

BY STEN SALUVEER



MEDIANUMERIC

Academy

LESSONS FROM BUILDING A
GO-TO-MARKET STRATEGY FOR AN EU-FUNDED
ONLINE UPSKILLING PLATFORM

Colophon

About this report

Lessons from Building a Go-to-Market Strategy for an EU-Funded Online Upskilling Platform is published by MediaNumeric, an initiative of the Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision, InHolland University, L'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, Agence France-Presse, SWPS University, Storytek, EUScreen and Centrum Cyfowe.

The **Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision** is the institute for media culture; an inspiring, creative and accessible place for private individuals and professionals, focusing on current developments concerning people, media and society from a media-historical perspective.

InHolland University is a large university of applied sciences located in eight main cities in the Netherlands, offering practice-oriented education and research opportunities. They educate independent, critical professionals to make a meaningful contribution to the inclusive world of tomorrow, with a focus on fostering a sustainable living environment and a resilient society.

L'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel is a repository of all French radio and television audiovisual archives. Since 1974, Ina has been responsible for preserving, promoting and transmitting France's audiovisual heritage. Ina is also an international training and research centre for digital media and content.

Agence France-Presse (AFP) is one of the world's three major news agencies. Its mission is to provide rapid, comprehensive, impartial and verified coverage of the news and issues that shape people's daily lives.

SWPS University is a private non-profit university in Poland established in 1996, exploring the human mind and applying this expertise to address practical challenges in society, focusing on new technologies and dynamic social change.

Storytek Innovation & Venture Studio is a creative meditech and storytelling accelerator in Northern Europe, offering innovative business models and format options, as well as concrete needs for professional organisations in the European media ecosystem.

EUScreen is a network of European broadcasters and audiovisual archives, media scholars, and technical experts, facilitating access to and engagement with archival audiovisual content through their independent online portal.

Centrum Cyfrowe is a Polish think-and-do-tank supporting openness and engagement in the digital world by changing the way people learn, participate in culture, use the internet and exercise their rights as internet users.

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1. Executive Summary

The MediaNumeric Academy, available at <https://medianumericacademy.eu>, is a cutting-edge online educational platform that provides theoretical knowledge and skills to professionals in the media, journalism, communication, and creative industries. It was created over a period of 34 months by a consortium of European leading archiving, media education, and media innovation organisations and was financed and supported by the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission.

The academy is free of charge to its users and consists of three modules that focus on the most crucial skills needed to master data gathering, analysis, and storytelling in the European media industry. It features 14 of Europe's leading professionals as tutors with industry-leading expertise in the topics from the intersection of media and data. The learning journey begins by delving into the search and exploration of multimedia data, guiding participants through the data project lifecycle, including collection, preparation, and analysis, followed by data visualisation and storytelling including presenting latest generative AI tools, and concludes with a focus on debunking misinformation and disinformation - a topic more timely in Europe and elsewhere as never before.

In this white paper, presented as the project's deliverable 7.3, we offer a deep dive on the exploitation strategy of the MediaNumeric Academy, i.e., the activities for taking the project's outcomes to the potential audience. We specifically introduce innovative and cutting edge assets and exploitable contents of the project and hopefully position the project as a practical, market-focused and impact yielding innovation activity towards the ecosystem.

Throughout the document, we note some of the the challenges we faced in creating and delivering the exploitation and go-to-market work for the project, specifically challenges in balancing focus, creating a common language for stakeholder alignment, pinpointing MVP or a product, navigating institutional limitations, selecting advisors, and reprioritizing resources. We also suggest our recommendations and action items for future project managers, media industry executives, and policymakers embarking on a similar journey to build a ground-up innovation and upskilling program or project for the creative or media industries in Europe and beyond.

2. Introduction

The MediaNumeric Academy available at <https://medianumericacademy.eu> is a cutting edge online educational platform in the form of a comprehensive online course to students, young professionals or anyone interested in the field of data-driven journalism, creative storytelling and fact-checking.

