Co-innovating the generative future

How media organizations can sustain a competitive advantage in the dynamic digital media landscape

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ABSTRACT

Technological advances and digitization have significantly changed the media landscape, creating the need for continuous innovation to sustain a competitive advantage in the dynamic, fast-paced digital media landscape. It was suggested that to maximize the possibilities in the digital media landscape, new digital innovations need to be generative, so that they can be used to create value. In developing generative innovations, it is important that the five dimensions that delineate generativity are implemented in the innovation. More specifically, these five dimensions pertain to: adaptability, capacity of leverage, accessibility, transferability, and ease of mastery. However, it was found that a single organization's resources are often too limited to satisfy the need for continuous innovation since they either lack finances, or knowledge capabilities, or resources. This can be solved by opening up the organization's innovation department, and employ a model of open innovation. More specifically, a model of co-innovation. For this, there were two main components that need to be satisfied for successful co-innovation: co-innovation collaborations through strategic partnerships, and the media innovation process. The problem however, is that little was known about how these co-innovative collaborations function in the digital media landscape, as well as how innovations can be made generative in the media innovation process. Hence, by carrying out 10 expert interviews, this study tried to answer the question on how media organizations can leverage strategic partnerships to co-innovate generative innovations. A thematic analysis was conducted according to themes that were derived from the literature, with strategic partnerships and the media innovation process as the main themes. The findings of the thematic analysis suggest that there are six main success factors that constitute what is needed for media organizations to leverage strategic partnerships to co-innovate generative innovations. These six factors were: organizational alignment, creating the right team, co-designing the co-innovation project, continuous interactivity, continuous validation, and continuous optimization, including the optimization for the five dimensions that delineate generativity to ensure the innovation can be made generative. The key findings of this research add to co-innovation literature not only by substantiating what was already known, but also by illustrating how key success factors in the strategic partnership process as well as the media innovation process work and how they need to be approached, rather than just focusing on the why and what of the topic.

KEYWORDS: *Co-innovation, Strategic collaborations, Continuous innovation, Media innovation process, Generativity*

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- In memory of my father, who will not be forgotten -

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1. Introduction

Advances in digital technology have been a cause for significant changes in the media landscape. This digitization has been a prompted media organization to alter various aspects of their business models. First, digitization and the emergence of the internet has redefined media content and the way it is produced and distributed (Kallinikos & Mariategui, 2011). There is no longer a need for example, for media to be distributed through analogue channels. Service and device, as well as content and medium, were inseparable in the traditional media landscape, but have become separable in today's digital media landscape Yoo, Henfridsson and Lyytinen (2010). Furthermore, the world has become interconnected at all times, allowing for information to travel much fast than it used to (Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012).

In addition, the changes in production and distribution has affected the ownership of the available media content as well. Whereas in the traditional media landscape content was predominantly owned by media organizations and distributed linearly, digitization has allowed for the emergence of earned media, as well as an increase in non-owned media (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Therefore, the production and distribution of media content is no longer under the full control of traditional media organizations, and is not distributed according to linear schedules but rather is constantly available and updated.

The developments in the production and distribution process of media content have led to the blurring of boundaries between various media industries, requiring media organizations to take part in economies of sharing across multiple media sectors (Sullivan & Jiang, 2010). Traditional newspaper organizations for example, had to vastly innovate their business models to include digital outlets to produce and distribute their content. They no longer are an organization that just produces physical newspapers, as they have been induced to partake in media sectors they did not partake in before. Accordingly, many of the same traditional newspaper organizations are now also active in the social media sector, the mobile application sector, and often many other sectors. Similarly, non-traditional media organizations encountered similar issues, compelling them to partake in the aforementioned media related activities as well. Therefore, many of those non-traditional media organizations have essentially become media organizations in the digital landscape, since these organizations now engage in activities that were previously exclusive to media organizations. As such, this thesis will consider non-traditional media organizations that actively partake in media activities (social media, publishing, broadcasting, etc.) as media organizations as well in the digital media landscape.

Lastly, Yoo, Boland, Lyytinen, and Majchrzak (2012) found that new digital innovations in the digital media landscape do no longer need to be fixed, single value

creation innovations, but need to be innovations that have generative capabilities. In this, generative capabilities in an innovation refer to the ability for external users to generate value for the innovators using this generative innovation. An example that is often used to illustrate the generative capabilities in innovations, is the generative capability of mobile platforms. The generative infrastructure of the mobile platform app stores allows for third party developers to generate value for the mobile platform owner by developing applications that are distributed through said app stores (Ghazawneh & Henfridsson 2010). For innovations to have generative capabilities, they need to have a high degree of generativity, which is delineated by five dimensions: adaptability, capacity of leverage, accessibility, transferability, and ease of mastery (Zittrain, 2008). A high score on each of these dimensions ensures that it is as easy as possible for users to generate value for the innovation developers using that innovation, making said innovation generative. Another example of an innovation with generative capabilities, is the Spotify application. The infrastructure of the Spotify application makes it very easy for music producers to distribute their content on the platform, while at the same time it is very easy for consumers to listen to the music through the platform. Both actions generate value for Spotify, thus showcasing the generative capabilities of the platform.

The Spotify case also serves as an example as to how the various changes in the media landscape, as well as the blurring of traditional industry boundaries, have caused media organizations to continuously innovate aspects of their business models. Even though Spotify was founded in the digital era, their business model shows how digitization has affected traditional media organizations. As mentioned, service and device, as well as content and medium, have become separable because of technological advancements and digitization. This shows in the music industry as musical content is no longer restricted to vinyl records and CDs, as musical content is now easily distributed through online channels (Tilson, Sørensen, & Lyytinen, 2013). As musical content is no longer confined to a physical medium, music producers need to rely on services as Spotify for the digital distribution of their content. Spotify, in turn, had to adapt innovative ways to distribute their service, as their service is not designated to a singular device. Therefore, Spotify is dependent on various mobile platform developers (e.g. Apple, Google, etc.) to distribute their service.

However, even though music producers are dependent on services as Spotify for digital distribution, partnering with Spotify gives them additional benefits that they did not have in the traditional media landscape as well. Spotify connects people all over the world by means of the ability to share playlists. This not only helps musical content to be distributed globally, it also offers users peer recommendations of said musical content, thus offering a new, alternate marketing technique. The dynamic nature of the digital media landscape precipitates continuous new opportunities and needs for media organizations,

who need to anticipate and adapt their business models accordingly. This is no different for Spotify, which caused them to innovate their software by partnering with organizations as Mediachain to accommodate, amongst others, the development of the block chain technology (Rath, 2017).

What all of this indicates is that the digital media landscape is very dynamic, and that media organizations have to adapt to this dynamic environment. Therefore, the fast-paced nature of the digital media landscape has caused for an increasing need for continuous innovation as media organizations need to anticipate on developing changes by continuously innovating aspects of their business models (Yoo, et al., 2012). Whereas some media organizations adapt to these changes by utilizing internal resources, other media organizations need to acquire knowledge, capabilities, and other (technological) resources externally (Sullivan & Jiang, 2010). Record labels for example, did not have to means available at the time that Spotify had to efficiently distribute their music and thus had to make use of Spotify's resources. Similarly, Spotify did not have the technological knowledge, capabilities, and resources to innovate their software to the recent block chain developments, and thus had to incorporate Mediachain in their business model. Often, the need to for the acquisition of knowledge, capabilities and resources externally means partnering up with organizations that can provide those elements. In addition, the need for continuous innovation requires a lot of resources to be invested in resource and development (hereinafter referred to as R&D) departments, which is something not all organization can afford (Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012). This too can be solved by partnering with organizations and so minimizing the required expenditures on R&D.

Therefore, to be able to satisfy the need for continuous innovation in the digital media landscape, media organizations need to open up their organizational boundaries to external actors to facilitate an open innovation model so that another organization's knowledge, capabilities, and resources can be exhausted (Baum, Cowan, & Jonard, 2010; Gouillart, 2014; Kazadi, Lievens, & Mahr, 2015; Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012; Perks & Moxey, 2011). As opposed to closed innovation models, open innovation models are not based on the self-reliance of internal R&D departments, but rather invite external actors, sometimes including competitors, to collaborate on innovative projects. According to Lee, Olson, and Trimi (2012) this open model needs to be based on the integration of internal and external resources to generate shared value through co-innovation projects.

Co-innovation is considered to be a relatively new innovation paradigm, one that allows for the creation of value that would have been impossible to create otherwise. The foundation of co-innovation projects is based on engagement, co-creation and the creation of shared value (Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012). Thus, co-innovation is based on a collaborative network that integrates its resources for mutual benefit. Gouillart (2014) further advanced

this relatively new innovation paradigm, by suggesting that organizations should go beyond collaborative networks for co-innovations, and invest in ecosystem collaborations for co-innovation.

To comprehend the workings of ecosystems collaborations, it is paramount to understand the definition of an ecosystem. Smith and Smith (2012, as cited in Stahlberg & Maila, 2013) define an ecosystem as "a community of living organisms (plants, animals and microbes) in conjunction with the non-living components of their environment (things like air, water and mineral soil), interacting as a system". Thus, ecosystems refer to systematic interactions between within environments consisting of components from all natures. Applying the ecosystem logic to ecosystem collaborations in a business setting, Jones and Kornum (2013) suggest that ecosystem collaborations encapsulate both the network nature of collaborations, as well as the systematic interactions between smaller elements that make up the network. In ecosystem collaboration literature, three components are suggested to make up the foundation of ecosystem collaborations: the integration of resources, continuous interactivity, and the systematic interplay between the elements that make up the ecosystem – all for a mutual beneficial outcome (Gouillart, 2014; Jones & Kornum, 2013; McEvoy, 2013; Stahlberg & Maila, 2013).

This is also where ecosystem collaborations transcend standard co-innovation collaborations, as even though engagement is a big part of all co-innovation collaborations, the continuous interactivity and systematic interplay between smaller elements in the network are not necessarily considerations in standard co-innovation collaborations. Gouillart (2014) suggest that organizations that are able to most successfully integrate its key assets into a collaborative ecosystem, will be the ones that are able to continuously sustain a competitive advantage in the digital media landscape.

There are two main components that make up the foundation of co-innovation projects in ecosystem collaborations for media organizations: strategic partnerships and the media innovation process. Strategic partnerships make up the core of the ecosystem collaboration. More specifically, media organizations need to establish strategic partnerships with a high level of engagement in which knowledge, capabilities, and resources are shared profoundly – also known as integrative partnerships (Austin, 2000). These partnerships allow for the integration of resources into the ecosystem, as well as a high level of interactivity. There are certain factors that are important in the creation and maintenance of these partnerships: trust building, organizational alignment, and clear agreements considering arrangements throughout the co-innovation project.

Second, to carry out the media innovation process, Anthony, Eyring, and Gibson (2006) and Gouillart (2014) stress the importance of the adaptation of a process that allows for collaborative development of innovative solutions. One such process that was suggested

by Gouillart (2014), was the design thinking model. This model has three phases: the inspiration phase, the ideation phase, and the implementation phase (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). Each phase represents a different stage in the co-innovation process, from the identification of an innovative problem, to the development of the solution of said problem and the implementation of that solution into the proper environment. The design thinking model is not a linear process, meaning that innovators can jump back and forth between phases, and that the process does not end after the implementation phase. This is important since continuous innovation also means that innovations that are developed in the co-innovation process, need to be continuously updated and improved, thus needing a process that is continuous as well. If a new technology is introduced to the digital media landscape after the implementation phase for example, innovators may have to jump back to the inspiration and ideation phases to adapt the innovation to this new technology.

It is also in this process, most importantly in the implementation phase, that the aforementioned dimensions that delineate generativity need to be considered. Whereas generativity needs to be a point of attention in the earlier stages of the co-innovation process, the innovation needs to be tailored to the five dimensions in the implementation phase to ensure that the innovation has the generative capabilities that are increasingly needed in the digital media landscape.

While some literature exists that exhibits co-innovative and ecosystem collaborations that are leveraged for co-creation projects (Austin, 2000**;** Colapinto, 2010; Frow, Nenonen, Payne, & Storbacka, 2015**;** Gouilliart, 2014**;** Jones & Kornum, 2013; McEvoy, 2013**;** Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008**;** Romero & Molina, 2011), there is a gap in the literature concerning how these co-innovative collaborations function in the digital media landscape. Therefore, more research is needed in relation to how strategic partnership can be leveraged for co-innovation projects. The need to investigate this is corroborated by Lee, Olson and Trimi (2012), who suggested that: “we still have much work to do to lay the theoretical foundation work to firmly establish the concept of co-innovation and then do empirical research to determine the key success factors and outcomes of co-innovation” (p. 829). In addition, even though there is exhaustive literature regarding generativity in mobile platforms (Eaton, Elaluf-Calderwood, Sørensen, & Yoo, 2011; Moon & Choi, 2016; Nielsen & Hanseth, 2010; Selander, Henfridsson, & Svahn, 2013), there is a significant gap in the existing literature about how innovations can be made generative in the co-innovation process.

As such, given the aforementioned literature gaps and the outlined needs for media organizations to sustain a competitive advantage in the digital media landscape, this thesis seeks the answer to the following research question:

RQ: How can media organizations leverage strategic partnerships to co-innovate generative innovations?

As mentioned, strategic partnerships are one of the two main components that are needed for co-innovation ecosystem collaborations. In this, there are two stages that need to be considered for successful co-innovative collaborations: the creation of these partnerships, and the maintenance of these partnerships. There needs to be a deeper understanding as to what goes into these stages, more specifically concerning trust building and maintenance, organizational alignment, and clear agreements and arrangements concerning the co-innovation project. As outlined earlier, some important elements in co-innovative ecosystem collaborations include engagement, the integration of resources, continuous interactivity, and systematic interplay between smaller entities within the collaboration. The need however, is to find out how all of this can be developed for successful co-innovative projects. Therefore, the first sub-question of this thesis is:

SQ1: How can media organizations develop strategic partnerships for co-innovation projects?

The second component that was identified as a foundational element for co-innovation ecosystem collaborations, is the media innovation process applied by means of the design thinking model. There needs to be a greater comprehension as to how the design thinking model can be utilized for co-innovation projects, with the particular goal for developing generative innovations. As established, innovations can be made generative by having considerations of the five dimensions that delineate generativity in the phases of the design thinking model, most importantly the implementation phase. How this works though, is yet to be determined. As such, the second research question of this thesis is:

SQ2: How can media organizations design a co-innovation process for generative innovations?

The answers to these sub-questions should provide sufficient information to answer the main research question, and thus further the discussion on co-innovation ecosystem collaborations. In addition, it should establish key success factors for co-innovation projects, furthering the discussion on how the co-innovation process works. Furthermore, the findings of this research should add to generativity literature, and how generativity and innovation coincide. In terms of societal relevance, the findings of this study should provide a framework for managers in the digital media landscape for how co-innovation collaborations

can be developed, and how they can use this for co-innovating generative innovations. This will include key success factors that managers can follow to ensure success.

The rest of this thesis is structured as follows: first, the topics that are introduced in this chapter are explored more into depth in the theoretical framework. This includes a thorough examination of how digitization has changed the media landscape in such a way that media organization need to employ continuous innovation, as well as the importance of co-innovation, how partnerships can be created and maintained for co-innovation projects, and how this co-innovation project can be carried out to develop generative innovations. The theoretical framework ends with a visual representation of the most important concepts in this study's conceptual framework. Next, the methodology is presented, which contains an explanation as to why the research method of expert interviews was chosen, how the sample was selected, and how the research was carried out. This is followed by a results section in which the most important findings from the thematic analysis will be discussed. Lastly, this thesis will conclude with a conclusion chapter in which the most important findings are used to find the answer to the research question, as well as with a critical reflection of this research.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the topics briefly addressed in the introduction are examined more in depth. Firstly, the various changes that digitization has caused to occur in the media landscape, besides the ones mentioned in the introduction, are investigated. These changes are analyzed to establish why and how media organizations' business models need to be continuously innovated. This analysis will also elaborate further on why there is a need for co-innovation, as well as the need for generative innovations. Next, strategic partnerships with the goal of co-innovation are explored, with a specific focus on the creation and maintenance of said partnerships. Lastly, the media innovation process is investigated in depth, focusing on how the design thinking model can be utilized to develop generative innovations through co-innovation.

2.1. How digitization has altered the media landscape

Digitization has led to many changes in the media landscape. It has changed the way people consume information, services, and products. As outlined in the previous chapter, the manner in which media content is produced and distributed has changed significantly with the emergence of digitization. There are however, various other manners in which digitization has significantly impacted the media landscape.

First, technological advancements in communication and information dispersion has caused the world to be significantly more interconnected than it used to be in the traditional media landscape (Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012). Developments surrounding the internet have enabled people to share information instantaneously all over the world, without needing the involvement of traditional media organizations. Therefore, it is easier for media organizations to overcome the limitations of time, space, and distance in their new business models (Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012). This has caused many of the traditional competitive advantages (location, human resources, scientific knowledge, etc.) to depreciate in value as these competitive advantages are now more easily accessible to other people and organizations as well. In addition, this means that many media organizations increasingly have to cater to a more complex and global environment (Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012). As such, there has been a strong need for media organizations to innovate various aspects in their business model to accommodate the global environment, as well as to the instantaneous information sharing.

