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COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM: WHY MEDIA UNITE FOR CO-PROJECTS ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Objective of the article. *The objective of our study is to assess the potential of media partnership in the Ukrainian media sector, the extent to which those practices can assist individual newsrooms in addressing their strategic objectives and development plans, as well as what benefits, including social impact, the partnerships may bring.*

Research methodology. *The presented results are part of a larger-scale study of media partnership practices. Interviews of 116 media representatives and 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews with members of the profession whose media already had experience of co-projects, made it possible identify the areas where most of cooperation takes place. The study also enables better understanding of what newsrooms expect from the collaboration, what motivates them to collaborate, and what risks prevail when they decide on future partnership.*

Results *of the study showed that the key motivations for media cooperation is their desire to expand the audience coverage. At the same time, risks associated with competition and lack of understanding of parity cooperation mechanisms, are still constraining factors for these practices.*

Novelty. *The study contributes to rethinking approaches to journalistic cooperation of digital media.*

Practical value *lies in the need to update both professional and scientific discourses on the effective implementation of media partnership practices. Understanding the issues faced by newsrooms when organizing collaborations can give new impetus for wider application of these practices.*

Key words: *media, models of of media collaboration, media partnership, network collaboration, collaborative models in journalism.*

I. Introduction

Media by their nature can never be partners. This widely accepted view has been disproved more and more recently. According to Scott Rosenberg, «there is a professional transition in the field from an environment where competition was the dominant mode of interacting with other organizations to an era where dividing labour and sharing might serve the public better» [as quoted by Josh Stearns [1]. Indeed, traditional competition-based activities have not only undergone significant changes over their centuries-old history, but have, to a certain extent, reverted to their origins, i.e. the true vocation of the profession with its inherent ideals and lofty objectives of service to society, freedom of expression, justice and access to information. The COVID-19 pandemic has also influenced processes of media convergence. Lack of content due to restrictive measures during lockdowns coupled with high competition from digital platforms and social networks compel media to unite for both short-term and long-term projects and goals.

Relevance of the study lies in the need to initiate both professional and scientific discourse of introduction of effective editorial partnership practices. Media representatives understanding of motivations and risks would give new impetus to cooperation in the Ukrainian media landscape. Results of the study also contribute to rethinking of approaches to journalism in the context of intensified discussions in the global professional community on the need for quality journalism, especially against the backdrop of the overall crisis in the industry.

Media partnership covers a wide range of areas and can take place at different levels and in different fields. Among fields «collaborative potential for digital media innovation at the intersection of editorial, business, and information technology (IT) departments» [2]; «collaboration by pooling resources and skills» and, in some cases, investments in technical infrastructure [3; 13], and collaboration between journalistic teams or individual journalists who act as initiators and intermediators between media [4] are most frequently mentioned. B. Alfter offers the methodological basis of cross-border collaborative journalism as a prospective model, especially for the development of cross-border journalistic investigative networks [5].

II. Statement of the problem and research methods

The objective of our study is to assess the potential of media partnership in the Ukrainian media sector, the extent to which those practices can assist individual newsrooms in addressing their strategic objectives and development plans, as well as what benefits, including social impact, they may bring.

The presented results are part of a larger study of media partnership practices. Previously, the environment and spheres of partnership were considered [6]. The article examines the existing practices in the region, as well as identifies the motivations that could intensify those processes, and risks that serve as a deterrent to the industry. For this purpose, methodology proposed by the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University, in particular, types of editorial partnership by Sarah Stonbely [7] were used being tailored to specificities and needs of the Ukrainian media market.

In the first phase, 116 media representatives holding various positions, including editor-in-chiefs, journalists, editors, SMM-specialists, and marketing department representatives were interviewed. The challenge was to find out how common collaborative practices are in their sector and what the nature of the collaborations is. The pool of respondents was partly formed using open sources of information about the collaborations. We also applied Exponential Discriminative Snowball Sampling method in order to present as many examples of editorial partnerships that were not yet widely known as possible. The size of the sample did not allow us to justify the prioritization of vectors of partnership; however, it did identify the areas, where such partnerships take place, and therefore there is the potential for further development.