MediaNumeric provides students, up-and-coming, and established professionals in media, journalism, communication, and creative industries the theoretical know-how and skills needed to embolden them to take on the opportunities that data-driven innovations bring. It provides them the tools to help create a European media ecosystem that is user-driven, fair and balanced, economically sustainable, and technologically advanced.

The academy was created over the period of 34 months by a consortium of leading European archiving, media education, and media innovation organisations including the Netherlands Institute of Sound & Vision (NISV, The Netherlands), Centrum Cyfrowe (FCC, Poland), Institut National Audiovisuel (INA, France), Agence Presse France (AFP, France), SWPS University (Poland), Inholland University (The Netherlands) and Storytek Innovation & Venture Studio (Estonia). The project was financed and supported by the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission.

This white paper looks into the journey of the MediaNumeric Academy, especially from the perspective of exploitation i.e. the activities for taking the project's outcomes to the potential audience, stakeholders, and the industry in the market over a 36-month period by consortium partner Storytek.

We specifically focus on and introduce innovative and cutting-edge assets and exploitable contents of the project and hopefully position the project as a practical, market-focused, and impact-yielding innovation activity towards the ecosystem. Specifically, we aim to encourage best business-focused practices in the ecosystem and, according to our initial vision more than three years ago, "raise interest and activate third parties (especially in the innovation, corporate and policy sectors) for co-exploitation of the projects results through outlining some of challenges and lessons learned on the way what we discovered in taking the project to the market" for academia, the media industry and innovation players. And finally, we suggest our recommendations and action items for future project managers, media industry executives, and policymakers embarking on the journey to build a ground-up innovation and upskilling program or a project for the creative or media industries in Europe and beyond.

3. MediaNumeric Academy at a Glance

The free-of-charge MediaNumeric Academy, launched publicly to the world during the MediaNumeric Conference in Warsaw on 27-28th of November 2023, consists of three modules that focus on the most crucial skills needed to master data gathering, analysis and storytelling in the European media industry.

The online academy and its curriculum were built over a period of three years by active collaboration of consortium partners in Poland, France, the Netherlands and Estonia, and was validated on approximately 50 young professionals across Europe in the format of three winter/summer schools and feedback loops.

The academy features 14 of Europe’s leading professionals with industry-leading expertise in topics at the intersection of media and data. The Academy online learning journey begins by delving into the search and exploration of multimedia data, guiding participants through the data project lifecycle, including collection, preparation, and analysis. Participants engage in practical exercises to learn about various data collection methods, the tools and databases involved, and the identification of potential biases.

Subsequently, the learning focus shifts to the art of data storytelling, covering the fundamentals of multimedia and data-driven narrative construction alongside techniques for crafting data storytelling projects.

