays. Instead of behaving like partners, media firms are then tempted to control product adaptations or completely take over, which is also suggested by Brennan et al. (2013). The discrepancy between the asymmetric partners' adaptations illustrates a lack of mutual adaptation. Mutual adaptation would, however, strengthen the fit between partners as well as the operational performance (Hagberg-Anderson, 2006, Nyaga et al., 2013).

With regard to the role of the innovation intermediary, we found that MediaMatters played on the one hand a role in building awareness among media firms about the potential of asymmetric partnerships and was on the other hand considered as the start-up recruiter who screens and scouts the start-ups and provides access to the encompassing start-up community. The latter function of MediaMatters aligns with the definition of scholars (Howells, 2006; McEvily & Zaheer, 1999).

Moving on the topic of cross-industry innovation. Based on our findings, we suggest that the cognitive distance definitely played a role in the partnership development. All media firms agreed on the fact that start-ups often offer a solution before considering the actual problems, which is also suggested by Enkel & Heil (2014) and Enkel & Gasmann (2010). Prior experience the counterparty's industry is proposed as potential bridge to overcome the cognitive gap.

To conclude the above discussion, our research verified the difficulties and challenges that come with the asymmetries between established firms and start-ups. Asymmetric partnerships are indeed by no means easy to accomplish. In order to succeed in developing

asymmetric partnerships, we find that each stage should be carefully taken into consideration and the partners cannot rush from one stage into another. Before continuing from the awareness to the initiation stage, for example, it is important that potential barriers like lack of organizational support or lack of strategic motivations are dissolved. Although a media firm may initiate the selection process, the partnership development might still be discontinued due to the presence of one of these barriers. Furthermore, consistency within a partnership development stage is another element that would help asymmetric partners to succeed in developing a partnership. For example, the combination of both partner- and task-related selection criteria would be preferred as opposed to focussing on one (Cummings & Holmberg, 2012) or mutual adaptations instead of a discrepancy between the start-up's and the media firm's adaptations would be beneficial (Hagberg-Anderson, 2006, Nyaga et al., 2013). Finally, technology start-ups and media firms are more likely to succeed in developing asymmetric partnerships when the start-up offers a relevant solution and the cognitive distance is thus not that high. The bigger the gap between problem and solution the smaller the chances of successfully developing a partnership.

## **5.2 Limitations & Future Research**

Considering that we constructed the analytical framework ourselves, it can be argued that the framework was incomplete or insufficient. Although a considerable amount of academic literature was subjected to developing an appropriate framework for assessing asymmetric partnership, it can be possible that certain aspects remain unexplored in our theoretical framework. However, from the interviews it seemed that all the identified concepts were relevant for asymmetric partnership development. Future research can further assess whether our self-constructed framework is suited for asymmetric partnership development.

Furthermore, the chosen methodological approach can be argued to give an incomplete understanding of the partnership development processes between the technology start-ups and traditional media companies. A case study would have allowed us to obtain a more in-depth analysis of a specific asymmetric partnership. However, we made the decision to take a broader perspective considering our research focus lies on the development processes that go ahead of an actual partnership. This approach allowed the respondents to address different experiences from various partnerships. Future research can obtain a more in-depth

understanding of asymmetric partnership development by doing a case study on asymmetric partnership development.

Besides that, the sample size, which consists of both representatives of start-ups and representatives of media companies, may restrict the generalizability of our findings. It can be argued that the sample is too small to make generalizations about a start-up or a media firm perspective. However, we chose to include two groups in to our sample in order to obtain an understanding of both ends of asymmetric partnerships. Future research can maybe focus on one perspective or test our findings with a larger sample. Another issue is the geographically constrained sample in regard to media firm respondents. All selected media firm participants were located in the Netherlands. It is possible that media firms in other countries identify different problems, which would be an interesting comparison.

### **5.3 Managerial implications**

Our study consists of a number of interesting issues for both managers of technology start-ups and traditional media companies to take into consideration for current or future partnerships. We defined recommendations for both ends of asymmetric partnerships in regard to partnership development.