In the second phase, we conducted 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews with members of the profession whose media already had experience of co-projects. We wanted to find out what newsrooms expect from the collaboration, what motivates them to collaborate, and what risks prevail when deciding on future partnership. Once the motivations and risks were identified, respondents rated them using the Likert scale of one to five, where for risk priority, 1 means «no threat», and 5 stands for «the highest threat»; and *for motivation,* 1 means «does not motivate/ zero priority», whereas 5 stands for «the highest priority».

III. Results

Researchers studying editorial partnerships suggest different approaches to classify partnership models. For example, typology by M. Konieczna – a so-called «collaboration stepladder» – is based on the intensity of collaboration among parties (information exchange, collective work on stories, collective work on methods, organization of events, allocation of funds and addressing problems of the society) [8]. S. Stonbely identifies six models, in which the key classification criteria are the length of project and the level of involvement shown by participants [7].

However, we cannot accept these classifications as is, because the media environment is constantly changing and the Ukrainian media landscape demonstrates mixed forms of the collaborations or offers new ones.

Areas of partnership. Reviewed Ukrainian practices identified the following media collaboration vectors of editorial partnership: *content exchange (text, photo, video) with mutual attribution and links; dissemination of content from partner media; pooling resources to work together on a large material or project; cooperation in checking data, facts, etc.; concurrent work on materials for different platforms (video, photo, Internet) (Fig. 1).*
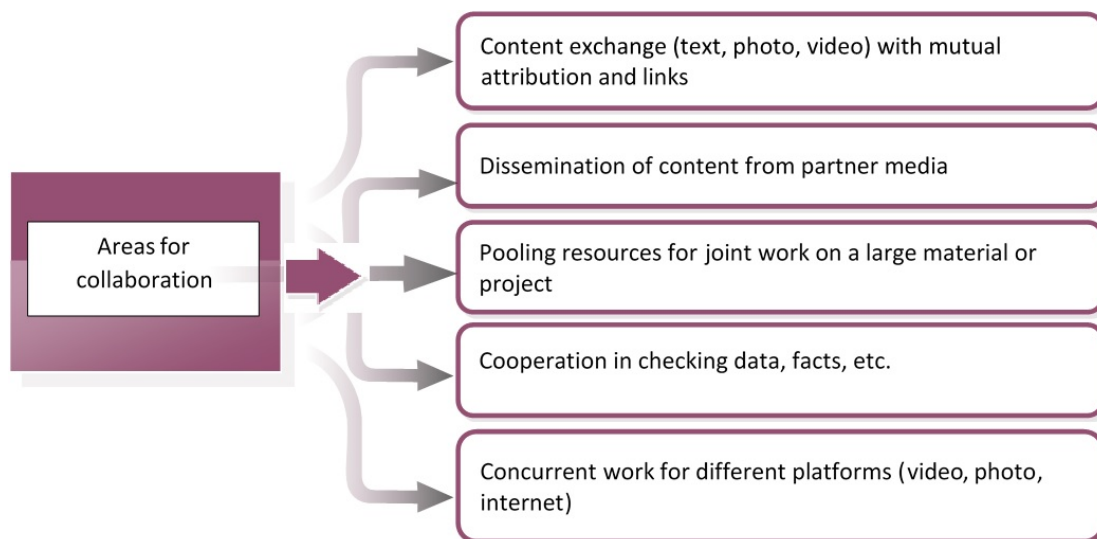

Figure 1. Areas for collaboration

At the same time, *sharing content* remains a priority area for cooperation. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected newsrooms that experienced limitations in coverage under quarantine, lack of content and newsworthy information in general. In order to overcome this situation, Ukrainian regional TV broadcasting enterprises have united their efforts in a project to create *Media Change Ukraine*, a hub for joint use of content[1]. Quite a few newsrooms admitted that they were not ready to collaborate even in the crisis; however, they called on their audience to interact, while acknowledging that these actions do not make a real contribution to the production of their content. Content sharing model is very common for the products created within the same media holding. Member-companies do not see competition here; their activities aim at maintaining the popularity of each other and, as a result, the holding as a whole.

Media with small coverage readily *disseminate content from partners* to attract additional audience. However, the practice primarily concerns pages and accounts in social networks, where the principles of perception of content by audience, its attribution and distribution differ. At the time, as to own website, media still show a conservative attitude towards collaboration.