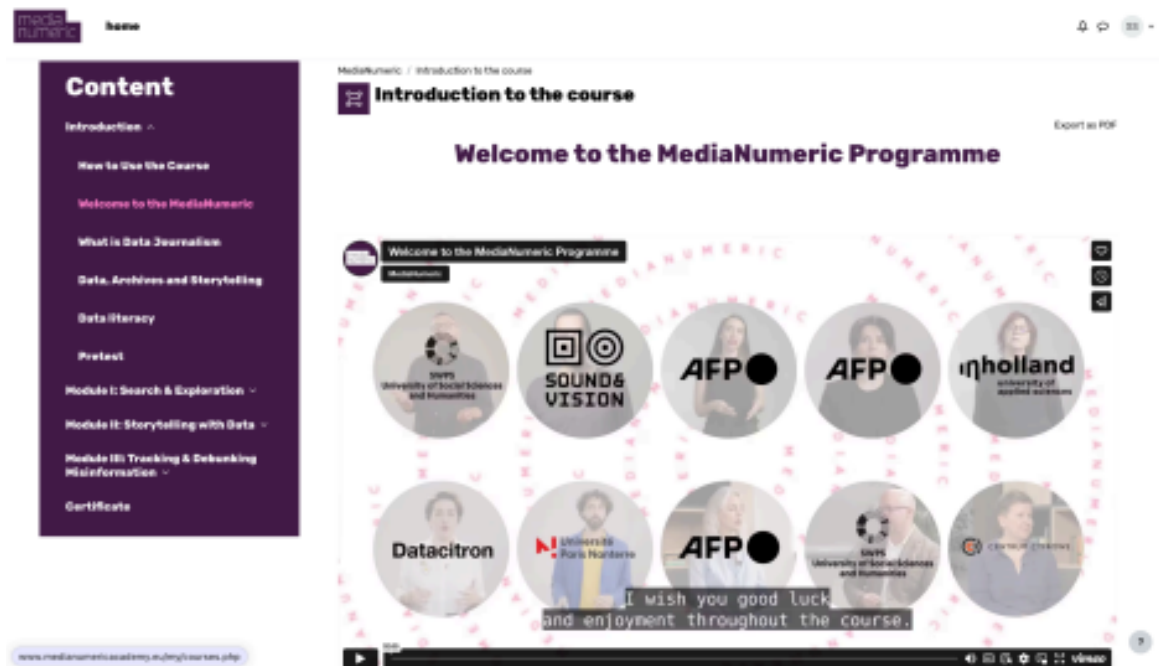


Figure 1. The MediaNumeric Academy start page is where the learning journey begins.

Participants are introduced to a range of free data visualisation tools such as Flourish, rawgraphs, Kartis, and Tableau. The course culminates in a module dedicated to tracking and debunking misinformation, emphasising the ethical considerations of digital media and data manipulation and equipping participants with the skills to identify and counteract misinformation using open-source intelligence techniques. The academy also looks at the recent trends and innovations in the overall European media ecosystems including the impact of generative AI and synthetic media.

During the course participants proceed with upskilling by engaging with various information sources from short videos from MediaNumeric-selected experts, additional reading materials and quizzes, and an outcome obtaining a certificate upon completion to boost their academic or professional resume.

4. How Did We Get There? Our Exploitation Strategy, in a Nutshell

The MediaNumeric Academy's exploitation strategy, crafted by Storytek Innovation & Venture Studio, built a comprehensive approach to maximising the impact and sustainability of the MediaNumeric online course.

This section presents an overview of the strategic plan executed over 24 months, focusing on creating traction, promoting knowledge assets, validating a business model, and establishing crucial partnerships.

4.1 Strategy Pillars

Our strategy for the MediaNumeric Academy centred on four main pillars:

1. **Traction Creation:** Targeting both B2B (Higher Education Institutions, industry training organisations, etc.) and B2C segments (students, professionals, researchers, and archivists) to drive engagement with the MediaNumeric online course.
2. **Knowledge Asset Promotion:** Highlighting the consortium's contributions, including state-of-the-art reports and policy recommendations.
3. **Business Model Validation:** Ensuring the online course's financial sustainability through effective monetization strategies.
4. **Partnership Establishment:** Forming content creation, technology, and monetization partnerships to ensure post-project sustainability.

4.2 Agile Exploitation Approach

To achieve these goals, Storytek implemented an agile exploitation strategy, which included:

- **Monthly and Ad Hoc Check-Ins:** Regular updates and strategy adjustments to ensure alignment with objectives.
- **Inbound Marketing:** Developing a conversion-focused landing page and managing a CRM platform using Streak software tied to the project's workspace at Google for Business. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Crafting tailored messages and launch and newsletter blurbs plus white paper packs for different target groups.
- **Thought Leadership:** Participating in leading industry conferences (e.g., Berlin, Cannes, DLD) to establish MediaNumeric as a thought leader.

- **Academic Outreach:** Engaging with the HEI community and academic partners to foster collaboration through the consortium's network.
- **Policy Advisory:** Influencing national and European discussions on media professional upskilling, directly contributing to strategies like Estonia's Digital Culture Strategy and EU media industry programs for 2025-2027.

Storytek, as consortium partner lead on exploitation, oversaw the exploitation strategy, focusing on KPIs, infrastructure, and performance. This included close collaboration with NISV's communication team to synchronise communication and social media efforts. The consortium engaged in monthly and ad hoc check-ins to monitor progress.