#### **- Recommendations for traditional media companies**

We recommend managers of traditional media companies to develop a clearly defined strategy for partnerships with start-ups. As our findings suggest that partnerships based on strategic motivations have more chance to succeed compared to partnerships based on coincidence, we first of all advise managers of media companies to have a strategic objective. Having a strategic objective in mind will guide and direct managers throughout the partnership development processes. In order to realize the strategic goal of developing a partnership with a particular start-up, we also suggest to assign personnel that is responsible for governing and managing the start-up projects. Currently, start-up projects are still assigned to, for example, the managing director or the head of technology department of a media firm. However, these employees have an extremely busy agenda and varied occupation, which makes it difficult to be fully dedicated and committed to the partnership.

Furthermore, we recommend the Dutch traditional media companies to share their success stories. Considering that both partner assessment and selection and trust-building are shaped by the start-up's competencies or ability to deliver results, it may be interesting to learn from each other successful partnerships.

- **Recommendations for technology start-ups**

One of the lessons learned from this study is that there is often still a gap between the start-up's solution and the media firm's problem. To bridge this gap, we advise start-up managers to get more affinity with the struggles and challenges that the traditional media industry is facing. Thus, start-up managers should avoid being in a "bubble" of their own solution.

Besides, even though start-up managers might be tempted to go after the big names in the media industry, we recommend them to attract smaller media companies first. Smaller media firms are less likely to have the resources for developing their own technologies and are thus more likely to search for external options. This way, the start-up can build more credibility and increase the chances of developing a partnership with a larger and more reputed media firm.

## References

- Adner, R. (2006). Match Your Innovation Strategy to Your Innovation Ecosystem. *Harvard Business Review*, 84(4), 98-107.
- Adner, R., & Kapoor, R. (2010). Value creation in innovation ecosystems: How the structure of technological interdependence affects firm performance in new technology generations. *Strategic Management Journal*, 31(3), 306-333.
- Agarwal, R., Croson, R., & Mahoney, J. (2010). The role of incentives and communication in strategic alliances: an experimental investigation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 31(4), 413-437.
- Bannerjee, S., Bielli, S., and Haley, C. (2015). *Scaling together: overcoming barriers in corporate-startup collaboration*. Retrieved from [https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/scaling\\_together\\_.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/scaling_together_.pdf)
- Baumol, W. (2002). *The free-market innovation machine: Analyzing the growth miracle of capitalism*. Princeton, U.S.A: Princeton University Press.
- Barbour, R. S. (2001). Checklists for improving rigor in qualitative research: A case of tail wagging the dog? *British Medical Journal*, 322(7294), 1115-1117.
- Blomqvist, K. (2002). Partnering in the Dynamic Environment: The Role of Trust in Asymmetric Technology Partnership Formation. doctoral thesis, Acta Universitatis Lappeenrantaensis
- Blomqvist, Kyläheiko, & Virolainen. (2002). Filling a gap in traditional transaction cost economics:: Towards transaction benefits-based analysis. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 79(1), 1-14.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brinkmann, S. (2014). Unstructured and semistructured interviewing. *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 277–299). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Bruhn, M., Schoenmueller, V., & Schäfer, D. (2012). Are social media replacing traditional media in terms of brand equity creation? *Management Research Review*, 35(9), 770-790.
- Brush, C., Greene, P., Hart, M., & Haller, H. (2001). From initial idea to unique advantage: The entrepreneurial challenge of constructing a resource base. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 15(1), 64-78.

- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford university press.
- Busenitz, L. W., & Barney, J. B. (1997). Differences between entrepreneurs and managers in large organizations: Biases and heuristics in strategic decision-making. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 12(1), 9-30.
- Caceres, R., & Papparoidamis, N. (2007). Service quality, relationship satisfaction, trust, commitment and business-to-business loyalty. *European Journal of Marketing*, 41(7-8), 836-867.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London, UK: Sage.
- Chesbrough, H. (2003). *Open innovation : The new imperative for creating and profiting from technology*. Boston, U.S.A: Harvard Business School Press.
- Chesbrough, H., Vanhaverbeke, W., & West, J. (2006). *Open innovation : Researching a new paradigm*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Clover, J. (2018, February 11). European Sandbox Hub underway.  
Retrieved from <https://www.broadbandtvnews.com/2018/02/09/european-sandbox-hub-underway/>
- Das, T. (1991). Time: The hidden dimension in strategic planning. *Long Range Planning*, 24(3), 49-57.
- Das, T., & He, I. (2006). Entrepreneurial firms in search of established partners: Review and recommendations. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, 12(3), 114-143.
- Dean, T., Brown, R., & Bamford, C. (1998). Differences in Large and Small Firm Responses to Environmental Context: Strategic Implications from a Comparative Analysis of Business Formations. *Strategic Management Journal*, 19(8), 709-728.
- Deephouse, D., & Carter, S. (2005). An Examination of Differences Between Organizational Legitimacy and Organizational Reputation. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(2), 329-360.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B. & Crabtree, B. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40(4), 314-321.
- Doz, Y., & Hamel, G. (1998). *Alliance advantage : The art of creating value through partnering*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

- Enkel, E., Gassmann, O., & Chesbrough, H. (2009). Open R&D and open innovation: Exploring the phenomenon. *R&D Management*, 39(4), 311-316.
- Enkel, E., & Gassmann, O. (2010). Creative imitation: exploring the case of cross-industry innovation. *R&D Management*, 40(3), 256-270.
- Enkel, E., & Heil, S. (2014). Preparing for distant collaboration: Antecedents to potential absorptive capacity in cross-industry innovation. *Technovation*, 34(4), 242-260.
- Freeman, J. & Engel, J. S. (2007). Models of innovation: startups and mature corporations. *California Management Review*, 50(1), 94-119.
- Gholampour Rad, M., & Nisar, T. (2017). Disruptive innovation in media industry ecosystem and need for improving managerial cognitive capabilities in polymediation era. *Cogent Business & Management*, 4(1), 1-24.
- Hagberg-Andersson, &. (2006). Does adaptation pay off? *Industrial Marketing Management*, 35(2), 202-209.
- Hasche, N., Linton, G. & Öberg, C. (2017). Trust in open innovation – the case of a medtech start-ups. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 20(1), pp.31-49.
- Howells, J. (2006). Intermediation and the role of intermediaries in innovation. *Research Policy*, 35(5), 715-728. doi:10.1016/j.respol.2006.03.005
- Hurmelinna, P., Blomqvist, K., Puumalainen, K., & Saarenketo, S. (2005). Striving towards r&D collaboration performance: The effect of asymmetry, trust and contracting. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 14(4), 374-374. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8691.2005.00357.x
- Iyer, K. (2002). Learning in strategic alliances: An evolutionary perspective. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 2002, 1-9.
- Johanson, J., Hallén, L., & Seyed-Mohamed, N. (1991). Interfirm Adaptation in Business Relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, 55(2), 29.
- Johnson, J., L., Cullen, J., B., Sakano, T., & Takenouchi, H. (1996). Setting the stage for trust and strategic integration in Japanese-U.S. cooperative alliances (Special Issue). *Journal of International Business Studies*, 27(5), 981-1004.
- Kanbach, D. K. & Stubner, S. (2016). Corporate accelerators as recent form of Startup Engagement: The What, The Why, And The How. *The Journal of Applied Business Research*, 32(6), 1761-1776.