Pooling resources for joint work on a media project is predominantly practised for journalistic investigations and fact checking. An example could be #VyboryBezBrekhny (Elections Without Lies) project implemented jointly by *Hromadske TV*, *Ukrayinska Pravda*, *VoxCheck*, *Novoye Vremya*, *KyivPost* and *Radio Svoboda* during elections in Ukraine in 2019.

In some cases, media try to build regional journalists' networks to have regional issues covered directly by local journalists (e.g. a project to launch *Ukrainsky Tyzhden* (Ukrainian Week)) [9].

In *fact checking*, media prefer relying on their own resources, fearful of sharing the story with more experienced partners. Engaging experts and professional fact-checkers is a relatively new phenomenon for the Ukrainian media market. The service is not yet very popular, but has a big potential, because its use is an indication of an increased level of journalistic responsibility.

Although the cooperation is mostly built around the creation of individual media products, it may result in emergence of new independent media. For example, upon initiative of *Ukrayinska Pravda* and journalists from several Ukrainian media, «B.Zh.» magazine about urban culture was founded and subsequently sold to Czech investors [10].

Partnership at the Ukrainian media market also takes atypical forms. Professional events play an important role for networking and establishing communication and potential collaborations. To this end, in pre-quarantine period, #MediaHub[2] co-working space was created jointly by *Ukrayinska Pravda*, *Hromadske.TV* and *Center UA*.

Motivations for partnership. What drives media partnership? When clarifying this during a survey and interviews with media representatives, we were able to identify the following motivations for collaboration, the priority of which was further assessed by media representatives: *opportunity to expand the audience and improve brand awareness; increasing audience's trust through collaboration with well-known media; budget savings, shared costs and resources when preparing materials or implementing projects; use of partner's expertise or resources; access to new sources of income (Fig. 2).*
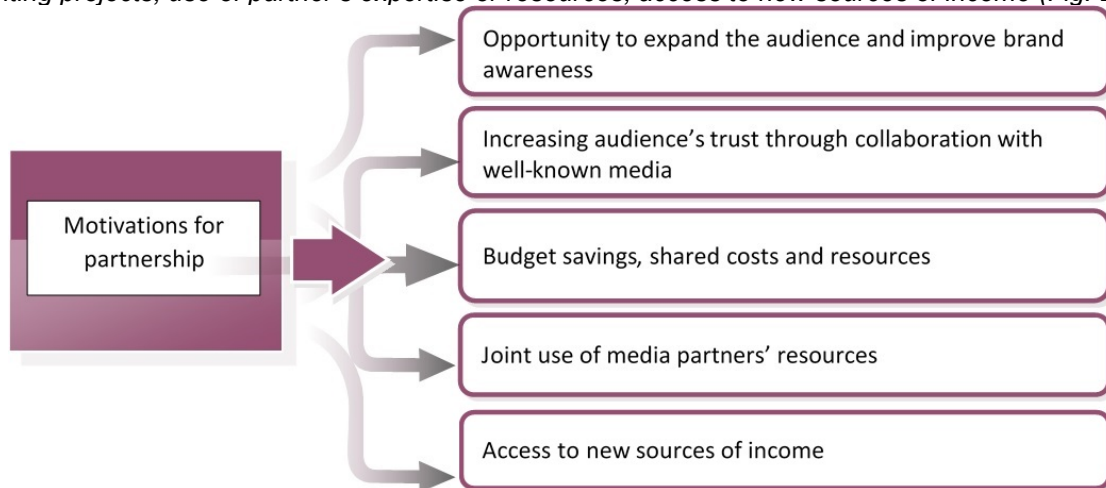

Figure 2. Motivations for partnership

In the course of the analysis, we identified several modes of the collaboration. Potential participants make a decision about collaboration during their participation in professional activities, find partners through social networks, and less often, they send letters inviting to cooperate.