Furthermore, the heightened interconnectedness has caused the groundswell effect to occur – the phenomenon that people increasingly get what they need from unconventional sources (i.e. each other), rather than from traditional sources as (media) organizations or governments (Li & Bernoff, 2008). Examples of the groundswell effect includes the rise of

user generated content as blogs, networking sites, and online forums. Through the interconnecting technology, people do not have to go to the traditional media sources anymore to get their entertainment or information as they can now get it from each other as well. In addition, the abundance of entertainment that has been made available because of the groundswell effect has caused audiences to increasingly expect media provide information and entertainment to tailor their lifestyles (Dahlgren, 2010). This has been cause for another reason for media organizations to innovate their business models as the groundswell effect significantly impacts the competitive advantage of many media organization's value propositions.

Lastly**,** the rapidly evolving technological advancements have caused for product life cycles to be significantly shortened (Gnyawali & Park, 2011**;** Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012). This is noticeable in many products. The iPhone for example, has proven to be a wildly successful innovation by Apple. The life cycle of one model of the iPhone however, is relatively short as the smartphone market keeps developing as new technological possibilities enable smartphone developers to develop more advanced, higher quality smartphones. Therefore, Apple needs to innovate the iPhone continuously to sustain the competitive advantage the iPhone can give them. Therefore, there is an increasing need for continuous product innovation to be able to have a competitive advantage in the long term.

In addition, as outlined before, Yoo, et al. (2012) found that, specifically for digital innovations, there is an increasing need for innovations to have generative capabilities. They argue that whereas technology used to be fixed and immutable, generative digital technology is cause for the increasing possibility that digital innovations form the basis for changes in organizational functioning in the digital media landscape. The changes in organizational functioning that is being referred to pertains to the capability for generative innovations to enable external parties to create value for the organization rather than having to create the value itself. Fixed and immutable technologies needed the organizations' involvement to create value, generative digital technologies neutralize the necessity of the organizations' involvement and thus changes the organizational functioning. Therefore, generative digital technologies can generate value for an organization on a scale that was impossible with fixed and immutable technologies. For a digital innovation to be generative, it needs a high degree of generativity, or what Zittrain (2006) refers to as "a technology's capacity to produce unanticipated change driven by broad heterogeneous and uncoordinated audiences" (p.1980). As such, generativity needs to be a consideration in the media innovation process, if media organizations are to capitalize on the value creation capabilities of generative digital technologies.

What all the aforementioned trends in the media landscape indicate, is that

continuous innovation is needed to sustain a competitive advantage in the dynamic digital media landscape. This is corroborated by Yoo et al. (2012), who state that the continuously increasing pace of change in the digital landscape has resulted in a situation in which innovation needs to be continuous. This continuous innovation does not just include product innovation, it also includes the need for continuous innovation in amongst others distribution channels, customer segments, market positions, and many other aspects of the media organizations' business models. The need for continuous innovation however, also increases the need for particular knowledge, capabilities, and resources. Continuous innovation for example, requires an increasing need for R&D expenses, which is something not all organizations can, or want to, afford. Therefore, a single organization's closed R&D department is too slow and costly to sustain a competitive advantage (Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012). Moreover, even if they do have the resources, single organizations only have limited knowledge and capabilities (Kazadi, Lievens, & Mahr, 2015).

Therefore, as mentioned earlier, it has been suggested by many scholars that organization should open up their organizational boundaries to external actors so their innovation model includes other organizations' knowledge, capabilities, and resources (Baum, Cowan, & Jonard, 2010**;** Gouillart, 2014; Kazadi, Lievens, & Mahr, 2015; Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012; Perks & Moxey, 2011). More specifically, a co-innovation model is considered to be the innovation model that media organizations should adapt, as co-innovation allows organizations not only to sustain competitive advantages, but also to collaboratively create value that no single organization could create alone. Since knowledge, capabilities, and resources are integrated in a co-innovation model, co-innovating organizations can fully exhaust each other's assets for the mutual benefit of the collaborative network (Adner, 2006; Romero & Molina, 2011).

Taking innovation theory a step further, Gouillart (2014) suggests that co-innovation ecosystem collaborations make up the new innovation paradigm that allows organizations to sustain a competitive advantage in the digital media landscape. Co-innovation ecosystem collaborations are similar to co-innovation collaborative networks, with the addition that co-innovation ecosystem collaborations facilitate continuous interactivity and systematic interplay between smaller elements in the collaboration, allowing the collaborative entities to function as a system rather than a network (Gouillart, 2014; Jones & Kornum, 2013; McEvoy, 2013; Stahlberg & Maila, 2013). Continuous interactivity has many advantages, including the facilitation of high levels of engagement, as well as an added quickness in relation to collaboratively anticipating on changes in the digital media environment.

Systematic interplay between smaller elements in the collaboration refers to constant interaction and interchangeability between various teams in the ecosystem collaboration. This means that teams are very dynamic in ecosystem collaborations since individual

entities are interchangeable between teams based on the needs of the ecosystem collaboration. Specialists for example, are not stuck in a single team or department in ecosystem collaborations, but are able to move between teams and departments based on specific tasks or other needs. An example of systematic interplay between smaller elements, is Netflix' company culture. In this company culture, Netflix continuously adapts teams to the best available talent that best suits the task at hand – as Patty McCord, creator of this company culture said: "Don't expect that your current team can be your team for tomorrow" (Dening, 2018). These teams are highly dynamic, theoretically allowing for the best possible result since the best talent is always performing the right task.

Similar for co-innovation ecosystem collaborations, the systematic interplay between teams allows for the best talent from either collaborative party to perform the tasks that is best suited for them for the mutual benefit of the ecosystem collaboration. Therefore, one of the major differences between standard co-innovation collaborative networks, and co-innovation ecosystem collaborations, is that networks are more hierarchal and static than ecosystem collaborations, which are rooted in a very dynamic nature. The dynamic nature of ecosystem collaborations seamlessly fits the dynamic nature of the digital media landscape, which is why it has been suggested that organizations that are able to most successfully integrate its key assets into a collaborative ecosystem, will be the ones that are able to continuously sustain a competitive advantage in the digital media landscape (Gouillart, 2014). To be able to establish such ecosystem collaborations though, strategic partnerships are needed.

2.2. Strategic partnerships

As established, the partnerships that are needed for co-innovation collaborations are strategic partnerships, which are created to utilize the respective partner's strengths while minimizing its weaknesses (Dahan, Doh, Oetzel, & Yaziji,2010; Sanzo, Alvarez, Rey, & Garcia, 2015). In doing so, organizations can scrutinize a partner's capabilities and resources, which then can be used in the co-innovation process. The kind of strategic partnership determines how intimately the partners work together, and the extent of knowledge, capability, and resource sharing. Austin (2000) classified partnerships in three different stages, helping organizations to assess the nature of partnerships, as well as aid organizations in strategizing what kind of partnerships organizations might need in their partnerships mix. In this, strategic partnerships with a high level of involvement generally have a high payoff, but also require a lot of maintenance whereas a low involvement partnership generally has a lower payoff and requires less maintenance. The three stages

as identified by Austin (2000) are: philanthropic partnerships, transactional partnerships, and integrative partnerships.

In the philanthropic stage of partnerships, the relationship between the partners is predominantly one of “charitable donor and recipient” (Austin, 2000, p. 71). In this stage, the level of engagement between the partners is low, and the manner to which resources and capabilities are shared is close to none. Per consequence, the value that is created is relatively small and static. In the transactional stage of partnerships, there is a more pronounced exchange of resources than in the philanthropic stage, with a focus on specific activities as “cause-related marketing, event sponsorships, and contractual service arrangements” (Austin, 2000, p. 71). In this stage, the value creation is still relatively static as the value creation is based on specific activities. In the stage of integrative partnerships, partners’ missions and activities begin to merge into more collective action (Austin, 2000). The level of engagement between the partners is high in the integrative stage, resources and capabilities are shared extensively, and the strategic value increases to the point that shared value is created.

Shared value is typical for integrative partnerships and “represents benefits that are not bilateral resource exchanges but rather joint products or services derived from the combination of the organization’s competencies and resources” (Austin, 2000, p. 79). In integrative partnerships, the organizations involved typically align the goals that need to be achieved through the partnership, and share their capabilities and resources accordingly to achieve that goal. Given these classifications, integrative partnerships are those that make up the core for co-innovation (ecosystem) collaborations. Integrative partnerships allow for the integration of knowledge, capabilities and resources into an ecosystem, and embody what is needed for ecosystem collaborations. For these partnerships, even more so than for philanthropic partners and transactional partners, it is important to have a relationship that is based on trust.

It has been established that trust building is essential for ecosystem collaborations, and thus also for the co-innovation process in such ecosystem collaborations (Petrou, Gautam, & Giannoutakis, 2006). If there is no trust between the collaborative parties in an ecosystem collaboration, friction may occur throughout the co-innovation process, possibly derailing a mutually beneficial outcome. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) identified four pillars that together form the foundation for trust in co-creative projects, also referred to as the DART pillars. The first pillar is about dialogue, which allows for the prevention of miscommunication throughout the co-innovation process. In this, interactivity, willingness to act, and strong engagement from all sides are important factors that enable strong dialogue between the parties (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). With no coincidence does this pillar resemble the need for continuous interactivity in ecosystem collaborations, as clear

communication between collaborative parties is always crucial if misunderstandings are meant to be prevented. The second pillar concerns accessibility to one another's knowledge, employees, and other resources. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue that clear accessibility agreements and arrangements need to be made since they may prevent possible deteriorations concerning clarity of what resources are available to an ecosystem collaboration. Integrating resources for a co-innovation collaboration is one of the main beneficiaries of co-innovation models, for both co-innovation networks as well as co-innovation ecosystem collaborations - thus clear arrangements on the accessibility to said resources could determine the level of success of the integration of resources for co-innovation efforts.

The third pillar in Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) DART model is about risk-benefits and refers to the assessments and alignments concerning what shared value is and what actions should be taken for this value to come to fruition. Determining the risks and potential benefits for all parties involved is key in these assessments, and can determine whether participating in co-innovative efforts is beneficial at all. The last pillar in the DART model concerns transparency, referring to the importance of being open and honest with each other in co-creative efforts (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Co-innovation efforts are partly built on trust between the collaborative parties, if this trust is broken by a lack of transparency, the whole co-innovation project could fall apart.

Upholding a strong commitment to the DART pillars is the basis for establishing and maintaining trust within a co-innovation collaboration. This trust is essential as partnering for co-innovation processes require stark commitments and does not come without certain risks. Working together with strategic partners on a co-innovation project also means that the parties involved are dependent on each other to be successful. Adner (2006) refers to the risks of this dependency as interdependence risks. Even though an organization can fulfill its own role in the co-innovation process successfully, there is the risk that other parties in the co-innovation effort do not, as the organization cannot fully control what the other parties do. In addition to the DART pillars for trust, there are certain measures that can be taken in the partnership creation phases, as well as in the partnership maintenance phase, that can minimize interdependence risks.

2.2.1. Partnership creation

Establishing strategic partnerships for co-innovative efforts does not go overnight, it requires a meticulous process in which the collaborative organizations must be aligned, and the co-innovation project must be co-designed. In doing so, it is important that trust between the organizations is built, making the aforementioned DART pillars an important part of this

process. The collaborative parties should go through this partnership creation process together so that the interdependence risk in the co-innovation ecosystem collaboration is minimized. There are numerous areas in which the collaborative organizations need to be aligned before the co-innovation project can be designed. Even though there is an intention to co-innovate, the organizations involved may have very different business models, not to mention different ways of conducting themselves. Organizational alignment minimizes interdependence risks in that it aids in the prevention of future misunderstandings, as well as provide guidance for the collaborative parties throughout the co-innovation process.

More specifically, organizational alignment refers to the following three areas: attainment of a mutual understanding, the substantiating the meaning of shared value, and the creation of a mission statement (Adler, Heckscher, & Prusak, 2011; Austin, 2000; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). In gaining a mutual understanding, the collaborative parties align their knowledge and other competencies so that there is a clear synopsis as to how far the capabilities of each organization can be utilized for the mutual benefit of the co-innovation ecosystem collaboration (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004). A mutual understanding of everyone's knowledge, resources, and other capabilities in an ecosystem collaboration establishes what the capabilities of the ecosystem collaboration will be. Simultaneously, this is where the parties align in regard to what the purpose of the ecosystem collaboration is.

In doing so, a shared mission and the definition of shared value need to be determined. Bradburne (2001) construes this stage in the partnership creation process as one of the most fundamental parts of partnership creation as a shared mission and shared value definition provide guidance for partners throughout the partnership. The can be no misconceptions about what value is in a co-innovation effort, as an unclear value definition could cause for individual entities within a co-innovation collaboration to unwittingly chase different value. Austin (2000) corroborates the importance of a clear value definition as the more specific the expected benefit of collaboration is, the greater the guidance the collaboration will have. This refers not only to the value definition, but also to how value is measured by each individual collaborator as organizations may use different value measurements metrics.

This step in the partnership creation process also refers to the third pillar in Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) DART model; the risk-benefits pillar. They recognized the importance of the alignment of the measurement of value as an important component in trust building, as misconceptions about shared value could not only lead to individual ecosystem collaboration entities unknowingly pursuing different value, it could also lead to mistrust within the ecosystem collaboration. In addition, alignment of the value measurement metrics aid in the transparency within the co-innovation effort as an alignment in the usage of value

measurement metrics allows for individual entities in the collaboration to be less interdependent with regards to value measurements.

Once there is a mutual understanding, as well as a clear determination of shared goals and shared value, the parties have to collaboratively come up with a mission statement for the co-innovation ecosystem collaboration. As mentioned, mutual goals and benefit are essential for ecosystem collaborations, thus making mutual mission statements essential for ecosystem collaborations. A mission statement clearly defines the purpose of the collaboration, and serves as a point of reference to guide the collaborative parties throughout the co-innovation process (McDonald, 2007). The importance of a collaborative mission statement is corroborated by Adner (2006), who states that a mission statement allows for clarity in performance expectations of each entity that is needed to accomplish success. In the organizational alignment phase, the dialogue and transparency pillars from the DART model are crucial. Continuous, clear, and honest communication are needed if organizations truly and truthfully want to align themselves for the benefit of the ecosystem collaboration. Any miscommunications or dishonesty in the organizational alignment process could lead to misconceptions as to what the collaboration needs, or is able to, accomplish, which could lead to damaging friction later in the co-innovation process.

After the individual entities in the ecosystem collaboration are aligned, the co-innovation process needs to be designed collaboratively. According to Le Ber and Brenzei (2015), it is vital for partners to design an innovation project or process together, if the collaboration is to be a success. In co-designing the process, partners construct how the mission statement can be accomplished for mutual beneficial outcomes of the co-innovation project. In this particular case, this pertains to the plotting of the co-innovation process, or more specifically the media innovation process. In co-designing this process, partners make clear arrangements concerning financial agreements, the role allocation throughout the co-innovation process, and the integration and use of resources.

The allocation of roles involves specifying and dividing the co-innovation project into task and subtasks that are to be carried out by each of the partners, and is an integral step in the process co-designing phase (Adler, Heckscher, & Prusak, 2011; Adner, 2006; Perks & Moxey, 2011; Romero & Molina, 2011). An unambiguous role allocation provides clarity as to what needs to be done, who is supposed to do what, and how big the role of each collaborator is. Perks and Moxey (2011) suggest however, that it is increasingly difficult to specify roles and tasks at the start of the innovation process as roles and tasks could be subject to change throughout the project. Especially in ecosystem collaboration efforts, in which there is systematic interplay between teams, the allocation of roles will need to be re-calibrated throughout the co-innovation process. The integration and use of resources relates closely to the accessibility pillar in the DART model, as this requires clear

agreements concerning the accessibility to one another's resources. These resources need to be distinctly defined and includes tangible resources as technology and software, and intangible resources as customer insights and copyrights. Accessibility agreements may prevent possible deteriorations concerning clarity of what resources are available to an ecosystem, and thus prevent friction and mistrust throughout the co-innovation process.

Lastly, as outlined before, continuous interactivity is one of the main components that are needed to make ecosystems work. To facilitate this interactivity, McEvoy (2013) suggests the establishing of what he calls touch points. These touch points consist of different tiers of engagement, and can include physical meetings, online communication tools, and scheduled calls. These touch points help partners to stay continuously engaged and aligned in the ecosystem collaboration throughout the co-innovation process. Essentially, these touch points facilitate the first pillar of the DART model – dialogue. In the process co-designing phase, partners need to agree on what the touch points are, and the frequency of use of these touch points. Since continuous interactivity is one of the goals of establishing these touch points, collaborative parties should make sure to be readily available for communication through these touch points whenever it is needed. Agreements on touch points are not only important in the partnership creation process, but are also an essential part in maintaining partnerships in an ecosystem.