In the final three months, the strategy shifted towards active market engagement, including producing tailored webinars and conversion videos to attract stakeholders. This phase also saw increased participation in upskilling programs to maximise the platform's exposure.

The MediaNumeric Academy's exploitation strategy, developed and executed by Storytek, demonstrated an agile approach relevant to delivering tangible goals within a limited 5% of the overall project budget to ensure the project's long-term impact and sustainability. Through targeted engagement, thought leadership via global event participation, active communication of our learnings and policy outcomes and strategic partnerships, the initiative met its KPIs to enhance the skills and knowledge of media professionals across Europe.

5. What We Delivered

5.1 The MediaNumeric Assets

Over its 34 months, the MediaNumeric project created key assets. Below is a table summarising the key MediaNumeric Exploitation Assets alongside their industry benefits and opportunities. This overview highlights how each component of the initiative is designed to foster professional development, facilitate networking, enhance business development, and support strategic planning within the media industry. From offering an extensive “video library” for self-paced learning to providing a rich pool of research insights, MediaNumeric is poised to significantly contribute to the enhancement of media literacy, innovation, and collaboration across Europe.

MediaNumeric Exploitation Assets	Industry Benefits and Opportunities
<p>The MediaNumeric Academy - online platform for upskilling European media professionals in data-driven exploration, storytelling, debunking, and AI.</p>	<p>Professional Development: Enhances skills and knowledge in cutting-edge media practices, increasing competitiveness and adaptability in the digital age.</p>
<p>A video library of mentor lessons on key topics from contemporary media literacy, working with data and databases, data visualisation, and generative AI.</p>	<p>Accessible Learning: Provides a rich resource for continuous learning, allowing professionals to stay updated with the latest trends and techniques at their own pace.</p>
<p>A network of 14 top European industry leaders and experts</p> <p>A CRM with 400+ industry contacts across verticals from HEIs to archives, festivals, and media organisations.</p>	<p>Networking and Collaboration: Facilitates connections with leading figures in the media industry, opening up opportunities for collaboration and insight into industry best practices.</p> <p>Business Development: Enables access to a broad network of potential partners,</p>

	clients, and collaborators, supporting growth and innovation strategies.
A "reachout pack" for B2B engagement of audiences stakeholders	Marketing and Engagement: Provides tools for effective communication and engagement with business clients and stakeholders, enhancing outreach and brand visibility.
An Interactive Webinar format for onboarding	Efficient Onboarding: Offers an engaging and informative way to introduce new users or clients to services or projects, improving user experience and satisfaction.
A catalogue of state-of-the-art white papers and deliverables of the R&D outcomes and processes of the MediaNumeric consortium.	Knowledge Sharing: Shares valuable insights and findings from research, helping the industry to adopt innovative practices and technologies.
An insight pool on how to develop a ground-up, large-scale, pan-European digital skilling program.	Strategic Planning: Provides a blueprint for developing comprehensive digital education programs, supporting long-term industry growth and digital transformation strategies.

Table 1. Assets created during the course of the MediaNumeric project.

5.2 Synergies with Trend Reports

Our findings during the 34 months of developing the MediaNumeric Academy reinforce the message that emerged from the last three years of published pivotal white papers, industry reports, and sector-focused R&D projects: the European media and audiovisual industry is undergoing rapid transformation towards a data and AI-centred ecosystem. The need for data literacy, data-powered business leadership, and a matching workforce is critical not only for business competition but also for competition in audience attention and appetite for European content.

At the broadest level, our findings interact and support the excellent work carried out by EDMO, the European Digital Media Observatory, especially in the fields of digital skills, media literacy, and dis- and misinformation¹ and their wide repository of published findings.