- King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research* (pp. 257–270). London, UK: Sage.
- Kohler, T. (2016). Corporate accelerators: Building bridges between corporations and startups. *Business Horizons*, 59, 347-357.
- KMPG N.V. (2014). *On the road to corporate-start-up collaboration — new horizons 2014*. Retrieved from <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2016/05/new-horizons-2014-1.pdf>
- KMPG N.V. (2015a). *On the road to corporate-start-up collaboration — new horizons 2015*. Retrieved from <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2015/12/new-horizons-2015.pdf>
- Lambert, D., Emmelhainz, M., & Gardner, J. (1999). Building successful logistics partnership. *Journal of Business Logistics*, 20(1), 165-181.
- Langfield-Smith, K. (2008). The relations between transactional characteristics, trust and risk in the start-up phase of a collaborative alliance. *Management Accounting Research* 19(4), p. 344–364
- Larson, A. (1992). Network Dyads in Entrepreneurial Settings: A Study of the Governance of Exchange Relationships. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 37(1), 76-104.
- Lumpkin, G., & Dess, G. (1996). Clarifying the entrepreneurial orientation construct and linking it to performance. *Academy Of Management Review*, 21(1), 135-172.
- Mandják, T., Szalkai, Z., Neumann-Bódi, E., Magyar, M., & Simon, J. (2015). Emerging relationships: How are they born? *Industrial Marketing Management*, 49, 32-32.
- Mandják, T., Szalkai, Z., Neumann-Bódi, E., Magyar, M., & Simon, J. (2016). Trigger issues in emerging relationships. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 58, 137-147.  
doi:10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.05.021
- McEvily, B., & Zaheer, A. (1999). Bridging ties: A source of firm heterogeneity in competitive capabilities. *Strategic Management Journal*, 20(12), 1133-1156.
- MediaMatters (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.mediamatters.vc/>
- Media Perspectives (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://mediaperspectives.nl/missie-visie-mediaperspectives/>
- Minshall, T. (2006). Partnerships between technology-based start-ups and established firms: making them work. *IfM Briefing*, 1(1), 1-2.



- Minshall, T., Mortara, L., Valli, R. & Probert, D. (2010). Making “asymmetric” partnerships work. *Research-Technology Management*, 53(3), 53-63.
- Mocker, V., Bielli, S., and Haley, C. (2015). *Winning together: a guide to successful corporate-startup collaborations*. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/43-nesta-winning-together-guidestartupcollab.pdf>
- Mohr, J., & Spekman, R. (1994). Characteristics of partnership success: Partnership attributes, communication behavior, and conflict resolution techniques. *Strategic Management Journal*, 15(2), 135-152.
- Morgan, R., & Hunt, S. (1994). The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), 20-38. doi:10.2307/1252308
- Nowell, L., Norris, J., White, D., & Moules, N. (2017). Thematic Analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1-13.
- Narula, R. (2004). R&D collaboration by SMEs: New opportunities and limitations in the face of globalisation. *Technovation*, 24(2), 153-161.
- Nowell, L., Norris, J., White, D., & Moules, N. (2017). Thematic Analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 2017, Vol.16(1).
- Oliver, D., G., Serovich, J., M., & Mason, T., L. (2005). Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflection in Qualitative Research. *Social Forces*, 84(2), 1273-1289.
- Paulus-Rohmer, D., Schatton, H., & Bauernhansl, T. (2016). Ecosystems, strategy and business models in the age of digitization - how the manufacturing industry is going to change its logic. *Procedia Cirp*, 57, 8-13.
- Parkhe, A. (1991). Interfirm Diversity, Organizational Learning, and Longevity in Global Strategic Alliances. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 22(4), 579-601.
- Pellikka, J., & Ali-Vehmas, T. (2016). Managing innovation ecosystems to create and capture value in ICT industries. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 6(10), 17-24.
- Petkova, A. (2016). Standing Out or Blending In? The Formation of New Firms' Legitimacy and Reputation under Different Levels of Market Uncertainty. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 19(1), 22-34.
- Petkova, A., P., Rindova, V., P. & Gupta, A., K. (2009). How can New Ventures Build