2.2.2. Partnership maintenance

Whereas a successful partnership creation process is essential for the success of co-innovation projects, it has been argued that maintaining partnerships throughout the duration of a collaboration is even more important. Baum, Cowan and Jonard (2010) for example, found that the performance that comes out of a co-innovation process is influenced more by the behavior of the collaborators during the process rather than the conditions as they were established initially. Since the digital media landscape is fast paced and very dynamic, it contains a lot of uncertainties and unpredictability. As such, the partnership creation factors as outlined in the previous section are unlikely to remain stable throughout the co-innovation process. For one, as identified earlier, it is increasingly hard to allocate all roles and tasks from the outset of the co-innovation process (Perks & Moxey, 2011). In addition, new knowledge, capabilities, or other resources may enter the equation during the co-innovation process, which may need to be considered for integration in the co-innovation collaboration. The partners in the co-innovation collaboration should therefore continuously re-align all partnership creation factors throughout the co-innovation process to keep up successful partner relationships. This includes the continuous re-calibration of the accessibility agreements per the second pillar of the DART model as these help maintain trustworthy

resource sharing and integration procedures. In this, the desired continuous interactivity in ecosystem collaborations could prove very valuable, as it should allow for a faster re-calibration and re-alignment process.

In this, it is important for partners to continuously reiterate the shared value expectations and the mission statement to prevent partner complacency (Austin, 2000; Le Ber & Branzei, 2015). These were established to provide clarity and guidance throughout the co-innovation process, and as such could provide the proper motivation for partners if complacency threatens to arise. In addition, this abets in the maintenance of the third pillar in the DART model, and thus encourages the maintenance of the trust relationship between the collaborative parties. Last, it is imperative for partners to maintain engagements and commitments made in the partnership creation phase. Agreements and arrangements made in the partnership creation phase are meaningless when they are not kept throughout the co-innovation process. The touch points agreements and aligned value measurement system play an important part in this as they allow for partners to assess the progress of each entity in the co-innovation process. Adner (2006) suggest that tracking partners' development as closely as your own development is essential for successful collaborative efforts. Doing so minimizes the chance that partners do not uphold their end of the agreed upon arrangements, and thus minimize the interdependence risk. A strong dialogue and transparency, the first and forth pillar of the DART model, are essential in this process as continuous and honest communication allows for an accurate assessment of the situation in the ecosystem. Dialogue and transparency are therefore not only important in maintaining trust, but also in maintaining healthy partnerships altogether.

The success of the partnership creation process and the partnership maintenance process are fundamental if collaborators are to successfully co-innovate in an ecosystem collaboration. The other part that is essential for co-innovation, is the media innovation process that is to be conducted by the collaborative parties.

2.3. The media innovation process

The media innovation process is where the actual generative digital innovation is created. This is also the process that is to be co-designed by the partnerships in the ecosystem collaboration. However, to understand the media innovation process, it is important to understand what media innovation is. First, a distinction between innovation and invention needs to be made. Whereas invention refers to a new idea or new theoretical model, innovation refers to the implementation of an invention in a market or social setting (Fagerberg, 2003). Shtern, Paré, Ross and Dick (2013) expand on this by stating that innovation implies introducing something new into a social economic system, which could

include new combinations of existing ideas, competences, and resources. Therefore, it should be understood that innovation does not necessarily mean creating something completely new, it could also include combining existing elements into something new, adding a new feature to an already existing element in a product, service, or process, and implementing something that is not necessarily new to the world, but is new to the organization's business model. This is corroborated by Lee, Olson, and Trimi (2012), who asserted that innovation could be a new idea or approach being applied in fundamentally different ways than before to create value for the organization and other stakeholders. So, if innovation includes putting existing knowledge and ideas into new contexts, doing so in the context of the media landscape can be considered media innovation.

Storsul and Krumsvik (2013) identified two dimensions that characterize media innovation; what is changing, and the degree of novelty of this change. The degree of novelty of media innovation refers to the effect the implemented change has, and to what extent this effect affects the digital media landscape. The discussed change can occur in various aspects of the digital media landscape, which are conceptualized in five different categories: product innovation, process innovation, position innovation, paradigmatic innovation, and social innovation (Francis & Bessant, 2005; Mulgan, Tucker, Ali, & Sanders, 2007; Shtern, et al., 2013).

In this, product innovation concerns changes in products and/or services (Stormsul & Krumsvik, 2013), which includes the aforementioned example of Apple's iPhone. Especially since the product life cycles are increasingly shortened, there is an increasing need for product innovation. Process innovation relates to changes in how products and/or services are created and delivered (Stormsul & Krumsvik, 2013). Opening up the R&D department for external organizations for example, is an illustration of process innovation. Position innovation refers to changes in the way products and/or services are positioned or framed within particular markets and contexts (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013). Because of the heightened interconnectedness in the digital landscape for example, organizations have a need for position innovation to appeal to the new (global) markets.

Paradigmatic innovation involves changes in business models, values, and the organization's general mindset (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013). Successful recent examples of paradigmatic innovation include Uber and Spotify. Last, social innovation includes innovative activities with the goal of meeting people's social needs and improving their lives (Mulgan, et al., 2007). Social innovation usually solves social needs that are created by adversity or market failure. It is important to note however, that even though these types of innovation are categorized in five different categories, said categories are not mutually exclusive. The end result of digital innovation is often the result of a combination of various innovation categories.

Anthony, Eyring, and Gibson (2006) suggest that to successfully create an innovation, organizations need a successful innovation game plan as strong game plans produce the highest quality innovations that are produced the quickest with relatively low investments. This is corroborated by Gouillart (2014), who argues that co-innovation requires the adoption of a process that enables organizations to collaboratively come up with, develop, and implement innovations. One process he suggests, is the design thinking model. This model is often used to give structure to the innovation process, and consists of three phases: the inspiration phase, the ideation phase, and the implementation phase. This is one of the models that co-innovating parties can use to co-design the co-innovation process, and is the one that is used in this thesis to illustrate how the co-innovation process can be utilized to create generative innovations.

2.3.1. The design thinking model

The inspiration phase is the first of three phases in the design thinking model and is all about identifying where the opportunity or need for innovation lies (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). How an innovation opportunity or a need is identified partly depends on in which media innovation category the opportunity or need occurs. For product innovation for example, a market research to find out what the needs of the customer segments are could lead to inspiration for an innovation, whereas a new technological invention could provide opportunities for process innovation. These are merely examples as there are a multitude of approaches to identifying opportunities or needs for each of the media innovation categories. The key in this phase, regardless of the innovation category, is for the co-innovative parties to familiarize themselves with the environment in which the innovation opportunity or need may occur. According to Brown (2008) it is important to dig deep to find actual needs rather than perceived needs. Asking people what they think they need for example, might give different ideas than when actually going into the field and observing what their needs are. Therefore, integral for the identification of opportunities and needs is the familiarization of oneself with the environment that is being innovated in; no matter whether it is the customer segment, the technological landscape, or any other environment the collaborators operate in. Since the digital media landscape is a rapidly changing environment, the inspiration phase is fundamental in establishing where and how to innovate continuously to sustain a competitive advantage for the ecosystem collaboration. As such, the knowledge and expertise of the digital media environment needs to be accurate and continuously updated.

Continuous dialogue is imperative for co-innovation partners in the inspiration phase as the need and/or opportunity for an innovation need to be aligned across the ecosystem collaboration. All collaborative parties need to be fully aligned as to what the innovation

problem is to be able to collaboratively solve the innovation problem, making the establishment of touch points throughout the inspiration phase crucial in the early stages of the media innovation process. Once the opportunity or need is identified, a problem definition should be created, after which an initial solution to this problem definition is to be conceptualized into a value proposition. According to Skok (2013), a value proposition defines who will benefit from the innovation that is to be developed, and how the innovation can be developed for beneficial ends. The value proposition needs to be matured in the second phase of the design thinking model – the ideation phase. This is where the co-innovating partners work together intensively to develop a solution to address the innovation problem, need, or opportunity as identified in the inspiration phase (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). Typically, this is done by means of brainstorming and divergent thinking sessions between the co-innovating partners. In the co-designing of the co-innovation process, the collaborative parties need to agree on continuous touch points so that the brainstorming and divergent thinking happens thoroughly and in true collaborative fashion.

In doing so, there are certain considerations that the co-innovating parties need to address. More specifically, this concerns the consideration of the feasibility, viability, and desirability of the prospective innovation (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). In other words, the innovative solution has to be desirable for humans, viable from a business perspective, and feasible from a monetary and technological perspective. In these considerations, all of the knowledge, capabilities, and resources that are integrated for the co-innovation collaboration are exhausted to come up with the innovative outcome that maximizes the full potential for mutual benefit for the co-innovation collaborators. After the innovative idea is sufficiently matured, the collaborative parties need to co-create the value proposition that is to be developed in the implementation phase. Between the establishment of the value proposition and the development of the innovation, co-innovative parties commonly develop a prototype of the innovation that is to be tested and improved where needed.

The prototyping of the innovation is an ongoing process that is grounded in testing and improving the innovation based on testing results and feedback. Prototyping is not about creating the perfect innovation right away, but more to see what works and what does not. Therefore, as Brown (2008) states: “prototyping doesn’t have to be complex and expensive...prototypes should command only as much time, effort, and investment as are needed to generate useful feedback and evolve the idea” (p. 87). Even after the implementation of the innovation, the prototyping and testing does not stop as the innovation needs to be continuously updated and improved. The implementation phase is the last phase in the design thinking process and represents the point when the innovation concept is developed and prepared for the market (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). The innovation is implemented once it is deemed ready based on the aforementioned prototyping and testing.

As mentioned though, the media innovation process does not end after the implementation phase. Since the dynamic digital media landscape requires continuous innovation, the value proposition of the innovation needs to be continuously updated according to developments in the digital media landscape. Hence, the design thinking model is not a linear process. The co-innovating parties need to jump back and forth between phases to successfully innovate continuously. To update the value proposition according to the developing digital media landscape for example, requires the co-innovators to jump back to the inspiration phase as they need to establish where and how the value proposition needs to be updated. In this, the collaborative use of each other's data could prove to be an important factor in the successful continuous innovation for the co-innovation ecosystem collaboration. Throughout the whole co-innovation process, the aforementioned partnership maintenance factors need to be maintained. To maximize the potential of the co-innovation collaboration, the collaborators do not only need to be transparent throughout the process, the teams need to be continuously interactive and systematic interplay between the teams must occur.

Lastly, since the digital media landscape requires generative innovations for media organizations to maximize competitive advantage (Yoo, et al., 2012**)**, there need to be considerations of generativity in the implementation phase. Even though making the innovation generative needs to be considered in the inspiration phase and the ideation phase as well, it is in the implementation phase that the innovation is actually made generative.

2.3.2. Making the innovation generative

As outlined before, for innovations to have a generative capacity, they need to have a high degree of generativity. Zittrain (2008) identified five dimensions that delineate generativity: adaptability, leverage, accessibility, transferability, and ease of mastery. The higher an innovation scores on these five dimensions, the higher the generative capacity of the innovation. In developing the innovation in the implementation phase of the co-innovation process, the co-innovators need to ensure that the innovation scores high on these five dimensions. In addition, the effectiveness of the five dimensions need to be tested in the prototyping and testing portion of the co-innovation process.

The first dimension that delineates generative capacity, adaptability, refers to the breadth of usability of the innovation, including the flexibility of the innovation and the extent to which the innovation can be used without the involvement from the developer (Zittrain, 2008). If others cannot use an innovation, it is impossible for them generate value with it. A high level of adaptability in an innovation therefore means that the innovation can be used

by a multitude of people and organizations, and in a variety of environments. The second dimension, leverage (or capacity of leverage), reflects the extent to which the innovation can be employed for accomplishments that would be either impossible or a lot harder to achieve without it (Zittrain, 2008). The higher the leverage in an innovation, the more effort the innovation saves in generating value. In other words, an innovation with high capacity of leverage makes it easy for others to generate value for the co-innovators that developed and/or own the generative innovation.

Third, accessibility refers to how easy it is for users to gain access to the innovation so that they can use it (Zittrain, 2008). In order for an innovation to be used to generate value, consumers and organizations have to be able to access the innovation. Without this, the innovation cannot be used in the first place, rendering it worthless in terms of the generation of value. Next, transferability reflects the ability to transfer any technological changes to users of the innovation. Transferability in software for example, could refer to the easiness and readiness for users to remotely update the software. Last, ease of mastery indicates how easy it is for new users to learn about the technology. If an innovation is not easy to master, users might need to be very skilled in particular areas to be able to generate value using this innovation. Therefore, a high ease of mastery could entice more entities to use the innovation, which could lead to a higher generation of value. Even though the five factors that delineate generativity are important for generative ability in any sort of innovation, they are most commonly implemented in product innovation.

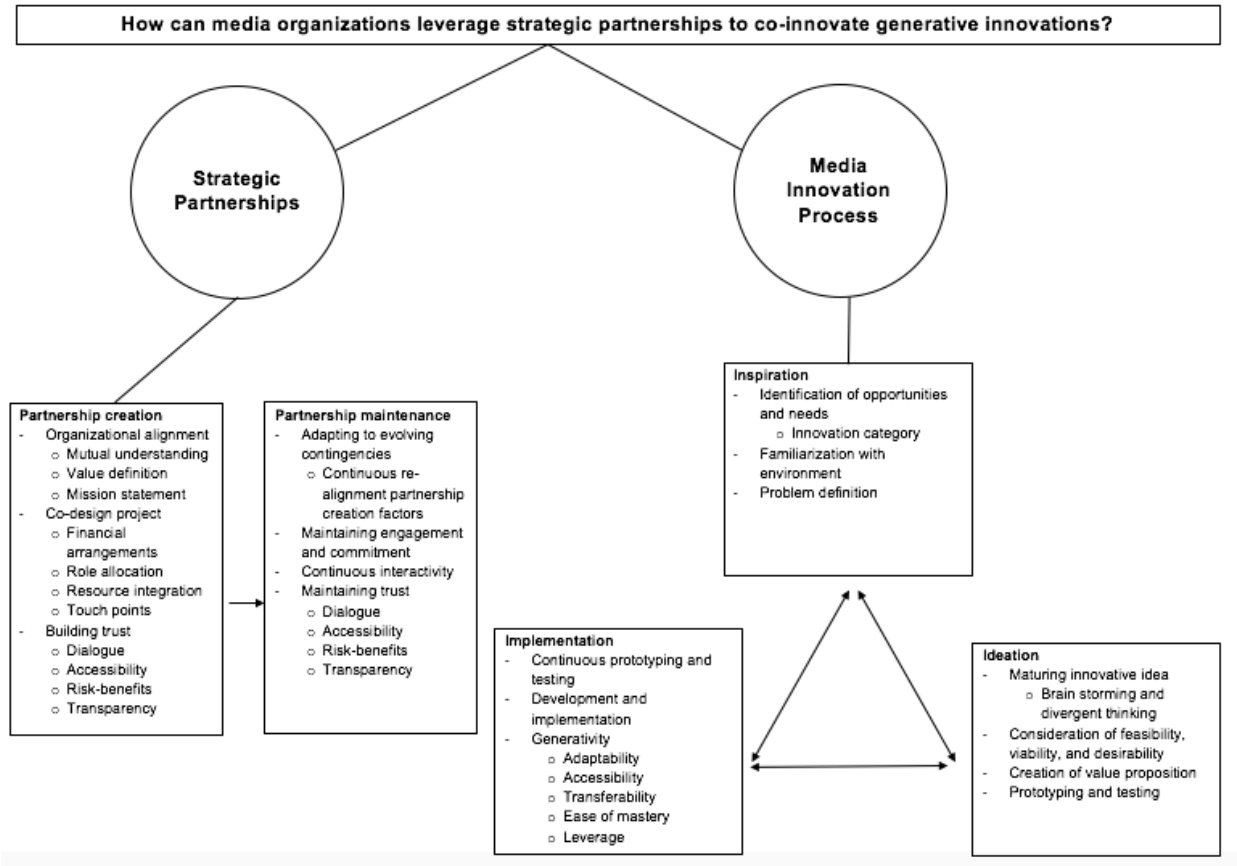
Nielsen and Hanseth (2010) explain that generative ability mainly concerns how innovation is influenced by the infrastructure it originates from, rather than the single innovation activity. In other words, it is more about how the innovation's infrastructure stimulates innovation by independent innovators or users than it is about the creation of a single product or service. Therefore, co-innovators in the digital media landscape should innovate to provide a foundation that enables independent organizations (i.e. organizations not directly involved in the innovation process) to initiate their own innovations or other means to generate value from that foundation, without additional help and input from the media organizations providing the foundation. To do so, this foundation needs high degrees of adaptability, leverage, accessibility, transferability and ease of mastery. Even though generativity based on foundations is important for any kind of innovation, it is most apparent in process innovation. All of these considerations of generativity are meant to make it as easy as possible for innovation users and organizations to generate value for the co-innovation ecosystem collaboration from which the generative innovation originates from.

If the co-innovators manage to successfully implement these considerations of generativity in the development of the innovation, the innovation will have the high generative capabilities that are needed in the dynamic digital media landscape.