On a media industry level, the two highly influential white papers that MediaNumeric's product offering directly relates to are the EU's milestone *The European Media Industry Outlook* report (released May 2023),² which will be the annual benchmark of impact for the Commission's initiatives in the creative, AV and media sectors, and the *European Film Academy x CRESCINE: Members Survey 2023*³(published in October 2023) that exposes the crucial need for online upskilling platforms for Europe's film (but extendable to media) sector.

The *Media Outlook's* findings indicate that for Europe, "An early adoption and usage of new technologies is key to adapt and open new markets"⁴. Data and Generative AI are key priorities, yet the European media industry, which primarily consists of SMEs, is "unable to harness data the same way" as market leaders.⁵ The report also notes that the market is dynamic and converging in the context of the digital shift, and "new skill needs are emerging based on a new combination of digital, tech, and creative skills."⁶ This calls for upskilling programs, such as MediaNumeric, which works on the combination of these new digital skills - such as data literacy, visualisation, and misinformation/disinformation debunking.

The report continues: "Three main media sub sectors compete to a large extent on the same attention economy market", and the crucial competitive advantage is "adoption of new distribution methods, while many traditional players struggle to adapt". To stay competitive in the market, European media organisations, whether in the news or other forms of media, need to produce more engaging content, which in turn requires a workforce equipped with data and AI skills that can be boosted by platforms such as

¹ A relevant example is the EDMO report "*Mitigating (Dis)information Vulnerability With Situational Risk Awareness And Human Centered Approaches: A Conceptual Model*", University of Tartu, 2023.

<https://edmo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/D3.1-2-Mitigating-Disinformation-Vulnerability-1.pdf>

² *European Media Industry Outlook*, European Commission, 17 May 2023, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/european-media-industry-outlook>.

³ "European Film Academy x CRESCINE: Members Survey 2023", Crescine, <https://www.crescine.eu/blog/efa-crescine-members-survey-2023>.

⁴ *European Media Industry Outlook*, pg. 6, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/european-media-industry-outlook>.

⁵ *European Media Industry Outlook*, pg. 4, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/european-media-industry-outlook>.

⁶ *European Media Industry Outlook*, pg. 6, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/european-media-industry-outlook>.

MediaNumeric.

In sync with the *Media Outlook* report, the CresCine consortium, in partnership with the European Film Academy, surveyed almost 1000 European audiovisual sector professionals and found very high levels of insecurity within the industry, both financially and skill-wise, as "Only 20% of all respondents feel secure about their position in the industry when it comes to future perspectives or about their financial capacity to stay up-to-date and competitive. 80% of all respondents do not feel secure within the industry and cannot attend training programs, even if they want to. Only 30% of all respondents indicate they have the financial support to participate in training programs".⁷

While the study indicated that the participants prioritised learning of new digital skills that would provide them better opportunities in the marketplace, including data and AI skills, the two inhibiting factors were the price of the training opportunities and the lack of uptake of online learning platforms.

As we demonstrate later in this white paper, the MediaNumeric Academy addresses both of these concerns by providing a free-of-charge and cost-effective self-learning solution and empowering industry organisations (including other training vendors) with an upskilling platform that can boost the data-driven skills of either their employees or training program participants.

5.3 Our Impact in the Innovation, Business, and Policy Community

Throughout its life cycle, the MediaNumeric Academy, through the work of the consortium exploitation partner Storytek, has played a significant role in shaping EU and national policy, as well as the executive agenda of industry organisations, related to digital transformation and upskilling in the creative, audiovisual, and media sectors in Europe and globally. Through its work with various partners over the past three years, the wealth of knowledge and experience gained in understanding the state of data literacy among European media organisations, the baseline skills of European students and professionals, and the viable scenarios for scalability and impact have created a pool of policy and executive insights that were shared actively. The following lists some of the key initiatives that the Academy's work contributed to directly:

1. **Estonian Digital Culture Strategy 2030** (policy focus on data literacy and data upskilling), Estonian Ministry of Culture (spring-winter 2022).

⁷ "European Film Academy x CRESCINE: Members Survey 2023", <https://www.crescine.eu/blog/efa-crescine-members-survey-2023>.