- Reputation? An Exploratory Study. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 11(4), 320-334.
- Pérez, L., & Cambra-Fierro, J. (2015). Uneven partners: Managing the power balance. *The Journal of Business Strategy*, 36(6), 13-21.
- Popa, I. L., Preda, G., & Boldea, M. (2010). A Theoretical Approach of the Concept of Innovation. *Managerial Challenges of the Contemporary Society*, 1(1), 151-156.
- PwC. (2016). *Entertainment & Media Outlook for the Netherlands 2016-2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.pwc.nl/nl/assets/documents/pwc-entertainment-and-media-outlook-for-the-netherlands-2016-2020.pdf>
- PwC. (2017a). *Entertainment & Media Outlook for the Netherlands 2017-2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.pwc.nl/en/publicaties/dutch-entertainment-and-media-outlook-2017-2021.html>
- Rao, R., Chandy, R., & Prabhu, J. (2008). The Fruits of Legitimacy: Why Some New Ventures Gain More from Innovation than Others. *Journal of Marketing*, 72(4), 58-75. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30162299>
- Ries, E. (2010, June 21). Startup Lessons Learned: What is a startup? Retrieved from <http://www.startuplessonslearned.com/2010/06/what-is-startup.html>
- Rohrbeck, R., Hölzle, K., & Gemünden, H. (2009). Opening up for competitive advantage - how deutsche telekom creates an open innovation ecosystem. *R&D Management*, 39(4), 420-420.
- Rogmans, D. (2017, February 16). MediaMatters stimuleert innovatie mediabedrijven. Retrieved from <https://www.villamedia.nl/artikel/mediamatters-stimuleert-innovatie-mediabedrijven>
- Rousseau, D., Sitkin, S., Burt, R., & Camerer, C. (1998). Introduction to Special Topic Forum: Not so Different after All: A Cross-Discipline View of Trust. *The Academy of Management Review*, 23(3), 393-404.
- Ryan, G., & Bernard, H. (2003). Techniques to Identify Themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85-109.
- Sarkar, M., Echambadi, R., Cavusgil, S., & Aulakh, T. (2001). The influence of complementarity, compatibility, and relationship capital on alliance performance. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 29(4), 358-373.

- Schumpeter, J. A., & Opie, R. (1934). *The theory of economic development: An inquiry into profits, capital, credit, interest, and the business cycle*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Schmidt, S., Tyler, K., & Brennan, R. (2007). Adaptation in inter-firm relationships: Classification, motivation, calculation. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 21(7), 530-537.
- Shaw, E., Wilson, J., & Pret, T. (2017). The process of embedding a small firm in its industrial context. *International Small Business Journal*, 35(3), 219-243.
- Shwetz, R. (2017, June 6). Reinvention of innovation: Four key benefits to an innovation ecosystem. Retrieved from <http://sandbox.rh7thm.com/2017/06/15/reinvention-of-innovation-four-key-benefits-to-an-innovation-ecosystem/>
- Simmonds, K. (1986). Marketing as innovation: the eighth paradigm, *Journal of Management Studies*, 23, 479–500.
- Simons, H. (2009). *Case study research in practice*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Stiles, W. (1993). Quality control in qualitative research. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 13(6), 593-618.
- Talaulicar, T., Grundeij, J., & Von Werder, A. (2005). Strategic decision making in start-ups: The effect of top management team organization and processes on speed and comprehensiveness. *Journal Of Business Venturing*, 20(4), 519-541.
- Tony Bailetti. (2012). What Technology Startups Must Get Right to Globalize Early and Rapidly. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 5-16.
- Ulvenblad, P., Berggren, E., & Winborg, J. (2013). The role of entrepreneurship education and start-up experience for handling communication and liability of newness. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, 19(2), 187-209.
- Usman, M. & Vanhaverbeke, W. (2016). How start-ups successfully organize and manage open innovation with large companies. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 20 (1), 171-186.
- Valkokari, K. (2015). Business, innovation, and knowledge ecosystems: How they differ and how to survive and thrive within them. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 5(8), 17-24.
- Vossen, R. (1998). Relative strengths and weaknesses of small firms in