In all the above cases, media staff themselves initiate partnership because they encounter problems when preparing their materials or see collaboration as a way of solving newsroom issues. It is

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[1] According to information of Media Change Ukraine project: http://mediachange.com.ua/
[2] MediaHub Kyiv. https://www.pravda.com.ua/mediahub/

individual journalists or editors who play a leading role in representing the interests of media companies in the course of cooperation [4], while it would be logical to assume that this work should be done by managers who would also take into account the strategic advantages of partnerships. Many media have demonstrated successful practices of promoting their content on separate digital platforms, but their actions are fragmented because marketing teams and newsrooms do not share their goals with each other – the communication is insufficient. R. Picard notes that new business models require «organisational transformation and a change of mindsets» [11]. A. Cornia, A. Sehl and R. Nielsen also emphasize the need to develop business thinking of journalists and disseminate integration «practices that are based on frequent exchanges between editorial and commercial teams» [12]. Results of the study conducted by Media Development Foundation among regional mass media show that Ukrainian media understand the importance of separating business processes from production of content too. Newsrooms pay more attention to ensuring that journalists are guided by the goals set by the media organization [14].

Proposed grants are also used as an opportunity to experiment with partnership without fear of financial difficulties. However, even this type of cooperation bears certain risks associated with the impossibility of setting long-term goals. As a result, many co-projects are finished when funding is ceased. The issue of grant funding is also often considered in the context of limitations on journalistic autonomy by grantors [15].
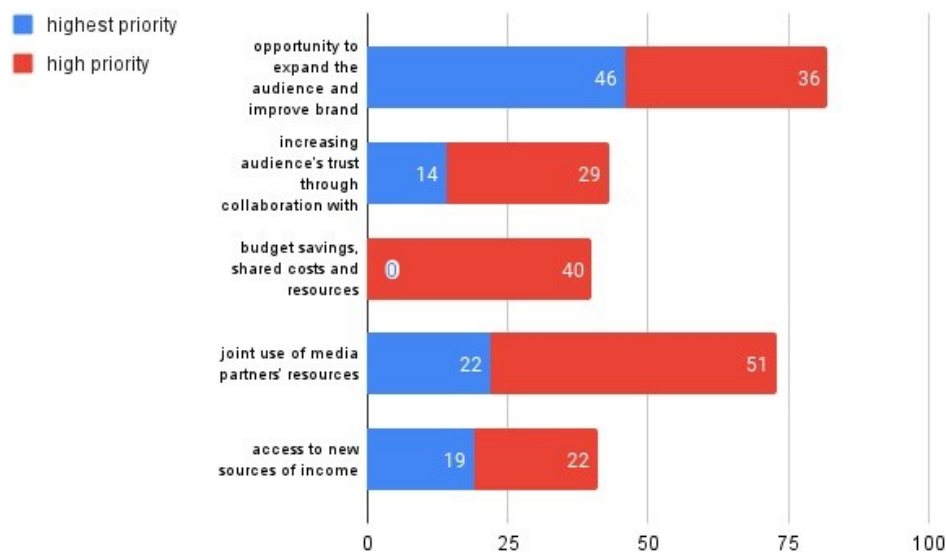
Graph 1. Priorities of motivations for media partnership[1]

Overall, the opportunity *to expand the audience (See Graph 1)* is seen as the biggest motivation for media collaboration. Small or regional media working over reaching a new audience use such opportunity to increase the awareness of their own brand in connection with implementation of a joint project.

Although respondents mentioned *increasing audience's trust* in media as one of their motives for collaboration, interviews with industry representatives showed the opposite. Most interviewees do not directly link the possibility to increase trust with the partnership and emphasize that, on the contrary, partnerships can play both positive and negative roles. Interestingly, regional media have a feeling for potential in partnership with national media to increase trust more often. At the same time, the results of a survey of Ukrainian audience conducted by USAID-Internews in 2020, on the contrary, showed a decline in trust in the national media against the background of its growth in relation to regional media [16].

Most media representatives do not expect *savings* as a result of collaborations (no interviewed respondents chose this parameter as the highest priority), whereas a use or *joint use of media partners' resources* 63% (n-73) is regarded a strong argument for cooperation[2]. Some types of cooperation are related to the fact that partners have expertise in a certain sector or technological tools for developing and supporting a certain type of projects. In such situation, one party is responsible for the content and the other, for example, for its visualization. Although collaborations with design agencies are not so common for media, large media holdings have attempted to implement such joint projects.

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[1] The graph shows sample data in range of 4-5 (on the Likert scale), which the media indicated as high and the highest (respectively) priority among motivations.
[2] Common indicator for parameters 4-5 (on the Likert scale), which the media indicated as high and the highest (respectively) threat.