2. **Netherlands Work Agenda Value Driven Digitalisation (2022)** Digital literacy, including media literacy, will be included in the curriculum for primary and secondary education. Additionally, citizenship will be added as a compulsory subject, which provides in strengthening knowledge, skills and actionable insights to improve resilience against disinformation.
3. **Development of the Assessment Framework for the Digital Skills in the Creative Industries** (lessons learned in developing the framework and focus areas of the study, as well as advisory for the policy leadership team), Estonian Ministry of Culture (ongoing).
4. **Input to the industry hearings on the priorities for the industry skill development support measures for the Creative Europe MEDIA program 2025-2027** (insights presented at a closed hearing initiated by the DG Connect Unit of the EU) (winter 2023).
5. **Discussion on how to develop viable and future skill-driven content and media ecosystems at the KOCCA Convergence Forum 2024**, by the invitation of the Korean Creative Contents Agency to the national and regional policy leaders (winter 2023).
6. **Dutch Government-wide strategy for effectively tackling disinformation (2022)** The strategy of the Dutch government consists of two tracks: Track 1: Strengthening the free and open public debate. Track 2: Reducing the influence of disinformation. This track covers measures that depend on A) the content of disinformation, B) the producer or disseminator, C) the responsibilities of the traditional and social media, and D) knowledge development in general.”
7. **Input to the pan-European skills survey in the film and audiovisual sector in the framework of the CreCine initiative** (ongoing, recommendations published spring 2024).
8. **Executive presentation to the managers of Nordic Film Schools/Academies** in the framework of the Nord Project to exchange best practices in designing the next generation of AV sector educational systems in the Nordics, by the invitation of the National Film School of Denmark (autumn 2024).
9. **Executive presentation with the Swedish Audiovisual Ecosystem on the opportunities of next-generation data and AI-focused upskilling**, by the invitation of the Swedish Film Institute (autumn 2023).
10. **Executive Presentation and discussion with the Estonia Audiovisual Ecosystem on the opportunities of next-generation data and AI-focused upskilling**, by the invitation

of the Estonian Film Institute (winter 2023).

11. **Executive presentation to 60 Estonian school teachers in the framework of JustFilm industry days regarding the transformation of the learning curricula** regarding data and AI in secondary school education, by the invitation of the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival (winter 2023).

12. **Executive presentation to 100 industry Creative Industries professionals on the impact of the opportunities of next-generation data and AI-focused upskilling** (winter 2023), by the invitation of the Viljandi Culture Academy, The University of Tartu (winter 2023).

5.4 Further Use Cases for Creative, Media, and Policy Sectors

Besides its direct-to-audience approach (i.e. the opportunity for all interested parties to sign up individually and start their learning journey), the MediaNumeric Academy has a range of additional use cases for European creative, media and policy sectors - the most prominent of which are use cases for EU and National policymakers, (Media) Innovation Community organisations, and finally European Creative, AV and Media sector organisations. The MediaNumeric Academy also has a close synergy with the EUScreen foundation, “a network of European broadcasters and audiovisual archives, media scholars, and technical experts [which aims to - sic] facilitate access to and engagement with archival audiovisual content through our independent online portal... collaborations aimed at curating and generating content, enhancing audience engagement, and ... infrastructure⁸.

The table below summarises the primary use cases and co-exploitation opportunities.

Target Group	Use Case	Co-Exploitation Opportunity
European and National Policymakers	Evidence-Based Policy Making	Collaboration on policy frameworks and policy input supporting digital and data literacy
	Fostering Upskilling Programs	Collaboration on transformation towards next generation, data driven skills in the European media industry

⁸“EuScreen website”, <https://www.crescine.eu/blog/efa-crescine-members-survey-2023>.