2.4. Conceptual framework

As derived from the theory, figure 1 gives an overview of the conceptual framework of this thesis. As identified, the two main components that are needed for co-innovation collaborations are strategic partnerships and the media innovation process. Accordingly, these two components represent the two main themes in this framework. Even though these themes are presented as separate processes, it is acclaimed that these processes happen simultaneously. In addition, in consideration of clarity, the arrows in the media innovation process mean to represent a continuous non-linear process, which is what the co-innovation process in the digital media landscape ultimately entails as well. Furthermore, even though the DART pillars are mentioned separately as part of trust building and maintenance, it should be implied that the DART pillars are to be honored throughout all factors that are mentioned in the strategic partnership process, as outlined in chapter 2.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



3. Methodology

In the following chapter, the chosen method will be discussed. First, the research design will be outlined, after which the sample and sampling method will be explained. Then, the process of data collection and operationalization will be explored. This will be followed by an explanation of how the data was analyzed, after which the chapter will conclude with considerations of validity and reliability of this research.

3.1. Research design

Considering the purpose of this study was not to answer hypotheses and to find generalizing findings for an entire population, but rather to research a specific phenomenon, a qualitative method of research was more suited for this study than a quantitative approach (Dworkin, 2012). More specifically, the chosen method concerned expert interviews as it allowed for the garnering of in-depth understanding of the co-innovation process, more specifically the strategic partnering process, and the media innovation process. Consequently, this granted the opportunity to give meaning to the 'why' and the 'how' of the concepts. Through conducting expert interviews, the meaning that emerged from this research represents the ideas and values of the ones who live the situation that was being studied, instead of what was deemed representative by researchers who look from the outside in (Yin, 2011). In addition, expert interviews provide a "unique source of "inside" information" (Dorussen, Lenz & Blavoukos, 2005, p.317). Therefore, conducting expert interviews gives researchers the chance to obtain insights about a particular phenomenon that would otherwise be unavailable to them. The aim of the research was to gain a more in depth understanding of the topic. In doing so, the goal was not only to confirm or contradict what was already known based on the existing literature, but also to find new insights that could expand on and add to what was previously known.

3.2. Sample and sampling method

In order to answer the research question, 10 expert interviews were conducted, each lasting about 45-60 minutes. Conform common practice**,** the exact number of experts to be interviewed was determined by the point when saturation was reached (Dworkin, 2012). The experts were selected by means of nonprobability-sampling. More specifically, the method of choice was purposive sampling, as it allowed for the collection of the most relevant and productive data (Yin, 2011). Purposive sampling is a method that allows researchers to select a sample based on selection criteria, ensuring that the researcher can choose experts that are actually knowledgeable about the topic that is being researched. In addition, Yin (2011) suggests that selecting a variety of sample may provide different viewpoints,

consequently delivering diversified pieces of information, which is also something that was taken into account in establishing the selection criteria.

However, not any random collection of experts represents a good sample, as there are certain criteria that experts needs to meet (Bogner, Litig, & Menz, 2009). Firstly, a good sample of experts includes those who normally act as key decision makers, or influence those who make decisions in their work setting (Mikecs, 2012). Secondly, since not every decision maker is necessarily an expert, the experts that make up a good sample are not only decision makers, but also ones who possess an "institutionalized authority to construct reality" **(**Hitzsler, Honer, and Meader, 1994, as cited in Bogner, Litig, & Menz, 2009, p. 19). Experts in an institutionalized authoritative position are socially recognized as those who possess the required knowledge and expertise to be in those positions, and thus possess the expertise to be deemed a good expert for an expert sample.

As such, the experts selected for this research were those who have decision making power, as well as the authoritative position to be considered expert with the required knowledge and expertise (e.g. managers, head of departments, etc.). To satisfy Yin's variety of sample criterion, the sample of experts selected contains one group of 5 experts that are employed at traditional media organizations, and one group of 5 experts that are employed at non-traditional media organizations that are considered media organizations in the digital media landscape. Even though both groups can be considered experts representative of media organizations as defined in this research, the nature of the business of both groups differs and should thus give a more varied perspective on the topics surrounding this research.

Since the nature of the study required the insights on specific phenomena related to co-innovation, the experts that were interviewed had to be directly involved in the co-innovation process (in this, consisting of the partnership creation and the media innovation process), and employed at a (digital) media organization. To ensure a sample that was feasible, there was no hard criterion regarding nationality or country of residence. Such a criterion would have been preferred as to prevent biased answers from respondents. The stronger determinant however, was that such criterion could result in a sample of lesser quality, with respondents who do satisfy the nationality criterion, but could be less qualified than respondents without said criterion as experts who satisfy both criteria are harder to come by. Since the other selection criteria - consisting of an authoritative position, decision making power, employed at a media organization, and active closely to the co-innovation process – were deemed more important for the quality of the sample, they were chosen over the nationality criterion. The list of experts, including a description of their current role and prior experience, is presented in the following subsection.

3.2.1. List of experts

Expert name	Title(s), Institution/Organization	Experience
Boris van Bennekum	Innovation Lead, BNNVARA (Hilversum)	Boris van Bennekum recognizes that the fast-paced changes in the media industry requires radical responses from media companies, and he has a passion to make sure to contribute to this with his innovation projects. His extensive work experience makes him an expert in innovation, as well as in media.
Ewout Karel	Senior Innovation Manager, T-Mobile Nederland (The Hague)	With over eight years of experience in prominent roles in innovation, Ewout Karel can be considered an experienced innovation professional. In his current position at T-Mobile, he is in charge over many co-innovation projects. He is currently writing a book on an innovation model that is to replace corporate funding called corporate craftsmanship.
Myrthe Zwaan	Partnership and Technology Manager, Company X[1]	As the Partnership and Technology Manager for a prestigious consultancy organization, Myrthe Zwaan manages over 135 partnerships that are associated with innovation projects. She has extensive experience in managing partnerships, allowing her to be considered a partnership expert.

[1] Name of the organization has been anonymized by request of the respondent.

Peter Smet	Innovation and Process Coordinator, Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek (The Hague)	As the Innovation and Process Coordinator at the SvdJ, Peter Smet experiences co-innovation projects every day. He employs a futuristic approach to innovation, and believes that others should do so as well. After eight years of either working in or studying the media landscape, he can be considered a media specialist.
Remy van Leeuwen	Product Innovation Manager, Booking.com (Amsterdam)	As the Product Innovation Manager at Booking.com, Remy van Leeuwen is in charge of many collaborate innovation campaigns to facilitate innovation for new and existing products. Through his extensive, prior experience in digital marketing, he has gained strong knowledge of the digital media landscape.
Robert Novorolsky	Interactive Producer, MediaMonks (Hilversum)	Because of his daily work, Robert Novorolsky is experienced in the set-up and execution of innovation projects with partners. His job requires him to stay up to date with the continuous developments in the digital media landscape.
Ruud Hendriks	Co-founder, Innoleaps (Amsterdam)	As the co-founder of Innoleaps, Ruud Hendriks helps corporates with their innovation projects, as well as teach aspiring innovators about the ins and outs of innovation. He is a regular speaker on innovation and entrepreneurship conventions, and with his extensive experience in the media landscape (including being on the

		executive board of Endemol Entertainment for almost a decade), Ruud Hendriks is not only an innovation expert, but also a media expert.
Sicco Wegerif	Head of Big Builds, MediaMonks (Hilversum)	As the Head of Big Builds at MediaMonks, Sicco Wegerif has extensive experience with digital building projects. As such, he has a plethora of experience with co-innovation projects. In addition, his years of employment at MediaMonks have given him the experience needed to be an expert in the digital media landscape.
Thomas Hurkxkens	New Media Director, Centre for Innovation Leiden University (Leiden)	As the New Media Director at The Centre for Innovation at Leiden University, Thomas Hurkxkens has made (co) innovating his job. He aspires to improve education with his innovations, and has an extensive history in the media production industry.
Willem van Zeeland	Head of Digital, NTR (Hilversum)	Willem van Zeeland is the Head of Digital at NTR, and has been working in the media industry for years. Digital innovations are part of his job description, making him an expert in innovation projects.

3.3. Data collection

The 10 interviews were conducted over a period of about one month, with an average duration of about 45 minutes per interview. The interviews were semi-structured as to facilitate a flexible conversation as these types of interviews allow for the interviewer to respond to the respondent's answers with probes or unplanned questions. Semi-structured

interviews are typically carried out according to a topic list, but their open nature gives the researcher flexibility to instantly respond to and explore unexpected emerging topics during the interview (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). The researcher carries an important role in this as the researcher is responsible for fostering an open dialogue and using the right probes to derive the right information from the interviewee, and so developing a deeper understanding for the topic that is being researched (Gilbert, 2008). In addition, semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to conduct the interview in a more conversational manner, going after context based on the respondent's answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). As such, this structure allows for the interviewer to develop a deeper understanding of the subject of the interview as the interviewer can pursue specific information in this conversational method. Even though semi-structured interviews were chosen based on their flexibility, the set-up of the interviews was designed so that the conditions of the interview were as much alike as possible for standardization purposes, and thus contributing to the reliability and validity of this research (Opdenakker, 2006)

The preferred method of interviewing was in a face-to-face setting as this allows for a more synchronous and personal interview setting (Opdenakker, 2006**)**. This aids the quality of the interview as it probes the respondent to give more genuine and spontaneous answers, resulting in a more productive conversation. However, due to a variety of circumstances this proved inconceivable at times, in which case the interviews were conducted by means of a phone call. Furthermore, all respondents were confronted with the principles of informed consent prior to the interview, including a short reiteration about the nature of the study, the respondents' right to withdraw from the interview at any point, and a discussion regarding how they would be identified in the study. The interview started only after the informed consent was discussed, and consent was given. All interviews were recorded, with the consent of the respondents. These recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher as a means to prepare for the analysis.

3.4. Operationalization

The interview questions were based on the above stated conceptual framework, as to ensure that the questions found their grounds in the existing theory. As such, the interview guide consisted of two main themes: *strategic partnerships* and *media innovation process*. The strategic partnerships theme had two categories (partnership creation and partnership maintenance), whereas the media innovation process theme had three categories (inspiration, ideation, and implementation). Each category in turn, was expanded on by means of questions and sub-themes, based on the theory as outlined in chapter 2 of this thesis. In accordance with the essence of the semi-structured interview, these sub-themes

were elaborated on during the interviews by means of probes or additional questions. The full operationalization of the theoretical concepts can be found in table 1.

Table 1. Operationalization

Theme	**Questions**
Strategic partnerships	

Partnership creation	With the goal of co-innovation in mind…
	• How do you establish strategic partnerships?
	  ○ What are the important things that go into creating partnerships?
	  ➢ Defining common mission and/or goals
	  ➢ Defining expected value
	• How do you decide the role allocation for the process?
	• How do you establish the extent to which you can use each other's resources?
	• How do you establish a strong dialogue with partners?
	  ➢ Touch points
	• How do you measure potential risks and/or benefits when working together so intimately with a partner?
	• How do you ensure transparency with your partners?

Partnership maintenance	Considering evolving contingencies…
	• How do you maintain partnerships throughout the process?
	  ➢ Adapting to evolving contingencies
	  ➢ Continuous re-alignment of partnership creation factors
	  ➢ Maintaining engagement and commitment
	• How do you maintain a strong dialogue throughout the partnership/process?

Media innovation process	**Shortly reiterate goal of the research**
Inspiration	• How do you come up with an idea for innovation with a partner? ➢ Identification of opportunities and/or needs ➢ Familiarization with the environment
Ideation	• How do you and your partner get from that idea for innovation to an actual innovation? ○ What are some of the steps that you take in this process? ➢ Brain storming and divergent thinking ➢ Consideration of feasibility, viability, and desirability ➢ Creation of value proposition
Implementation	• How can you ensure that others are able to use your innovation to create value for you without your direct involvement? ○ How can you ensure that your innovation has a high degree of: ➢ Adaptability ➢ Capacity of leverage ➢ Accessibility ➢ Transferability ➢ Ease of mastery • How do you and your partner implement your innovation? ➢ Continuous prototyping and testing ➢ Development and implementation

3.5. Data analysis

To analyze the data that was collected from the expert interviews, thematic analysis was conducted. This type of analysis allowed for the data to be broken down into groups, or

themes, based on concepts derived from literature, facilitating the understanding and interpretation of the data by the researcher (Bailey, 2007; Boeije, 2010). Given that the interview questions were derived from themes as established in chapter 2, this seemed like the appropriate method for analysis. The first step that was taken in this thematic analysis was the transcription of all the interviews verbatim, both as a means to prepare the data for further analysis, and as a means to get familiarized with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Next, the data was segmented and reassembled to recognize patterns in the data that would constitute the findings. In this, the data was first coded according to the themes as presented in the conceptual framework. Since the themes were known, Microsoft Excel was used for the allocation of the experts' answers to the corresponding theme. After they were allocated to the corresponding theme, the respondents' answers were further coded according to the researcher's interpretation (i.e. in vivo codes) as a means to help the researcher recognize similarities and differences between the codes.

These codes were attentively compared and reassembled into more meaningful categories based on recurring patterns, similarities, and differences. This also allowed for the further reduction of the data set. From these meaningful categories, subthemes were derived under the main themes as extracted from the literature. These themes and subthemes were converted into findings that represent the main concepts and recurring patterns from the interviews. The analysis and interpretation of were then used find an answer to the research question, as well as to the sub-questions. These findings are presented in the next chapter. Lastly, the analysis was carried out manually by the researcher, without the use of any particular analysis software.

3.6. Validity and reliability

When conducting a qualitative research like this one, the researcher ought to respect certain criteria of reliability and validity. Whereas the former refers to the soundness of methods used in the research (Silverman, 2011), the latter refers to the trustworthiness of the research (Bailey, 2007; Gilbert, 2008). To ensure reliability of the research, various measures were taken. Firstly, it was made sure that sufficient data was collected by considering both the amount and the length of the interviews. Secondly, the thesis elaborately and clearly explains the research method, as well as the method of analysis. In addition, the conceptual framework on which the research was based was shown to ensure transparency. At the same time, the conceptual framework was used to operationalize the concepts, ensuring the data provided accurate measurements of the concepts, adding to the validity of this research (Gilbert, 2008). To increase the trustworthiness of the research, the experts' sample was carefully selected so that each expert met the established selection

criteria, ensuring the quality of the experts in the process. Lastly, to ensure the solidity of the results, a clear and systematic process of coding and analysis was performed to obtain the final results.

4. Results

In this chapter, the findings from the thematic analysis will be presented and discussed. This is done according to the main themes and subthemes as derived from the literature, and as emerged from the analysis. As such, there will be a discussion of how strategic partnerships can be developed for co-innovation projects first, followed by a discussion of how the co-innovation process can be designed for generative innovations.

4.1. Strategic partnerships

Strategic partnerships are recognized as one of the two main components that form the foundation of co-innovation collaborations. Existing literature already recognizes some elements and factors that are important for the creation and maintenance of strategic partnerships. One of the aims of this research however, was to establish a greater understanding of how the process of partnership creation and maintenance works in co-innovation projects. More specifically, said aim was to answer the following sub-question: *How can media organizations develop strategic partnerships for co-innovation projects?*

As such this section will have a specific focus on how the process of creating and maintaining partnerships for co-innovation works, and what the most important factors are in this process.

4.1.1. Partnership creation

4.1.1.1. Organizational alignment

There was a consensus among the respondents concerning the importance of organizational alignment in the partnership creation process. The alignment process emerged as a key phase in the partnership creation process as it allows for organizations to not only get on the same page to create a mutual understanding, but also to find out what each other's strengths and weaknesses are. As Robert Novorolsky, Interactive Producer at MediaMonks stated:

> I think the first thing you do is an alignment. So, making sure that your goals are aligned with each other and that everything is clear. The second part is to create a debrief from the brief and allow clarity onto what are the key points of reference. Also understanding key points of disagreement or an understanding or unclarities so that you know that you need to address those because innovation in itself is unclear and you need to understand where your strengths and your weaknesses are when you're trying to do that.

Besides the importance of the alignment of the individual entities in the collaboration, the respondent emphasized various aspects that are important in this alignment, being: understanding key points of disagreement, straightening out anything that is not clear, and an assessment of each partner's strengths and weaknesses. These aspects were echoed as being important for organizational alignment by a multitude of other respondents. For the most part, the organizational alignment factors that were mentioned in the interviews, coincided with the organizational alignment factors as they were established in the literature. More specifically, these factors included creating a mutual understanding, establishing goals for mutual benefit, and defining shared value. All those factors were mentioned in the interviews by the experts, as well as in the literature (Adler, Heckscher, & Prusak, 2001; Austin, 2000; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006).

Furthermore, organizational alignment is a process of creating clarity for the collaborative parties as to what the situation and environment is in which the partnership is created, and what elements need to be adjusted to get on the same page. It is therefore not surprising that the underlying element that constituted most of the alignment factors that were mentioned by the respondents, was clarity. This need for clarity ranges from big factors as the earlier mentioned shared interest, mutual goals and availability of resources, to smaller factors such as a clear understanding of each other's terminology, or as Boris van Bennekum, Innovation Lead at BNNVARA**,** mentioned when discussing what was pointed out to him recently regarding something he had been doing wrong for years:

> […] this is going to sound silly, but almost like have a dictionary there at the start of it. Because if I say content to you, I mean something by that, but to you it might mean something completely different. There's a lot terms floating around that, you know, it's almost like white noise by now. If I say mission or vision or um, even metric, it means a lot of different things to a lot of different people.