In general, it can be concluded that the main reason why media are willing to consider partnership options is to expand the audience coverage. Media respond to its needs, fight for its attention and build their strategies accordingly. This approach significantly limits the potential for collaboration, as media do not see priorities other than those integrated into their business models. Unfortunately, social effects of the partnership as a motivation were not well received by respondents and therefore were not included in the follow-up survey. It is obvious that raising awareness of the problem by sharing successful experience of foreign newsrooms could trigger these processes. Experience of foreign media shows that partner media projects attract public attention, and as a result, set goals can be achieved by changing the public opinion and the actual input can be made to resolve problems of communities, cities, regions and even the country. Some joint international projects have been praised with industry awards such as the Pulitzer Prize [17].

Risks. Among the risks hindering wider use of partnership, media representatives indicated the following: *competition; different approaches to workflow organization; different priorities or goals; unequal audience coverage, which may lead to their migration from one partner to another; unequal benefits from partnership; additional burden on staff; different technical or financial capacities to support joint projects, etc.* Similar to motivations, newsrooms also associate risks with audience coverage. In their opinion, *the different size of partners' audience* is the greatest threat, which may lead to a situation when the larger medium can absorb the audience of the smaller partner (65,5%, n-76). Also, among the factors that may have an adverse impact on the result, media representatives mention *unequal benefits from partnership* (52,6%, n-61) and *different priorities or goals of newsrooms* (50 %, n-58) *(See Graph 2)*[1].
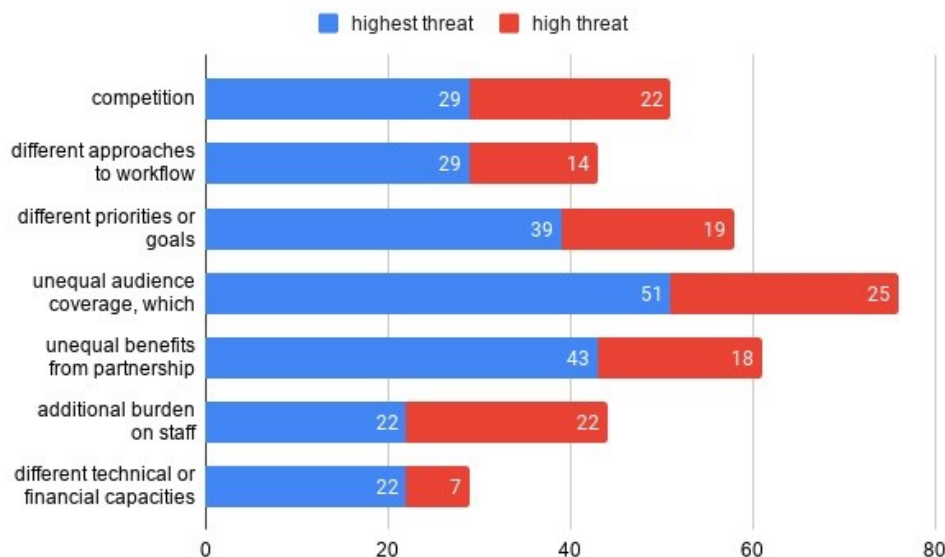
Graph 2. Priorities of media collaboration risks

Heather Bryant draws attention to the fact that in a partnership, media companies «are exploring who they want to partner with and who wants to partner with them» [18]. Ukrainian media also face this problem and try to find partners based on the following parameters: similar views, values, civic position, as well as approximately the same degree of brand awareness. In this regard, the key requirement is the parity in partnership, as media are often concerned that the cooperation may turn into exploitation when, as a result, one of the partners fails to convert its cultural capital into economic.

The issue of *competition* makes media be careful with joint projects requiring direct interaction of their journalists, SMM specialists, etc. In fact, it is also difficult from organizational point of view due to the distance and different approaches to the organization of the editorial work. Interviewees repeatedly noted those factors. In view of this, at the Ukrainian media market, the collaboration with separate production of content that is then presented on a joint platform (for example, a separate website or landing page, Facebook account, etc.) appears to be the most efficient.

IV. Conclusions

As we see, the crisis in the industry and a persistent tendency to the market monopolization force media, especially small ones, to look to new partners among their peers. Although partnership for innovation, development of new technological tools is not very popular in Ukrainian practice yet, those processes are increasingly intensified around joint fact checking and investigative journalism projects.