	Digital Governance	Exchanging lessons learned for public sector transformation on digital skills
	Fight Against Disinformation and Misinformation	Powering decision-makers with insights and latest strategies in the collective fight against dis- and misinformation
Innovation Community Organisations	Startup Acceleration	Utilising Academy resources in incubation and business development programs
	Collaborative R&D	Scaling the Academy in partnership with edtech or mediatech startups and finding funding for innovation in media technology through partnerships
	Networking and Ecosystem Building	Organising industry events for knowledge exchange between HEIs, the Academy mentors and startups
	Skill Development and Talent Pipeline	Tailoring custom data literacy and visualisation training programs for the innovation community
European Audiovisual and (Media) Sector Businesses & Corporations	Digital Transformation	Monetizing Academy resources as inspirational source materials leading digital transformation efforts towards more innovative and data driven decision making processes
	Data-Driven Decision Making	Collaborating on in-business or corporate training programs for increasing data literacy and capacity of employees
	Brand Reputation and Trust in Content	Through upskilling via the Academy powering efforts for European media and AV sector companies in producing more trustworthy and transparent content.
	Audience Engagement	Through upskilling via the Academy, empowering professionals to create more cutting edge and data driven content for engaging audiences.

<p>The EUscreen Foundation</p>	<p>Cross pollination and promotion</p>	<p>Collaborating on cross pollination and promotion will enlarge the MediaNumeric Academy’s user- base, while EUscreen will be able to gain access to the latest insights and extended future talent-oriented network.</p>
	<p>Infrastructural collaboration</p>	<p>The MediaNumeric Academy can benefit from the well-tailored digital infrastructure of the EUscreen foundation.</p>
	<p>Exploitation exploration</p>	<p>Monetizing Academy resources collaboratively with the EUscreen to achieve financial and operational sustainability.</p>

Table 2. Further use cases of the MediaNumeric Academy and its assets and expertise.

First, the synergy between EU policymakers, and foundation, such as EUscreen and the MediaNumeric Academy presents viable opportunities for focusing policy efforts towards **building data literacy and capacity initiatives in European creative, AV and the media sectors including infrastructural and exploitation focused collaboration.** This use case not only strengthens the foundation for policies that are responsive to the rapidly evolving digital media landscape but also supports the development of policy frameworks that prioritise digital and data literacy at both European and national levels. Collaborating in this way can facilitate the creation of informed initiatives that effectively address the challenges and opportunities of the digital age, ensuring technologies and their societal impacts, especially in the framework of the dialogues towards new upskilling priorities and initiatives for the EU’s budget period of 2025-2027. Moreover, the collaboration between the MediaNumeric Academy and policymakers is crucial for fostering upskilling programs towards next-generation, data-driven skills in the European media industry. This initiative aligns with the broader EU objectives of enhancing digital competencies across all sectors. The knowledge gained in building the academy can fuel upskilling programs that specifically address the needs of the media industry, ensuring that media professionals are equipped with the latest skills and knowledge, especially at regional and national levels. Finally, the MediaNumeric Academy plays a pivotal role in the fight against disinformation and misinformation by empowering stakeholders with the knowledge and frameworks in combating these challenges. This collaborative effort is essential in safeguarding the integrity of public discourse especially, in the present global geopolitical turmoil.

Secondly, the synergy between the MediaNumeric Academy and its assets, and the European (media) innovation community organisations can **complement the startup, and especially mediatech industry with upskilling and business capacity development opportunities**, while opening up venues for future business models for MediaNumeric. By integrating the academy's resources into incubation and business development programs, startups can tap into free of charge, self-pacing, and up-to-date knowledge, experience, mentorship on data-driven content creation and storytelling. This partnership accelerates the growth and viability of startup staff within the media sector. The potential for partnerships in R&D further expands the impact of the MediaNumeric Academy. By opening the Academy to forging partnerships with edtech and mediatech startups, it can expand its product and platform quality, as well as address features that were not implemented in the first, pilot version, including gamification and UX improvements. This avenue also opens opportunities for securing funding and support in the future. Finally, providing customised training programs either through the Academy platform or its mentor network for the innovation community can not only enhance the skill set in startups and innovation organisations, but also helps to power the future of media content creators.