It is often assumed by professionals that others within the same profession use the same terminology, which may not always be the case. Therefore, aligning terminology in the partnership creation process is an underappreciated aspect in the partnership creation process as many organizations appear to forget to do so. Consequently, this could lead to costly misunderstandings later on in the process. This also includes the alignment of what value means to each partner, and how this value is measured. For Peter Smet, Innovation and Process Coordinator at the Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek (hereinafter referred to as the SvdJ), aligning the definition and measurement of value is one of the core elements in successful partnerships:

> The first thing you have to find out is what the business model is of your partner and also how they measure the success of that business model […] and that the measurements that you make are then aligning with the measurements that they are already making internally.

The pirate metrics were mentioned by multiple respondents as a model that is often used to measure value in cross-organizational projects, but any similar metrics system could be employed, as long as there is clarity in the alignment of what metrics are used to measure value, and what that value actually is. In addition, the alignment of measurement tools also gives partners a means to check up on the progress of each other's performance, aiding in transparent value measurement across the co-innovation process. These findings substantiate Austin's (2000) and Bradburne's (2001) claims regarding the importance of shared value and a shared value definition in collaborative efforts.

Another organizational alignment element that recurred in multiple interviews, was the need to assess what each partner can contribute to the co-innovation process. The assessment of each organization's strengths and weaknesses was identified as one of the most essential steps in the partnership creation process by most experts. This assessment allows the organizations to see what the potential capabilities are of the partnership, and whether additional partnerships are needed to achieve the goal of the partnership. When discussing the alignment of each other's capabilities, Robert Novorolsky from MediaMonks said:

> The partnership can come together and say: hey, I understand I'm an expert in these three areas. You're an expert in this area, but we're missing these two. Do we have any other partners that we can bring into to do those or do you feel like one of our teams should investigate and research into that?

The importance of the alignment of each other's capabilities is not only something that was repeatedly mentioned by the experts, but also something that Bouwen and Taillieu (2004) mentioned as being essential for determining what the potential of the collaborative effort is. This assessment could simultaneously call attention to whether there are certain needs that the collaborative parties cannot address in their current state, meaning other external parties may need to get involved to reach the mutual goals of the collaboration. This is something that organizations want to get out of the way in the early stages of the co-innovation process, as doing so later may cause significant delays in the process, which could prove to be very costly. Moreover, one of the key elements in not only co-innovation collaborations, but also in ecosystem collaborations, is the integration of resources (Adner, 2006; Gouillart,

2014; Romero & Molina, 2011). The assessment and alignment of each other's knowledge, resources, and other capabilities can be considered the first step towards the integration of resources for mutual benefit.

Aligning all of the aforementioned factors is delicate process that requires a lot of direct communication. Many of the respondents suggested that the most efficient way to do this alignment, is through multiple meetings in which the partners are physically in the same space. Even though the method and the frequency of these meetings often differed, there was an overarching theme that being together in the same physical space with the goal of organizational alignment often proves to be the foundation of successful co-innovation projects. Boris van Bennekum, Innovation Lead at BNNVARA, for example, felt very strongly about this:

> I'm a strong advocate for putting [the teams] in one room. I've done a lot of content heavy projects in different ways, and the most successful ones were the ones where we got over ourselves and […] we stayed in the same room for an extended period of time with almost everybody.

The process of getting together for organizational alignment can also be considered as the starting point for engagement and continuous interactivity, components that were identified as foundational elements for co-innovation collaborations and ecosystem collaborations (Adler, Heckscher, & Prusak, 2001; Austin, 2000; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). In addition, this is also part of the trust building process, as this process constitutes of multiple DART pillars (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). A pillar not yet discussed though, is the transparency pillar. Transparency however, was something that the experts unanimously agreed upon as being one of the most important elements not only in this stage of the process, but through the whole partnering and co-innovation process. As evidenced by Boris van Bennekum from BNNVARA, who even compared transparency in collaborative relationships with a spousal relationship: "transparency is, I would almost say in a partnership, it's everything. It's like a relationship with your significant other, your life partner. If you decide not to talk about certain things, it's going to bite you in the ass". Similar sentiments were echoed by the other experts, accentuating the importance of transparency in co-innovation collaborations.

All in all, what was mentioned by the respondents concerning organizational alignment coincided with the literature for the most part. It was established that strong and transparent communication is needed for organizational alignment, with being in the same physical space being mentioned repeatedly as being the most efficient way to do so. Furthermore, it was implied that the alignment of the organizations makes the next stages in

the partnership creation process a lot easier - creating the right team and co-designing the co-innovation process.

4.1.1.2. Creating the right team

A remerging theme from the interviews is that it is not only important to create partnerships for co-innovation projects, but that it also is fundamental to create the *right* team of employees and partners. Creating the right team for co-innovation projects could be the difference between success and failure of the collaborative efforts. Ruud Hendriks, co-founder from Innoleaps was adamant about this, asserting that creating the right team is more important than having a good innovative idea: “a good team can make something out of a bad idea, but a bad team can ruin the best ideas. It is really all about the team”. When asked to clarify what would constitute the right team, he mentioned the importance of team members to be complementary to each other rather than having people in a team that can all do the same thing.

One of the benefits from the digital media landscape that was mentioned by Lee, Olson, and Trimi (2012), is that the digital media landscape allows media organizations to cross traditional boundaries. It was found to be important to do just that in forming the right team, as outlined by Boris van Bennekum from BNNVARA when describing this as an apparent problem among traditional media organizations:

> I'm of the opinion that my company in particular, but the entire industry at the moment, is pretty bad at finding the right partners […] it's a very limited little group of people that think we should do something about this. And what normally happens is that we partner up [with] you could almost call it the old boys' network.

Similar sentiments were emphasized by other experts, who considered this to be important, especially since the sharing of diverse knowledge, capabilities, and resources is one of the main reasons to commit to a partnership in the first place, thus making putting people in teams that have the same knowledge, capabilities, and resources would almost be futile.

It was suggested by multiple experts, that having people from the customer segment, or employees with the same demographics as the customer segment, in the co-innovation teams could be very beneficial as well since they are the ones that understand the target group for a potential innovation best. Sicco Wegerif from MediaMonks for example, explained how this is beneficial to them:

> We have a lot of people who are pretty much born with phones in their hand, right. So, super digital natives - we are often our own target group, so the people we have

> working on projects also understand what is needed for something to be different, and new, and industry or world changing.

Whereas this mostly pertains to the inspiration and ideation phase, it was also suggested that having someone from the target group in your team could be very beneficial for fast user testing and feedback in the prototyping and testing in the implementation phase. In addition, even though it could seem conflicting, it was mentioned by two experts that it could be beneficial to let competitors in your co-innovation teams, as they can prove to be a viable partner in the future. Even if not, they can still bring a lot of learnings to the co-innovation project.

The consensus among the experts who referred to the need for the right team was that the most important thing, besides the team having to be complementary, is that the people who make up the team all need to be able to do something in their field of expertise, thus trying to avoid situations where team members have to carry out tasks that they are not necessarily proficient in. If the right team is created, with the expertise from all collaborative partners, truly integrated teams form, which is a form of the integrated resources component that is so important for co-innovation ecosystem collaborations, as well as collaborative networks. In addition, creating the right team with the right people and the right resources, ultimately serves as a foundation the rest of the co-innovation process.

4.1.1.3. Co-designing the co-innovation process

As established per Le Ber and Brenzei (2015), the co-innovators need to collaboratively design the co-innovation process. In this stage, the collaborative parties draw the blueprint for the next stages in the co-innovation process. In doing so, clear agreements need to be made on the elements as derived from the theory: role allocation, resource sharing, and touchpoints for interactivity (Adler, Heckscher, & Prusak, 2011; Adner, 2006; McEvoy, 2013; Perks & Moxey, 2011; Romero & Molina, 2011). This blueprint functions as the foundation of the co-innovation process, and serves as guidance for the collaborative parties throughout the co-innovation process. In discussing the importance of creating a dependable blueprint for co-innovation projects from the start, Robert Novorolsky, Interactive Producer from MediaMonks mentioned:

> This is actually why setting it up from the beginning and putting it on paper and then going through the initial thought process really defines projects in the future. You will actually take that definition and that skeleton and you can keep reestablishing and going back to it. I call it creating a spot. So, if you have a great solid spot, you can

> always go back to that and then you can also recognize quickly if you deviated too far from that.

Especially in co-innovation projects, where the interdependence risk is relatively high, such a foundation could prove immensely important as it provides clarity for the teams that are involved in the co-innovation process. The importance of clear agreements in the creation of this blueprint was corroborated by most experts, as evidenced by the following statement from Willem van Zeeland from the NTR:

> We always work with an agreement, a contract where we describe all those aspects. Very important is of course defining the roles, there's also an agreement about the financial collaboration, office rights, and communication […] we're trying to describe all of them in the agreement that we make before we really start. And that is the basis for the project.

As mentioned, these agreements should include a clear overview as to who does what in the co-innovation process. When the organizational alignment and the creation of the right team has been done correctly, it should be easy to allocate roles according to the experts. In the organizational alignment process, it was established what each partner's strengths and weaknesses are, permitting the partners to create the *right* team accordingly. The roles are then to be allocated according to the strengths of each team member. Allocating roles conform to each member's expertise was a recurring theme during the interviews, evidenced by Ewout Karel from T-Mobile, who mentioned the following when discussing how teams of everyone doing what they are good at used to be a pillar in old Dutch society: "so, it is all collaborating specialties. You shouldn't put a vision or something between there, which act like a bank. Just let the people work together [and let them do what they're good at]".

Most of the other respondents shared similar sentiments regarding role allocation, confirming that combining each other's expertise to have everyone work according to their specialty is mutually beneficial for the co-innovation collaboration. In addition, four out of ten interviewees mentioned one particular model that they use for role allocation throughout the co-innovation process: the RACI model. This is a model that accounts for who is responsible for a task, who is accountable for it, who needs to contribute to the task, and who needs to be informed about the task. These experts experienced the use of such a model as very pleasant as it gives clear, practical structure to the co-innovation process, which is something that is desirable in such complicated cross-organization projects. Concerning this, Myrthe Zwaan, Partnership and Technology Manager at Company X mentioned the following:

> You keep coming back to it throughout the whole project. This way you establish very clearly who is responsible for what, and who is accountable for it in the end. So that is a very pleasant way to get a clear overview what party needs to be informed about what, or contribute to it, and that gives a very clear structure in the process.

It was also mentioned during the interviews that a model like the RACI model can be updated continuously throughout the project, which is something that aids in countering the problem that it is increasingly difficult to specify roles and tasks from the outset due to the dynamic digital media environment, as identified by Perks and Moxey (2011). As such, the use of the RACI model, or any other alike, for role allocation could be considered advisable for co-innovation collaborations. Similar to the added value of aligning measurement metrics, adapting a model like the RACI model could also improve the dialogue and transparency between the collaborative parties, invigorating trust building between the partners (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

Somewhat of a discrepancy between the interviews and the established literature concerning role allocation was found as well. According to the theory, to get the best out of a co-innovation process, there needs to be systematic interplay between the teams (Gouillart, 2014; Jones & Kornum, 2013; McEvoy, 2013; Stahlberg & Maila, 2013). In fact, this is one of the three components that define ecosystem collaborations. This interplay between teams is something that was rarely discussed in the interviews however, even though it was hinted at by multiple experts, as evidenced by Robert Novorolsky from MediaMonks who mentioned that “maybe you can bring in an expert, someone who’s good at that, a consult for a project for a period of time”. Even though this embodies interplay between teams, it is not systematic, which is needed in ecosystem collaborations. Even though it was not mentioned by most interviewees, there was one respondent who clearly mentioned systematic interplay between teams in an ecosystem model. While discussing what he considers to be “the next phase in innovation”, Peter Smet, Innovation and Process Coordinator at the SvdJ, explained the following:

> You need to have some entrepreneurs within each department. And let's say you're in the accounting department and you're like okay I got a pretty good idea on how we can innovate in this department, then you take some time to test that out within that department. If that starts to work, he moves into the entrepreneurial department because that entrepreneurial department is not a fixed set of people but that's something that's always rotating.

In this, Smet illustrates the workings of systematic interplay between teams in an ecosystem by giving an example of how entrepreneurs do not have a fixed position, but rather systematically move from team to team based on where their value is the greatest. He followed the example up by saying:

> You need to think of a company, not as a sequence of a production chain, but more of an ecosystem where the teams are more joined together and always interacting with one another. That's very important. But it's also still very abstract because not a lot of companies are doing it. It's very difficult.

In this he also mentions the importance of continuous interactivity and the dynamic nature of ecosystem collaborations, once more confirming what was mentioned in ecosystem collaboration literature (Gouillart, 2014; Jones & Kornum, 2013; McEvoy, 2013; Stahlberg & Maila, 2013). Moreover, he mentions that it something that has not been widely adapted yet by other organizations, explaining why the systematic interplay between teams rarely came up during the interviews. Ecosystem collaborations are considered the next step in the co-innovation paradigm, and it appears from the interviews that it has not been widely adapted yet in the digital media landscape. It is something that is emerging though, as Boris van Bennekum, Innovation Lead at BNNVARA, mentioned when discussing what one of the vice presidents from Amazon presented at a conference as one of the three most underutilized elements in innovation:

> And the third one, believe it or not, is to go for an ecosystem [collaboration]. And it was very interesting to me because she described partnerships as a cross industry entity that needs to have a mutual mission. […] you need to partner up with influencer companies instead of the ones that are just tagging along […] and also you need to work out with these people you're working with for sort of a win-win situation that falls under a mission statement. And I found that really inspiring and interesting because I think they [Amazon] are absolutely right.

With this, van Bennekum confirms, by means of something that was presented to him by one of the vice presidents from Amazon, that ecosystem collaborations are something that still needs to be widely adopted, but could be mutually beneficial for the ones who do. It appears however, that this is a step that has not been taken yet by many organizations in the digital media environment. For now, collaborative co-innovation networks seem to be the model that is most fitting for what is the most common way of co-innovating today.

One thing the two co-innovation models have in common though, is the integration of resources, which is also the next step in the co-designing process that agreements need to be made for. Similar to role allocations, resource sharing was also found as something to be done according to the resources available and what is needed. All experts who commented on resource sharing agreed that it is important to have clear agreements on resource sharing from the outset to prevent problems later. Again, integrating resources for mutual benefit is at the core of co-innovation collaborations, so collaborators need to make sure that they are willing to integrate resources prior to starting the co-innovation process. In sharing resources, it also becomes apparent as to why integrative partnerships are the type of strategic partnerships that are needed in co-innovation so that mutual benefit can be reached. As illustrated by Ewout Karel from T-Mobile when discussing what resources to share for a particular innovation project with an innovating party that lacked expertise in marketing:

> So then I thought, if I give you 100.000 euros, you are going to hire a marketer [for your marketing]. I have 27 marketers in my office who I've sent to expensive trainings to make them experts in marketing. So why don't you just use my marketers and expertise that I already have? That way your [innovative idea] gets accelerated, and we get valuable learnings [among other benefits].

This illustrates the importance of pursuing integrative partnerships instead of philanthropic or transactional partnerships for co-innovation projects, as outlined in chapter 2. The difference being that instead of just sharing financial resources, something that is typical for philanthropic and transactional partnerships, Karel insisted to share readily available internal resources, allowing for both parties to benefit from each other's expertise. This sharing essentially made them integrative partnerships, creating the kind of mutual benefit that would not be able to be achieved with the other kinds of partnerships.

Lastly, agreements need to be made concerning communication touch points throughout the co-innovation process. Dialogue and continuous interactivity were established as fundamental elements in co-innovation collaborations (McEvoy, 2013), thus clear interactivity agreements are indispensable for the success of co-innovation projects. The respondents recognized the need for communication agreements, outlining that agreements need to be made concerning the how, when, where and how much of interactivity touch points. Based on the respondents' answers, these could include, amongst others: update meetings, feedback sessions, and sprints for the development and testing of the innovation. Besides physical meetings, other touch points as a means for communication that were suggested included online communication boards, online telecommunication tools,

and phone calls. Ultimately, the how, when, where and how much of touch points, and what is to be discussed during those touch points, should be tailored to the resources and needs of the co-innovation process, barring in mind that continuous interactivity is preferred.

However, even though communication agreements are made, partners should be encouraged to pro-actively reach out to each other even when there is no agreed-upon touch point to be had. The importance of pro-active communication is underlined by Remy van Leeuwen, Product Innovation Manager at Booking.com, who recognized that pro-active communication is mutually beneficial: “At the same time it's also beneficial for us to reach out to them because we're all ultimately in this business together. We believe in creating business that brings value to both”. Pro-active communication is often beneficial for both parties in collaborative project, underlining the importance of continuous interactivity.