- innovation. *International Small Business Journal*, 16(3), 88-94.
- Wadhwa, A., & Basu, S. (2013). Exploration and resource commitments in unequal partnerships: An examination of corporate venture capital investments. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 30(5), 916-936.
- Webb, B. & Webb, S. (1932). *Methods of Social Study*. London, UK: Longmans Green.
- Weber, B., & Weber, C. (2007). Corporate venture capital as a means of radical innovation: Relational fit, social capital, and knowledge transfer. *Journal of Engineering and Technology Management*, 24(1,2), 11-35.
- Weiblen, T., & Chesbrough, H. (2015). Engaging with Startups to Enhance Corporate Innovation. *California Management Review*, 57(2), 66-90.
- Young, A. (2015, May 14). Media Innovation Matters. Retrieved from <http://www.editorandpublisher.com/a-section/media-innovation-matters/>
- Zimmerman, M., & Zeitz, G. (2002). Beyond survival: Achieving new venture growth by building legitimacy. *Academy of Management. The Academy of Management Review*, 27(3), 414-431.
- Zott, C., & Huy, Q. (2007). How entrepreneurs use symbolic management to acquire resources. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 52(1), 70-105.

## Appendices

### A. Interview guide

Media firm = MF; start-up = S

Introduction of the interviewer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Introduce the interviewer</li><li>- Introduce the study:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Development of partnerships between media companies and start-ups</li><li>o aim is to identify the success factors of developing these partnerships; beneficial for successful implementation</li><li>o in collaboration with Media Perspectives (MediaMatters program)</li></ul></li><li>- Request permission data recording</li><li>- Anonymous/Reveal identity?</li><li>- Sign interview consent form</li></ul>

#### Introduction

1. What is your role in developing partnerships with S/MF?
2. When did your firm start to develop partnerships with S/MF?

#### Awareness

3. For what reasons did your firm start to develop partnerships with S/MF?

#### Initiation

4. What are the benefits of partnering with an established firm/venture?
5. How do you evaluate potential partners?
  - a. What criteria do you take into consideration when selecting a partner? (Task- /Partner-related tasks)
  - b. How would you define a good media/start-up partner?

#### Interaction

6. How do you define the objective of the partnership?
  - a. Are you generally on the same page when defining the objective of the partnership? Could you give an example of a situation where this was not the case? How did you react?
7. How do you experience the communicative skills of S/MF partners? (managing expectations, clear and open communication)

8. What are the risks of partnering with S/MF?
9. Do you generally have trust in your S/MF partner? Why (not)?
  - a. How do you assess the trustworthiness of a potential partner?  
(competence/goodwill)
10. Have you undergone changes during the partnership development with S/MF? (product, behavioural or organizational adaptations)
11. Has there ever been a sign of power imbalance during the partnership development?

#### Innovation intermediary

12. How would you describe the role of MediaMatters in developing partnerships?
13. Would you recommend other S/MF to make use of an intermediary? And why?

#### Cross-industry innovation

14. M: Do start-ups offer relevant innovative solutions for the problems you are facing? Why (not)?
15. How do you keep up with the issues that media partners are struggling with? / How do you keep up with the technological developments?

#### Wrap-up

16. What advice would you give media firms on developing partnerships? And start-ups?

Thank interviewee and ask whether he/she has any questions

## **B. Informed consent form**

### **CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH**

#### **FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:**

Nurya E. Doorenbos; Kraaijenbroeklaan 35, 1860 Meise; [nuryadoorenbos@outlook.com](mailto:nuryadoorenbos@outlook.com);  
+32487443491

#### **DESCRIPTION**

You are invited to participate in a research about partnerships between start-ups and media companies. The purpose of the study is to understand how these are developed and managed.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to partnerships that emerged from the MediaMatters program.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a audio recorder for the interview. You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point. **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information not in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using [measures that will be taken: pseudonym, general identification only mentioning age and gender, etc.].

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

#### **TIME INVOLVEMENT**

Your participation in this study will take 40-60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

#### **PAYMENTS**

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

### **PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS**

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

### **CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS**

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish Daniela Bartosova ([bartos@eshcc.eur.nl](mailto:bartos@eshcc.eur.nl)).

---

### **SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM**

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name Signature Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name Signature Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.