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[1] Common indicator for parameters 4-5 (on the Likert scale), which the media identified as high and the highest (respectively) threat.

Sharing of content and partner publications is common. Media are also testing the potential of partnership in joint multimedia projects, although their number declined during the COVID-19 crisis.

In general, the Ukrainian media market is gradually adapting to modern conditions of business partnership. New media actors are taking the lead, and media themselves that are reorienting their strategies to Internet platforms increasingly cooperate with bloggers and network influencers. Of course, these practices require further in-depth study, as they will help newsrooms find new peripheral partners and thus go beyond traditional communication stereotypes.

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Горська К. О. Партисипативна журналістика: чому медіа об'єднуються для спільних проєктів на цифрових платформах

Мета статті. *Метою дослідження є оцінювання потенціалу співпраці між медіа в українському медіасекторі, наскільки такі практики можуть допомогти окремим редакціям у вирішенні стратегічних завдань і планів розвитку, а також які переваги, в тому числі й соціальні ефекти, може мати таке партнерство.*

Методологія дослідження. *Представлені результати є частиною масштабного дослідження практик співпраці в медіа. Проведене опитування 116 представників медіа та 12 глибинних напівструктурованих інтерв'ю з представниками професії, чиї медіа вже мали досвід партнерських проєктів, дозволили з'ясувати, у яких сферах переважно відбувається співпраця. Також дослідження дозволило глибше зрозуміти, які очікування редакцій від партнерства, що мотивує їх до співпраці, і які ризики впливають на прийняття рішення щодо майбутньої співпраці.*

Результати *дослідження продемонстрували, що головним мотиватором співпраці для медіа є бажання збільшити охоплення аудиторії. Водночас ризики, пов'язані з конкуренцією й відсутністю розуміння чітких механізмів паритетного співробітництва, як і раніше, є стримувальними чинниками для зазначених практик.*

Новизна. *Дослідження сприятиме переосмисленню підходів до журналістської співпраці в цифровому медіапросторі.*

Практичне значення *полягає в необхідності актуалізації як професійного, так і наукового дискурсу щодо питання ефективного впровадження практик співпраці між медіа. Розуміння проблем, з якими стикаються редакції в процесі організації співробітництва, може послужити новим поштовхом для поширення цих практик.*

Ключові слова: *медіа, моделі співробітництва медіа, медіапартнерство, мережеве співробітництво, партисипативні моделі в журналістиці.*

Горская Е. А. Партисипативная журналистика: почему медиа объединяются для совместных проектов на цифровых платформах

Цель статьи. *Целью исследования является оценка потенциала сотрудничества между медиа в украинском медиасекторе, насколько такие практики могут помочь отдельным редакциям в решении стратегических задач и планов развития, а также какие преимущества, в том числе и социальные эффекты, может иметь такое партнерство.*

Методология исследования. *Представленные результаты являются частью более масштабного исследования практик сотрудничества в медиа. Проведенный опрос 116 представителей медиа и 12 глубинных полуструктурированных интервью с представителями профессии, чьи медиа уже имели опыт партнерских проектов, дали возможность выявить, в каких секторах преимущественно происходит сотрудничество. Также исследование позволило глубже понять, какие ожидания редакций от партнерства, что мотивирует их к сотрудничеству, каковы риски, преобладающие при принятии решения о потенциальном сотрудничестве.*

Результаты *исследования продемонстрировали, что главным мотиватором сотрудничества для медиа является желание расширить охват аудитории. В то же время риски, связанные с конкуренцией и отсутствием понимания четких механизмов паритетного сотрудничества, по-прежнему являются сдерживающими факторами для названных практик.*

Новизна. *Исследование вносит свой вклад в переосмысление подходов к журналистскому сотрудничеству в цифровом медиапространстве.*

Практическое значение *состоит в необходимости актуализации как профессионального, так и научного дискурса по вопросу эффективного внедрения практик сотрудничества между медиа. Понимание проблем, с которыми сталкиваются редакции при организации сотрудничества, может послужить новым толчком для более широкого распространения этих практик.*

Ключевые слова: *медиа, модели медиасотрудничество, медиапартнерство, сетевое сотрудничество, партисипативные модели в журналистике.*