The steps taken in the organizational alignment, right team creation, and co-designing of the process are all part of what is also referred to as the pre-production process. Even though these steps are fundamental for the success of a collaborative effort, it was mentioned by Robert Novorolsky from MediaMonks that it something that is often underappreciated by organizations:

> Pre-production is probably where people spend the least amount of money and time on, but also if it's not done properly, it costs you the most amount of time and money. So sometimes it's just about getting people, making sure people realize that if you don't get it working that early, then we can't accomplish our goals in the end.

The importance of the pre-production process should not go unnoticed as the alignment of organizations for mutual understanding, the creation of the right co-innovation teams, and the co-designing of the upcoming project form the basis for the co-innovation process. In this, Prahalad and Ramaswamy’s (2004) DART pillars for trust building were found to be essential for a successful partnership creation process, as well as continuous dialogue and interactivity.

4.1.2. Partnership maintenance

4.1.2.1. Adapting to evolving contingencies

Aside from the fact that the digital media landscape is very dynamic and always evolving, innovation projects itself are also cause for a lot of uncertainties. It was said by many experts that innovation is a risky business since it is hard to predict the outcome of innovation projects. This goes double for co-innovation projects, since the interdependency on each other is cause for additional uncertainties. According to Myrthe Zwaan, Partnership

and Technology Manager at Company X, the only clarity you can rely on in co-innovation is that what you agree on in the partnership creation process: “and in co-creation the trajectory and the end result are unclear because what do you establish clearly in advance? You establish what you need, but the trajectory towards that is very uncertain”. Therefore, it is imperative that partners communicate continuously with each other, especially if contingencies occur.

Numerous respondents recognized that regular meetings for updates and being together in the same physical space as much as possible could be helpful to anticipate on evolving contingencies. In addition, it was found that partners should inform each other as soon as possible when contingencies occur. In discussing this, Sicco Wegerif, Head of Big Builds at MediaMonks, also validated the importance of transparency in partnership maintenance:

> Stuff can just happen. […] being as honest as possible and involving your client as soon as you know. So, if you know at 10:30, don't tell them one minute to 12, right? And I think that way […] because we see ourselves as a partner and not just as a supplier, it’s a much better way to cooperate and join forces because if you keep information back, or when you straight to lie to them, or are not honest, how can you have a long-lasting relationship?

This is something that was apparent throughout the interviews, with all respondents agreeing that continuous dialogue and transparency are paramount in co-innovation collaborations. This dialogue should be honest and direct, which means sometimes being a somewhat unfriendly, which is fine according to Ruud Hendriks from Innoleaps since “business is not the same as friendships”. A benefit of these co-innovation partnerships is that these partners are in it for mutual benefit, so combining resources for solve evolving contingencies is an advantage these partners have, and that should be utilized. This also means that partners should always be reachable and readily available for each other so that if contingencies do occur, they are able to deal with them collaboratively, and in a timely manner. These findings substantiate what was found in the literature concerning the importance of continuous interactivity, as well as transparency throughout the co-innovation process (McEvoy, 2013; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

In addition, as established in the previous section, it is increasingly difficult to allocate roles from the outset since roles could be subject to change throughout the co-innovation process. Therefore, roles should be recalibrated according to what is needed for the co-innovation process. Whereas earlier it was opted that the use of something similar to a RACI model could help in this, Thomas Hurkxkens, New Media Director at the Centre for

Innovation Leiden University, made a point of explicitly reminding partners that you are both in it for mutual benefit helps this process since role changes would be in the best interest of both partners:

> So obviously you try at the beginning to determine who is doing what, but this can change over the course of the project depending on how the project is evolving. So, we always make it very explicit to our partners that we are innovating as well, right? So, we are discovering as well with them. So, these kinds of changes in roles and responsibilities can change and can vary over projects.

Reminding each other that they are in this partnership for mutual benefit was something that recurred in multiple interviews, confirming Austin's (2000) and Le Ber and Branzei's (2015) claims about the need to continuously reiterate shared value, as well as the importance of the risk-benefits pillar in the DART model for trust (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Role allocation was not the only thing that was mentioned as something that could be in need to be recalibrated throughout the co-innovation process. Per suggestion of Robert Novorolsky from MediaMonks for example, the details of the blueprint that was co-designed in the partnership creation process should always be "optimized based on feedback and how you're working". These findings mostly agree with the established literature, confirming that partners need to be actively involved with each other since the dynamic innovation environment may cause them to have to re-align certain partnership creation factors.

4.1.2.2. Maintaining engagement and commitment

The second remerging theme in the literature as well as in the interviews, was that it is important to maintain engagements and commitments in co-innovation projects. The re-alignment of partnership creation factors, and the reiteration of shared value and mutual benefit certainly help in this, but are not the only measures that can be taken for this. For one, actively offering support for partnerships was suggested as a means to maintain engagement and commitment. Remy van Leeuwen from Booking.com for example, mentioned that they are always readily available for partners if their support is needed: "they will get the right support, and that could be also the partner service that we have - which are basically teams of agents that partners can call all around the world to speak about specific support they need".

This support could also mean giving partners access to certain resources that could aid in the support of partner needs, which is in line with the third pillar in Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) DART model. By far the most important thing in maintaining engagement and commitment throughout co-innovation projects however, is continuous

dialogue, which was stressed by all experts. This has been discussed elaborately before, but the importance of continuous interactivity cannot be understated. All experts agreed that continuous and interactive communication is the only way to maintain healthy partnerships, especially in co-innovation collaborations. In this, it was stressed that partners should also be reflective with each other, so that they can build and improve upon the relationship they already have.

4.2. Media innovation process

The media innovation process was recognized as the second main component that forms the foundation of co-innovation collaborations. For the purpose of this research, the media innovation process was applied by means of the design thinking model, as it was suggested that a specific process needs to be adapted for high quality innovations (Anthony, Eyring, & Gibson, 2006; Gouillart, 2014). This model contains three phases, and the findings of the thematic analysis will be presented according to these three phases. However, since the importance for generative innovations in the digital media landscape was established in the literature (Yoo, et al., 2012), there was an added focus on generative innovations. Hence the sub-question this section aims to answer is the following: *How can media organizations design a co-innovation process for generative innovations?*

As such, the sub-sections as outlined below will have a specific focus on how the co-innovation process works, and what the most important factors are in the co-innovation process. In addition, sub-section pertaining to how to make innovations generative is presented under the implementation theme. Even though generativity should be a consideration in all phases of the co-innovation process, it is in the implementation phase that the five dimensions that delineate generativity get developed. As such, and to maintain a coherent section for this subtheme, the findings concerning generative innovations are presented under the implementation theme.

4.2.1. Inspiration

4.2.1.1. Innovation category

The majority of the respondents affirmed that continuously innovating is imperative to stay competitive in the digital media landscape. Due to the fast pace of the digital media landscape, new problems, opportunities, and needs arise continuously, affirming the need for continuous innovation. Concerning this, Remy van Leeuwen from Booking.com asserted that:

> It's impossible in this world to be competitive with your business if you don't commit to continuously developing your software projects, or any products that are completely digital basically. Because this world moves very fast. Partners will come across new problems every single day and that means that our products will have to adapt to those needs and through those problems everyday as well.

While it was confirmed in the interviews that continuous innovation is needed in the digital media landscape, it was also implied that this continuous innovation can take many forms. In discussing these forms of innovation, the respondents identified two main considerations: the innovation category, and the nature of the innovation. The innovation categories that were mentioned by the respondents coincided with the five categories as established in the literature: product innovation, process innovation, position innovation, paradigmatic innovation, and social innovation (Francis & Bessant, 2005; Mulgan, et al., 2007; Shtern, et al., 2013).

Multiple respondents recognized that even though product innovation is the most common form of innovation, there are many instances in which innovation in the digital media landscape pertains to one of the other innovation categories. While confirming Lee, Olson, and Trimi's (2012) suggestion that media organizations have to innovate their business model to fit a global audience due to globalization, Willem van Zeeland, Head of Digital at the NTR, recognized that innovation in distribution channels could be just as important of an innovation as product innovation: " […]maybe using another distribution platform or maybe a distribution in collaboration with others in a way you never did before internationalization". This being what Stormsul and Krumsvik (2013) would identify as a combination of process innovation and position innovation.

Almost half of the experts made a point out of emphasizing that innovation goes beyond product innovation, mentioning forms of process innovation, position innovation, and paradigmatic innovation in the process. Sicco Wegerif from MediaMonks even mentioned that innovating the way consumers behave by steering their behavior through your innovations is considered an increasingly important form of innovation. Furthermore, the respondents urged the importance of the realization that the nature of innovation could stem from two different types of innovation: radical innovation and incremental innovation. Radical innovation is when something new is created, or how Peter Smet from the SvdJ describes it "in which you actually really define a problem for the first time and come up with the first solution for that problem". Even though radical innovation refers to an innovation that solves a new problem, it does not mean that something completely new needs to be created. Multiple experts proclaimed that this type of innovation is often the result of combining existing elements into a new solution, which is in accordance with findings from the literature

(Lee, Olson, & Trimi; 2012; Shtern et al., 2013). According to Sicco Wegerif, Head of Big Builds at MediaMonks, this could also include combining elements in a unique way so it fits a specific industry: “where we try to be innovative is in coming up with specific and unique combinations in how we can apply these existing or very new technologies best for the specific industries”.

Most experts however, agreed that the type of innovation that is far more common in the digital media landscape, is incremental innovation. This is when a problem is already solved, but that new innovative solutions are implemented to improve the existing solution. It was outlined in the theory, that there is a need for continuous innovation because new needs arise in the digital media landscape, causing organizations to have to adapt elements in their business models (Dahlgren, 2010; Gnyawali & Park, 2011**;** Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012). The shortened life cycle of products for example, means products need to be updated more frequently – which is a form of incremental innovation. These products were also referred to as continuous innovation products by experts, and need to be continuously optimized based emerging needs. According to Remy van Leeuwen, Product Innovation Manager at Booking.com, these optimizations do not have to be very big or impactful:

> […] very often they are part of continuous innovation products. So, these are relatively small optimizations in the product that make the product better and that's all based on adding extra functionality, or different data, or different information or expanding how a feature is used […] you know, addressing a need.

This was corroborated by multiple experts, who also mentioned that ensuring that innovations are continuous so that incremental innovation is possible in the future is something that needs to be considered from the very beginning when an innovation is first developed. That incremental innovation is most common among corporations is something that according to Ewout Karel, Senior Innovation Manager at T-Mobile, can be accredited to the fact that these corporations “lack the entrepreneurial mindset”. According to Karel, the only way big corporations can do radical innovation, is to partner up with smaller organizations who still have the entrepreneurial mindset to create radical innovations. With this he testifies to the need for co-innovation, agreeing with Lee, Olson, and Trimi (2012) who suggested that co-innovation allows organizations to create value that a single organization could not create alone.

A key takeaway from this subtheme, is that innovation can come in a multitude of ways. The emergence of digitization has opened up possibilities for innovation that were not apparent before, and media organizations can capitalize on these possibilities by partnering with other organizations for co-innovation projects. The experts mostly confirmed the theory

that was outlined in chapter 2, with the addition that they believe that organizations should have an open mindset to different kinds of innovation that are made possible by co-innovating with external parties. It is also with this mindset that emerging opportunities and needs in the market need to be approached by media organizations.

4.2.1.2. Identifying opportunities and needs

No matter the type of innovation or innovation category, co-innovative projects require the collaborative parties to identify where the opportunity or need for innovation lies. The respondents mentioned various ways as to how to identify opportunities or needs in the digital media landscape, ranging from visiting conferences, to data analysis, to scouring the environment by analyzing emerging developments and visiting other organizations for observations and learnings. Thomas Hurkxkens, New Media Director at the Centre for Innovations Leiden University, for example, mentioned that they often find inspiration for innovations by analyzing potential opportunities in technological developments: ”we first of all look at that tech landscape and look if there are any technologies that have a potential to solve challenges”.

Whereas it is more common for innovators to find opportunities or needs themselves, it is also possible that they are approached by external parties that have an innovation problem they need want to solve by co-innovating with the organization. Eight out of ten experts mentioned this as a way that they get inspiration for co-innovation process. They mentioned that it is important to approach those ideas for innovation with an open mind, and be willing to take a certain amount of risk. Even though not too many liberties should be taken with risks, it was lamented by the experts that a certain amount of risk is inherent to doing innovation, as the outcome of innovation projects cannot be pre-determined. In addition, even though a co-innovation project might not work out the way the partners had originally hoped, multiple respondents mentioned that the learnings that come out of such projects could be more valuable in the long term than the initial estimated value of the original project.

As such, even though not all ideas for innovation are worth taking up for a co-innovation process, approaching organizations with ideas for innovation with an open mind could prove very beneficial in the long term, especially in the fast-paced digital media landscape. No matter how the opportunity or need is identified though, the innovation problem that arises from these opportunities or needs demands to be validated first. Seven of the experts mentioned that the first thing to do after the problem definition is established, is to validate whether the problem is actually the problem that needs to be innovated. There are two tiers to this.

First, it needs to be validated that the problem is actually a problem that warrants innovation. It was explained by multiple experts that it should never be an organization's goal to innovate, but that there should be an actual problem that needs to be solved by means of innovation. In describing the recurring problem among those organizations, Robert Novorolsky, Interactive Producer at MediaMonks, said: "It's innovation to be innovative, not to solve a problem. You want to make sure that your innovation solves a goal". Similar sentiments were shared by other experts, who agree that innovation is not something that should be forced.

Second, it needs to be validated that a potential solution to the problem actually solves a real problem. Multiple respondents repeatedly mentioned that a perceived problem is not always a real problem. Ruud Hendriks, Co-founder of Innoleaps, said that there are a significant number of innovations that fail in the market because "it is all products that solve problems that are not real. People often think that there is a problem, but it turns out not to be a problem at all". A thorough problem validation process could prevent costly failure in the later stages of the innovation process.

In addition, it should be validated that the perceived problem is the whole problem. Remy van Leeuwen from Booking.com explained that they often get approached by partners with an innovation problem, but that solving this innovation problem is not necessarily "the sole thing that they need". With this he means that there is sometimes more to the perceived problem than what is realized, which is why sometimes problems are fixed, but not solved. Van Leeuwen gives an example of how giving a business that is consistently struggling money to pay their bills does not fix the problem that their business is consistently struggling, which is why they cannot pay their bills in the first place. Therefore, innovators need to make sure that their solution solves the whole, real problem rather than a perceived problem. The distinction between perceived problems and real problems is also something that was perceived to be important in previous research (Brown, 2008).

4.2.1.3. Familiarization with the environment

For identifying opportunities and needs, validating innovation problems, and as a means for preparation for the ideation phase, the co-innovators should familiarize themselves with the environment they operate in. This goes for the environment of all partners involved and includes, but is not limited to, familiarization with the aforementioned technological landscape, businesses that operate in the landscape, and the customer segment. Multiple respondents pointed out the need to have a thorough understanding of their customer segments. Organizations need to know who their customers are, and what their needs and competences are. Sicco Wegerif from MediaMonks for example, mentioned the need to know the customer's psyche and technical competences for product innovation:

> [You need to know] these are your customers, main customer groups. This is how they make decisions. This is what we understand of their needs. So, if we present our product, it should be aligning with those needs so they understand that we are the best product. Do you start at technical possibilities and technical constraints we need to take into account?

This proved a recurring pattern throughout the interviews, affirming that a thorough analysis of the environment that is being operated in, is a crucial part in the co-innovation process. Additionally, specifically as it pertains to the customer segment, it was brought up that to really familiarize oneself with a customer segment, the behavior of the customer segment should be studied rather than only asking them for their opinions. In the familiarization of the environment, it was asserted that, just as in many other parts of the co-innovation process, there is a need to validate all learnings. Concerning this, Ruud Hendriks from Innoleaps warned about a looming danger that exists among professionals:

> You don't have to validate the things that you're sure of. The biggest mistake many entrepreneurs make however, is that they think they're sure of something, while that may not be the case. The danger is that professionals think they know everything about their industry, and therefore think they know their customer segment […] you have to start with an open mind.

Knowing the ins and outs of the environment that is being operated in, including customer segments, will be beneficial for co-innovators in the later stages of the co-innovation process, particularly for considerations of feasibility, viability, and desirability. According to the respondents, the familiarization with the environment is also something that needs to be continuously updated, and thus is something that comes back in later stages of the co-innovation process as well. The information gained while identifying opportunities or needs, and while familiarizing with the environment can then be used to establish a solid problem definition for which innovative solutions can be developed in the later stages of the co-innovation process. This problem definition needs to be shared and aligned across the collaboration network or ecosystem collaboration, which is something that coincides with the organizational alignment process in the partnership creation phase.

4.2.2. Ideation

4.2.2.1. Maturing the innovative idea

Once there is a clear problem definition that is validated and when the organizations have familiarized themselves with the environment, the organizations need to come up with ideas as to how to solve the innovation problem. It was suggested by respondents that the innovation problem should always be starting point in the ideation process, rather than the innovative idea. As mentioned by Peter Smet, Innovation and Process Coordinator at the SvdJ,

> For me that innovative idea is not the starting point, but the problem is the starting point, that's also really the core of what we're doing when we're trying to innovate. And then the innovative idea that you're coming up with is just […] basically once you've gotten the problem as clear as you can, then finding the most effective and efficient way to solve that problem.

The literature proposed that finding the ideal solution to an innovation problem starts with brainstorming and divergent thinking (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). This is something that was echoed by a majority of the respondents, who emphasized that an open mindset where creatives think in terms of what is possible instead of what is not is needed to come up with the most optimal solution, as illustrated by the following statement from Sicco Wegerif from MediaMonks:

> We try to be innovative in our thinking and think open-minded and hardly ever think, well that's not possible, it hasn't been done before. If it hasn't been done before, it's cool if you can figure out how to do it, right?

In addition, besides of a team needing to have an open mind, the make-up of the team should not be underestimated in this process. If the *right* team is established in the partnership creation phase, the brainstorming and divergent thinking should happen among a complementary team of creatives and experts from each partner, who have their expertise in various disciplines. This way it is possible to think of solutions while optimizing each organizations expertise, capabilities, and resources - which is how partnerships become mutually beneficial. Putting this team together in a room for an extended period of time was suggested to be the best way in terms of thinking of solutions, as illustrated by Ewout Karel, Senior Innovation Manager at T-Mobile: “Innovation always sounds like one of those ‘Eureka’ moments, but that is not what it is. Innovation is just putting the right people together, and then the idea of ‘let’s do it this way’ will come naturally”. The importance of being in the same physical space in this part of the co-innovation process was corroborated by nearly all experts, who suggested various meeting possibilities including sprints and

design session workshops. No matter what type of meeting or communication touchpoint it is though, the most important thing is that it happens collaboratively so that the collaboration can profit optimally from all individual knowledge, capabilities, and resources.

In this, the co-innovators should not always strive to find the perfect solution right away. Co-innovation is a continuous process, meaning there is room for the testing and optimization of innovations to perfect the solution. In fact, Remy van Leeuwen, Product Innovation Manager at Booking.com, asserted that his team always makes the assumption that this initial solution is the wrong one, so they have an open mind when they test the presumed solution: “we then have to measure, the right things in order to decide in which direction we should change the product or optimize the product or even abandon the product and start in a completely different direction”. This is also an example of testing and prototyping in the ideation phase, whereas mostly the testing and prototyping in continuous innovations happen in the implementation phase.

In addition, it was asserted by multiple respondents that it could be helpful for the co-innovating teams to include someone from the customer segment, or an employee with the same demographics as the customer segment, in this process. Thomas Hurkxkens, New Media Director at the Centre for Innovation Leiden University, for example, mentioned that his team often includes students (i.e. his customer segment) in this process: “you always try to find the students to be part of this project so that we can get quick feedback from the end user”. This is also an element of what was referred to earlier as the interplay between teams, which is considered one of the main components of ecosystem collaboration. Even though this is not necessarily an example of systematic interplay between teams, it does show how experts (in this case of the customer segment) can be brought into the team to perform specific tasks for the mutual benefit of the team.

Before the innovative solution as thought of in the aforementioned sprints and design workshops are developed and implemented, there needs to be a strong consideration of the feasibility, viability, and desirability of this solution.

4.2.2.2. Consideration of feasibility, viability and desirability

As established in the literature, an innovative solution needs to be feasible from a monetary and technological perspective, viable from a business perspective, and desirable for the customer segment (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). This is something that was widely substantiated by all of the experts. It is important that the organizational alignment and the familiarization with the environment is done correctly for this so that the right information can be scrutinized for these considerations. Concerning desirability, the innovation problem should have been validated in the inspiration phase. If this was done correctly, and the innovation problem was validated as a real problem, that means that there is desirability for an innovative solution to

that problem. Then, if the learnings from the familiarization of the environment were taken into account in the solution development, the solution should be desirable as well. However, the respondents emphasized that it still needs to be validated as to how desirable this particular innovative solution is. In this, Peter Smet from the SvdJ recognized that the degree of desirability also affects the viability as according to him, a consideration in desirability is: “What are people willing to spend to solve that problem?”. If what the people are willing to spend on the innovative solution does not cover the costs of developing and maintaining this innovative solution, then the innovation is not viable enough to actually develop and implement.

Besides viability from a financial standpoint, another consideration of viability that was mentioned by the respondents is technological viability. An innovation based on a new technology could be a very good innovation, but may not be viable if the ability to use the technology has not been widely adapted by the market yet. This why it is important to have been familiarized with the technological capabilities and constraints from the implementation environment, evident in the following answer from Sicco Wegerif from MediaMonks:

> But then if you have an old school organization who cannot use it, then you have a very new shiny tool which will not be used. Because we invented this […] cool chat bot and the chat bot automatically connects to the call center, but their call center has people who are not able to pick up those automated responses. Then it still dies.

However, this does not always mean that the innovation should not be made. When discussing virtual reality based innovation, Willem van Zeeland, Head of Digital at the NTR, mentioned the following after discussing that virtual reality is not ready to be adapted properly by a wide audience yet:

> It's hard to, uh, is this is difficult to develop a product that is only for a small niche audience, at the same time you want to experiment with VR content […] because your organization needs to be ready to work with those techniques and to prepare for a future when those techniques may be much bigger or more important, or maybe not. I mean, you have to, you have to kind of predict the future, if we are going to be a big mainstream, media technology in five years or in 10 years, but that's hard to predict.

So even though an innovative idea may not be viable at the time, the learnings from developing such innovation could prove to be valuable in the future, even though this is risky due to the uncertainties of the future. Lastly, the respondents mentioned three

considerations of feasibility. First, it needs to be feasible to develop and implement the innovation in a certain time frame. If the time frame is unfeasible, the innovation could suffer from a potential rush in developments, which could be costly. Second, it should be feasible according to the budget. This means it is not always possible to develop the ideal solution, as implementation on a big scale of said ideal solution could be too expensive to be feasible. Third, it should be feasible from a technological perspective. If the innovative solution is not feasible from a technological perspective, it does not mean that the solution cannot work. Robert Novorolsky from MediaMonks explained that it just means that the team might have to get back to brainstorming and divergent thinking: “you research and develop, what is the feasibility of that, and then you come back to the creative idea and understand, these are the things that are feasible with that idea, how do we enhance creatively those feasibility restrictions?”.

So even though an innovative solution may not always be feasible, viable, or desirable from the outset, it does not mean that the innovative solution may not work at all but rather that the co-innovative team need to see how it can be adjusted and improved. After the innovative solution has passed all the aforementioned considerations for all collaborative parties, a value proposition needs to be developed, or as Sicco Wegerif from MediaMonks puts it: “so now we put it in a blender and we create a concept based on it. And that concept should help achieve those business goals”. This value proposition is then taken to the implementation phase, in which it is developed. Throughout the interviews, it appeared that one of the most important things for the ideation phase, is for teams to be in the same physical space together to optimally profit from each other’s expertise.

4.2.3. Implementation

4.2.3.1. Development of innovation

The first thing that needs to be done after the idea for an innovative solution has been matured enough for development, is a clear brief of what the innovative solution should entail. According to Robert Novorolsky from MediaMonks, this is something that sits at the core of the production process: “I think having good creative and good brief for production really lends itself to the whole project”. After the brief, the partners should get together to make arrangements for, amongst other things: how the innovation will be developed, who does what, and about the communication touch points that are to come. As such, this is typically a moment when the recalibration of roles takes place.

An approach concerning how to execute the development of innovations in the co-innovation process that was recurring throughout the interviews concerning, was to work in sprints consisting of regular tests and updates, and evaluating the progress on a regular

basis. According to Peter Smet from the SvdJ, these sprints are also an effective way to facilitate dialogue between teams:

> A sprint can consist of one or more tests, and that can be a week, two weeks, maybe a month, depending on the size of the tests that you're running. And that should also be the heartbeat of the dialogue with the people you're working with.

The regularity of sprints and update meetings can differ per co-innovation project, but the higher the regularity, the better the result was the common sentiment. Myrthe Zwaan mentioned that the increasing regularity of sprints and update meetings one of the most important differences between co-innovation and the old way of innovating, explaining that her co-innovation teams meet up every week: ”the new way of co-creation, is really meeting and evaluating the status every week, and adjust when needed”. This also underlines the importance of continuous interactivity, which was considered one of the main components of co-innovation ecosystem collaborations. In fact, Remy van Leeuwen from Booking.com suggested that no dialogue or interactivity between partners and teams could be catastrophic for the outcome of the project:

> Whenever a product team is developing a new feature, the worst thing that can happen is that a team will never have any contact with partners. Um, you know, that's when you create features that are just irrelevant or not useful, or not working in the way they should.

As opposed to in the ideation phase however, the contact points in this stage of the process does not necessarily require being in the same physical space together, even though that is still the preferred method. However, this could prove difficult sometimes, which is why update meetings and other meeting alike could be conducted through online communication tools, as suggested by the experts. Besides the continuous dialogue and interactivity, the other recurring element from the interviews that was deemed to be important in this stage of the co-innovation process, was the testing and prototyping to optimize the innovation until deemed ready for implementation.

One model for this prototyping and testing that was mentioned by multiple experts, is the ‘scaling-up model’. In this model, the innovation is first implemented on a small scale, after which the performance of the innovation is reevaluated by using data and user testing. After this the innovation is optimized based on this reevaluation, and implemented on a slightly larger scale. This process repeats itself till the desired result is achieved. According to Thomas Hurkxkens, from the Centre for Innovation Leiden University, it is important to not

be afraid to fail in this process: “we try to very quickly and learn, also by failing. So, what does not work, and when we have quickly learned that through building a prototype, we can then scale up and create a real project around it”. This real project then being that what will be implemented in the environment it was originally intended for. Amongst the other experts who referred to this model was Ruud Hendriks from Innoleaps, who added that these first prototypes on a small scale should be “the simplest, and cheapest possible version of the [innovation]”. This is because the first version is expected to be imperfect and necessary improvements are anticipated. As mentioned, failure is not something to be afraid of, but keeping the costs of failure low is desirable.

The importance of prototyping and testing until the innovation is deemed ready for implementation is something that was mentioned by all experts, as well as in the literature (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). This optimization process was also deemed to be absolutely fundamental in the process of making innovations generative.

4.2.3.2. Making the innovation generative

As outlined earlier, to fully capitalize on the value creation opportunities that the digital media landscape has created, co-innovators should focus on making their innovations generative (Yoo, et al., 2012). The literature also identified five dimensions that delineate generativity (Zittrain, 2008), which if implemented correctly in innovations, could make innovations generative. Whereas most experts asserted that they actively consider the implementation of one or more of the generativity dimensions in their innovations, there were some suggestions that the generativity dimensions are not considered enough yet. Per Myrthe Zwaan**: “**I think it is not considered enough yet, but it would be great if you can implement this in your product development”. Despite lamenting that the generativity dimensions are not considered enough yet, she does recognize the potential of the dimensions and expresses that it is something that should be considered in innovation today. In addition, she pointed out that the dimensions should be implemented in the development stage of the co-innovation process. Because even though generativity should be a consideration in the inspiration phase and the ideation phase, it is in the implementation phase that the generativity dimensions get developed.

Throughout the interviews, the importance and workings of all five dimensions that delineate generativity were discussed. First, in discussing things that are important to create generative innovations, Remy van Leeuwen, Product Innovation Manager at Booking.com, mentioned accessibility and ease of mastery: “When it comes you know actually people using the functionality, without getting any further support, we just need to make sure that the product is accessible and understandable enough”. This corroborated by multiple experts, who agreed that no one is going to generate value with your innovation if they

cannot access or use it. Ewout Karel from T-Mobile, even mentioned that him emphasizing the importance of ease of mastery in innovations is a big part of the value that his team adds to the co-innovation process:

> Often it is a techie that thought of it, who thinks that everyone can do that [what he can do]. Well, 99% of the people in my customer segment is not tech savvy at all, and does not understand it at all. So, a big part of my added value is that my people make the products as simple as they possibly can because the simpler the product, the higher the adoption.

He goes on to mention that they are able to ensure ease of mastery by conducting extensive research on their customer segment, which allows them to discover what it is that their customers find hard to master. In addition, multiple experts acknowledged the value of transferability, adaptability, and leverage for generative innovations. When discussing ways in how adaptability can be implemented in an innovation, Sicco Wegerif from MediaMonks mentioned the following: “We have interchangeable LEGO blocks, and try to be as flexible for the client as possible so that not every change needs development or involvement from us”. In this, he was referring to a connector that they built that can adapt and connect to multiple systems, which organizations can use in their own innovations. By making the connector as flexible as possible, MediaMonks was able to ensure that their connector is able to adapt to multiple technological environment and so function as a generative innovation. Since others are able to use to connector to generate their own innovations, the connector also contained a high capacity of leverage.

There are multiple experts who acknowledged the importance of these factors, sharing how they can be applied in different ways in the process. Willem van Zeeland of the NTR shared a story of how they developed an innovation for an art project, which they made so adaptable and transferable that it is now also used for video school boards. Similarly, Ewout Karel from T-Mobile explained how their IOT technology has been made so adaptable that farmers can use it for their own innovations, in this case referring to an innovation which is to be referred to as innovation A: “And then he can make an offer to each farmer like hey this is my innovation A, all you have to do is insert this T-Mobile card and you are all set”. This shows how adaptability and ease of mastery can stimulate a high capacity of leverage that can be utilized so that others can generate value with it. In this case, T-Mobile made the assets that they have adaptable so that others can use it, indicating that not all generative solutions need to be new inventions, but could be innovations on existing assets.

Moreover, multiple experts affirmed that a generative innovation does not always have to be a single product or service, but could also be an infrastructure. Remy van

Leeuwen from Booking.com referred to how the framework of functionalities could have a high generative capacity that others can use:

> So, if we create a functionality that sits within a framework and it seems to be a successful functionality for a partner or for our end users, it could be that we could make this framework available to other product teams from other parts in the business to use that same framework for their product and therefore extending their product functionality into a different way for other parts in the business.

This is in accordance with the findings of Nielsen and Hanseth (2010), in that this framework that is being referred to functions as an infrastructure that stimulates innovation by others, thus being a generative framework. Similarly, Thomas Hurkxkens from the Centre for Innovation of Leiden University mentioned that they have developed an infrastructure in the form of a toolkit that others can use to create their own innovative educational material. They hope that this toolkit stimulates others to use the infrastructure they built for their own innovations, agreeing with Nielsen and Hanseth's suggestion: "we hope that our projects also inspire others to go and create their own applications just because they can see what is possible and what's not". These infrastructures possess a high degree on each of the dimensions for generativity, ensuring that they themselves are generative.

Earlier, Ewout Karel referred to how they use customer research to develop ease of mastery for their innovations. Doing tests and conducting research to discover how an innovation can be optimized is part of the continuous innovation process, and embodies the need for continuous prototyping and testing. In fact, most respondents agreed that specifically focusing on the continuous testing and optimization of the five dimensions that delineate generativity is the best way to ensure that generative innovations are develop, as evidenced by what Sicco Wegerif from MediaMonks mentioned when discussing capacity of leverage:

> Then you can start and optimizing the leverage, to use your term. I think part of the, the newest and most innovative solutions is that they had lean starts, right? So, they went out in the open pretty quickly, perhaps not with the final product, but allowing them to gain usage and user insights as quickly as possible, taking out shitty parts and replacing them with solid parts. Usability research, user testing. All those elements need to be in place.

Thus, the five dimensions that delineate generativity were all confirmed to be important factors in making innovations generative. There are a multitude of approaches that co-

innovators could take to implement the dimensions in the development of the innovation. To ensure the generative capabilities of an innovation, the innovation should be continuously tested and optimized according to the five dimensions, which emerged to be not mutually exclusive based on the interviews.

However, even though an innovation is generative when it has a high degree of all five dimensions, it does not guarantee that it will be used to generate value. Zittrain's (2008) five dimensions that delineate generativity are aimed at making it as easy as possible for users to generate value using the generative innovation. It being easy to generate value though, does not ensure that users want to do so. In business-to-business innovations, this is less of an issue as businesses have incentives to create value. Consumers however, have less incentive, notwithstanding actually wanting to do so. This is an issue that was brought to attention by Boris van Bennekum from BNNVARA when discussing capacity of leverage:

> Leverage comes from involvement in earlier stages as well. It might build up to making something together with your audience or something like that, but it doesn't start out that way per se. First you have to get them there, if you know what I mean.

By 'getting there', he meant to say that consumers need to get engaged with the innovation first before they would want to use it to generate value. A method he suggested for doing so is by steering them through staged progression. This staged progression includes four stages, ranging from low attention and short time to high attention and long time. These represent micro moments, where the users progressively start spending more time and attention on the innovation, getting more and more engaged with it as they progress. In the last stage of this progression, high attention and long time, users are engaged enough to be incentivized to generate value using the innovation.

This is just one example of how to get consumers engaged enough to generate value using the generative innovation. The results indicate that, specifically for business-to-consumer innovations, an element of engagement needs to be accounted for. As such, in the ideation phase, there should be a consideration of how the innovation can be engaging enough for consumers to use it to generate value.

4.2.3.3. Implementation of the innovation

Once the prototyping and testing has developed the innovative solution to the point that it is deemed ready for implementation, preparations for the actual implementation need to be made. In this it is important to be familiarized with the environment that the innovation is implemented in, and the nature of the innovation. Especially in business-to-consumer innovations, the co-innovators need to find the right distribution channel and the right brand.

Sometimes, it is more beneficial to implement innovations under another brand than under the brand of one of the co-innovating parties. Karel Ewout from T-Mobile for example, explained that even though they co-innovate on a lot of product innovation projects, they rarely implement those innovations under their brand as they are “not known to be a product brand”. Therefore, it could be more beneficial to implement and distribute the innovation under another partner’s brand, or to get a distribution partner in the co-innovation network.

Lastly, it was emphasized by the respondents that the co-innovation process does not end after the implementation of the innovation. As outlined earlier, innovation in the digital media landscape needs to be continuous as the landscape is continuously developing as well. Therefore, there will always be a need for optimizing these innovations. Especially with generative innovations, the need to continuously innovate the innovation is essential. The co-innovators can jump back and forth between the stages, sometimes meaning that the co-innovation process starts all over again to optimize the implemented innovation. The co-innovating parties should always analyze what is happening in the digital media landscape, and how their innovation is doing in this dynamic environment, or in the words of Sicco Wegerif from MediaMonks:

> [we have to evaluate] What happened? What did we see? What went well? What went wrong? This is where we are now and this is where we want to get to. So how do we get there, and what things that need to change? And then start mapping new steps in a new project.

The co-innovation process is a continuous process, meaning that the partnership should be continuous as well if the optimal result is to be continuously achieved. The continuous nature of co-innovative projects requires a lot of testing and optimization, but if done right could give the co-innovators a competitive advantage in the digital media landscape.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to gain a greater understanding on how media organizations can sustain a competitive advantage in the dynamic digital media landscape. Because of the fast-paced digital media landscape, media organizations have to continuously innovate parts of their business model to be able to be competitive in the digital media environment. However, it was found that a single organization's resources are often too limited to satisfy the need for continuous innovation, in terms of finances as well as knowledge, capabilities, and other resources. Therefore, media organizations need to employ an open model for innovation, one in which resources can be shared intensively and mutual benefit can be reached. The model that was suggested to be used in doing so, was the co-innovation model. In addition, it was found that generative innovations are needed to maximize the potential of co-innovation in the digital media landscape. As such, the aim of this research was to answer the following research question: *how can media organizations leverage strategic partnerships to co-innovate generative innovations?*

It was found that there are two main components that are needed for this: strategic partnerships and the media innovation process. As such, the significant findings are presented along the lines of those two components. The key findings of this research are presented below, after which an answer to the research question is presented. Furthermore, theoretical and practical implications are discussed, followed by an evaluation of the limitations of this research, as well as suggestions for future research.

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5.1. Significant findings and theoretical implications

The results of the thematic analysis indicated that there are three main phases that need to be completed in order to establish a strategic partnership for co-innovation collaborations: organizational alignment, creating the *right* team, and the co-designing of the project. Together, these three phases form the foundation of the whole co-innovation process, since there are many moments in the rest of the co-innovation process where the collaborative parties fall back on this foundation. Even though many of the factors of the partnership creation phase were pre-established in the existing literature, this research has reevaluated them and developed a new framework in which all factors are divided in the aforementioned three phases. This does not only give a new spin to known literature, it also provides a framework that specifically focusses on what the key factors are in the partnering process for co-innovation collaborations.

In the organizational alignment phase, the collaborating organizations need to align themselves as to create clarity for what is to come next. This includes the creation of a mutual understanding of partnership creation factors that were established in the literature in

establishing mutual goals, defining shared value, and assessing each other's strengths and weaknesses (Adler, Heckscher, & Prusak, 2001; Austin, 2000; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006), but also more practical factors as aligning the use of terminology and the measurement tools that are to be used. The importance of the factors as established in the literature were substantiated by the experts that were interviewed, who also underlined the importance of Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) DART pillars for trust building throughout the duration of the co-innovation process. Therefore, the findings of existing literature were not only agreed upon, but expanded on by applying them to the co-innovation collaboration narrative.

Second, another significant finding was the importance of the creation of the *right* teams for co-innovation projects. One of the things that the experts were very adamant about, is that it is crucial to let everyone do what they are good at. One of the main attractions of co-innovation projects is that teams can be formed that transcend not only traditional industry boundaries, but also organizational boundaries. In doing so, the collaborative partners integrate their resources in these teams to make complementary teams that maximize the potential mutual benefit of the co-innovation process. These teams could also be referred to as integrated teams, since elements of each partnering organization are integrated in the teams. This is also why in co-innovation, collaborating parties should focus on establishing what Austin (2000) defines as integrative partnerships, rather than on philanthropic and transactional partnerships. These findings add to co-innovation collaboration literature in that it clearly outlines how resources of various organizations can be integrated for optimal mutual benefit, which is something that was not apparent in the literature before.

Some of the experts also added to the belief that ecosystem collaborations are the next step in innovation literature, even though it was also lamented that this might be a step that not all organizations are ready to take just yet. Especially the systematic interplay between teams in co-innovation projects is something that was not recognized as being important enough yet, even though both the literature (Gouillart, 2014; Jones & Kornum, 2013; McEvoy, 2013; Stahlberg & Maila, 2013) and some forward-thinking experts did recognize the potential of ecosystem collaborations with systematic interplay between teams. The systematic interplay between teams would also affect the way roles and resources are allocated in the co-designing process, as it allows for continuous rotation between teams based on expertise and needs.

Other significant findings that were found concerning the partnering process were the need for clear agreements on the co-designing factors, and the need for continuous interactivity. Especially the latter is something that was significant as even though it was mentioned to be important in ecosystem collaboration literature (Gouillart, 2014; Jones &

Kornum, 2013; McEvoy, 2013; Stahlberg & Maila, 2013), the fact that the experts were so adamant on the importance of continuous dialogue and interactivity was still a little surprising. This is in stark contrast with older innovation models, where the collaborating parties interacted only when needed at pre-established touchpoints. The findings of this research do not only substantiate the importance of the three main components of co-innovation ecosystem collaborations, they also assert that co-innovation ecosystem collaborations are to be taken serious in terms of possibly being the new innovation paradigm.

So, coming back to the first sub-question of this research: *how can media organizations develop strategic partnerships for co-innovation projects?* The key findings indicate that there are three phases that need to be completed successfully collaboratively to lay the foundation for the development of strategic partnerships for co-innovation projects. More specifically, these three phases are: organizational alignment, creating the *right* team, and co-designing the co-innovation project. In this, the integration of resources and continuous interactivity for partnership creation and maintenance, as well as transparency, were found to be crucial for this specific kind of collaboration, with the systematic interplay between teams as a possible additional one in the near future. These are the key success factors that need to be followed for media organizations to develop strategic partnerships for co-innovation projects.

In this lies also the foundation for successful co-innovation processes. In co-designing the co-innovation process, the collaborative parties already develop a foundational blueprint for the whole co-innovation process. Similarly, continuous interactivity was also something that was found to be essential throughout the different phases of the co-innovation process. One of key takeaways from the interviews concerning this, is that the most important thing in co-innovation is that everything is done together, which is also something that is unavoidable when members from different organizations are integrated in the same team in the earlier *right* team creation phase.

Moreover, other significant findings include the need to validate almost every step of the co-innovation process. This is something that the experts were very adamant on, and is also something that aids tremendously in ensuring feasibility, viability, and desirability in innovations. In addition, the need for continuous innovation by means of testing and optimizing was something that was widely corroborated by the experts. This is also something that agrees with the existing literature (Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012; Yoo, et al., 2012).

Lastly, to make innovations generative, the experts substantiated the importance of Zittrain's (2008) five dimensions that delineate generativity. These dimensions need to be thought of in every step of the co-innovation process, but most importantly developed and

optimized in the implementation phase. It was suggested that optimization was the most effective way to test for the five dimensions that delineate generativity and thus ensure that innovations become generative. Another thing that was found concerning generativity in innovations that was not established in the literature before, is that especially in business-to-consumer innovations, a certain element of engagement is needed for users to actually use the innovation to generate value. To go to say that this engagement factor should be a sixth dimension of generativity goes a little far, but it is definitely something that is to be considered.

Circling back to the second sub-question of this study: *how can media organizations design a co-innovation process for generative innovations?* The answer to this question lies for a big part in the foundation that is laid in the partnership creation process. It was found that continuous interactivity, continuous validation, and continuous optimization are essential for successful co-innovation projects in the digital media environment. Continuous optimization also proved to be fundamental in making innovations generative, which can be done by implementing a high degree of the five dimensions that delineate generativity (adaptability, capacity of leverage, accessibility, transferability, and ease of mastery) in innovations. In addition, even though not discussed in this chapter, key factors and specific steps that need to be taken in the co-innovation process were outlined in chapter 4, establishing a framework for how organizations can carry out co-innovation processes.

So, to answer the research question: *how can media organizations leverage strategic partnerships to co-innovate generative innovations?* The findings of this study indicate that this can be done by meticulously carrying out two main processes, that are not necessarily mutually exclusive: the strategic partnership process and the media innovation process. Co-innovation collaborations need to be created, in which the integration of resources, continuous interactivity, and possibly systematic interplay between teams are essential components. Key success factors in co-innovation processes for generative innovations include organizational alignment, creating the *right* team, co-designing the co-innovation project, continuous interactivity, continuous validation, and continuous optimization, including the optimization for the five dimensions that delineate generativity to ensure the innovation can be made generative. If these key factors can be treated successfully be the co-innovating parties, they can successfully co-innovate generative innovations.

The key findings of this research add to co-innovation literature not only by substantiating what was already known, but also by illustrating how key factors in the strategic partnership process as well as the media innovation process work and how they need to be approached, rather than just focusing on the why and what of the topic. This was something that was suggested as a means for future research by Lee, Olson, and Trimi (2012), thus also contributing to an identified literature gap.

5.2. Practical implications

As outlined in the previous section, key success factors as to how strategic partnership can be leveraged to co-innovate generative innovations were found. This included a framework for the creation of co-innovation partnerships. Managers all across the digital media landscape can adopt these key success factors, and other learnings from this study, to set up and carry out their own co-innovation processes. In addition, the findings of this study give unique insights into the workings of generativity in innovation development. This too is something that innovators all across the digital media landscape can take as learnings for creating their own generative innovations. Furthermore, co-innovation ecosystem collaborations were outlined as the possible next paradigm in innovation. Managers across the digital media landscape can take learnings from what was presented about co-innovation ecosystem collaborations, and investigate whether this is something they should start investing in while it is still an upcoming phenomenon.

5.3. Limitations

Even though various measures were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of this study, the research was confronted with some limitations. First, it was an educated decision by the researcher to exclude a nationality criteria from the sample as to ensure a high-quality expert selection by relieving some restrictions, as other selection criteria were deemed more significant to the results of this research. As such, the sample constituted of experts that were all employed in the Netherlands. This does comprise a limitation however, as there is a chance that there was some cultural bias in the results. In addition, this caused for the researcher to perhaps present a narrower view of the research topic.

Second, even though measures were taken to ensure standardization in the way interviews were conducted, there were some contingencies in the data collection that did not always allow for a fully standardized procedure. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, some interviews were conducted by phone, whereas others were conducted face-to-face. The latter was certainly the preferred method, but proved infeasible at times due to emerging contingencies and scheduling constraints. Furthermore, since the experts all had a very busy schedule, some interviews were shorter than others. This also affected the structure of the interviews at times, decreasing the level of standardization.

Third, the decision was made to focus on the design thinking model as a means to carry out the innovation process. This was decided based on suggestions in the literature. Even though it did not seem to skew any answers, there is a possibility that the results could have been slightly different if another innovation model was chosen.

Last, the interviews demonstrated that the co-innovation ecosystem collaboration paradigm is still a relatively new phenomenon. It is not something that has been widely adopted yet, even though there were indications that it will be in the future. Even though the focus of this research was on was co-innovation collaborations in general, and not specifically on ecosystem collaborations, it was not a major problem for the results. However, since the ecosystem collaborations emerged as the most advanced and potentially most profitable co-innovation collaboration model, it would have been interesting to find out more about the workings of this phenomenon. Despite some interesting insights on the phenomenon, the data on co-innovaiton ecosystem collaborations was not sufficient to draw significant conclusions.

5.4. Suggestions for future research

In correspondence with the aforementioned limitation of not having sufficient data to draw significant conclusions on co-innovation ecosystem collaborations, the first suggestion for future research is to investigate the co-innovation ecosystem collaboration paradigm more in depth to see how such collaborations work, and how it can be adopted by organizations in the digital media landscape. Especially the workings of the systematic interplay between teams in co-innovation projects is something that needs to be investigated further. Both the literature and the respondents who commented on the ecosystem collaborations suggested that there is high potential for such collaborations, making it worth investigating.

Second, it was mentioned by one of the interviewees that a certain level of engagement is needed for consumers to use generative innovations to generate value. It would be interesting if future research would focus on how this journey would work, and how innovators can ensure that their generative innovations are used to create value for them. There are certainly steps and stages to this, and investigating what they are and how they can be taken should generate interesting results.

Finally, developing generative innovations is the first step to having others generate value for the innovators without them having to be directly involved. The ultimate goal of this process would be to establish continuous value creation for the ecosystem collaboration. This means that the generative innovations are used continuously by a widely adopted audience to generate value. This could be both business-to-business and business-to-consumer based innovations. It would be interesting for future research to find out how the user network could be continuously activated so it keeps generating value, as well as other factors that might go into continuous value creation. There is a myriad of questions that require further investigation concerning co-innovation ecosystem collaborations and

continuous value creation and it would be interesting for future researchers to find the answers that are needed.

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Appendix A – Interview Guide

My name is Alexander, and I'm studying Media & Business. For my master thesis research, I would like to gain a greater understanding of how media organizations can create value for their business with partners in their media network by means of innovation. More specifically, the aim is to find out how this innovation can create value repeatedly, without the direct involvement of the media organization. In particular, I'd like to investigate the formation and maintenance of the partnerships and the process of innovation carried out with partners to produce a final output that enables that value creation.

First of all, I want to thank you for participating in my research today and being willing to participate in this interview. I will now go over some of the rights you have as an interviewee. The interview will take about 45 minutes. During this time, you may take a break or stop the interview, if you wish to do so. Just tell me that you would like a break. If you wish to discontinue the interview, then you also have that right. Additionally, you are not obliged to answer all of the questions if you don't want to.

For my research, I won't need any personal information, however, I would like to mention your name and professional title in my research paper. Would it be alright to use your name in my research paper or should I use an alias? But before we start: do you have any questions? Finally, I would like to ask if you are ok with me recording this interview?

Theme	**Questions**
Strategic partnerships	

Partnership creation	With the goal of co-innovation in mind…
	• How do you establish strategic partnerships?
	  ○ What are the important things that go into creating partnerships?
	  ➢ Defining common mission and/or goals
	  ➢ Defining expected value
	• How do you decide the role allocation for the process?
	• How do you establish the extent to which you can use each other's resources?
	• How do you establish a strong dialogue with partners?
	  ➢ Touch points
	• How do you measure potential risks and/or benefits when working together so intimately with a partner?
	• How do you ensure transparency with your partners?

Partnership maintenance	Considering evolving contingencies… • How do you maintain partnerships throughout the process? ➢ Adapting to evolving contingencies ➢ Continuous re-alignment of partnership creation factors ➢ Maintaining engagement and commitment • How do you maintain a strong dialogue throughout the partnership/process?
Media innovation process	**Shortly reiterate goal of the research**
Inspiration	• How do you come up with an idea for innovation with a partner? ➢ Identification of opportunities and/or needs ➢ Familiarization with the environment
Ideation	• How do you and your partner get from that idea for innovation to an actual innovation? o What are some of the steps that you take in this process? ➢ Brain storming and divergent thinking ➢ Consideration of feasibility, viability, and desirability ➢ Creation of value proposition
Implementation	• How can you ensure that others are able to use your innovation to create value for you without your direct involvement? o How can you ensure that your innovation has a high degree of: ➢ Adaptability ➢ Capacity of leverage ➢ Accessibility ➢ Transferability ➢ Ease of mastery • How do you and your partner implement your innovation? ➢ Continuous prototyping and testing ➢ Development and implementation

Appendix B – Form of consent

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Alexander Baanen
Westersingel 237
3015 LJ, Rotterdam, NL.

Mail: 388376fb@student.
Phone: +31631954105

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a research about co-innovation in the digital media landscape. The purpose of the study is to understand how media organizations can develop strategic partnerships to innovate with these partners.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to participate to be interviewed. In general terms, questions of the interview will be related to the formation and maintenance of strategic partnerships for co-innovation, and about the co-innovation process. In addition, questions will be asked as to how innovations can be made generative.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape / video recorder for the interview / focus group. 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 such as your employer's name not in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using an alias.

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 45 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— Matthijs Leendertse at leendertse@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.