Third, and last, the MediaNumeric Academy and European audiovisual and media sector businesses and foundation can collaborate to **drive the digital transformation and growth of the overall innovation capacity of the industry**, especially amongst SMEs, festivals, smaller content creators and the like. The Academy's online course can help organisations, particularly the HR and management teams, to adopt more innovative and data-driven decision-making processes. This partnership can help grow the approach of data-driven decision-making and content creation, equipping employees with the necessary tools to harness the power of data. The utilisation of the MediaNumeric Academy's learning program contributes to enhancing brand reputation and trust in the content produced by European media and AV sector companies. The academy's focus on upskilling and professional development empowers professionals to create innovative, engaging, trustworthy, and transparent content. It is essential to focus on quality and integrity to combat the spread of misinformation. Through data-driven content creation, professionals can craft stories that can stand out, but resonate deeply with viewers, resulting in stronger audience retention.

6. Common Challenges and Lessons Learned

Navigating the complexities of deploying an exploitation strategy for an ambitious yet publicly financed and non-commercial upskilling and educational platform presents a formidable challenge, especially when constrained by limited resources, scope, and pressing time constraints. Despite these hurdles, the MediaNumeric project in its broad

scope achieved its objectives through a process of active debates, notable victories, and, inevitably, some bittersweet failures and tensions down the way. This journey, while arduous, illuminated a vast range of challenges and presented us invaluable lessons that have profoundly shaped our approach and methodology.

In the spirit of collective knowledge-sharing, we are eager to divulge the most significant insights gleaned from our experience. We believe these revelations will not only inspire but also serve as practical guidance for project developers, managers, and go-to-market specialists. Our aim is to equip ourselves and them with insights and strategies necessary to navigate their future projects to success, ensuring they can effectively drive their initiatives across the finish line in today's competitive and ever-evolving landscape and the race for the audience's time and attention.

6.1 Balancing Focus

In the realm of EU-funded projects like MediaNumeric, the quintessential challenge is striking a harmonious balance between content excellence (i.e. the projects core proposal and solutions requested by funding stakeholder(s)) and the creation of “market-competitive products” (i.e. the project's exploitation and viability in the market after the funding finishes). In a nutshell this dichotomy embodies the tension within a consortiums project's planning and delivery between crafting and focusing the partner's efforts on high-quality academic or creative content and at the same time developing “a product” - a tangible, exploitable outcome that stand out in a competitive landscape and will be able to sustain itself financially and otherwise.

The same opposing forces were at play in the case of MediaNumeric's development over a 35 month period: on one hand, develop a top-tier European training and upskilling curriculum for journalism students and professionals, enhancing their skills in data handling, visualisation, and fact-checking, and at the same time concurrently forge a market-competitive, web-based “academy” product that is attractive, easy to use and caters to students, higher education institutions (HEIs), and media professionals.

Successfully pulling off this balancing act is fraught with complexities, often leading to friction between stakeholders focused on content generation and those aimed at market exploitation. A common outcome is targeting the majority of efforts in project planning and delivery on content development and production, therefore limiting and relegating market engagement strategies to the sideline, hence constricting the time and decision-making window for effectively marketing the final product to stakeholders.

In the MediaNumeric project, a significant portion of the allocated 36 months was dedicated to the process of curriculum development, validation, and testing and

production including three live summer/winter schools in Paris, the Hague and Warsaw. Additionally, this included a well-crafted production pipeline of creating online academy assets from videos to quizzes and additional materials that went through a multi-step process of going from content ideation to slide and video production, proofreading, and animation before the final delivery.

Combined with the factor that generally, publicly financed projects have limited resource allocation with ambitious and rapid “market standard” promotion and marketing, this extensive focus on the “content excellence” left a scant six months for promoting the “final and completed status product” to potential partners and target audiences, a timeframe markedly insufficient in a sphere where both free and paid online courses vie for the attention of students, HEIs, and media industry professionals.

This scenario underscores the imperative need for consortium managers to strive for a balanced approach that equally prioritises content excellence and strategic market positioning to ensure the sustainability and impact of such ambitious projects.

6.2 Creating a Common Language for Stakeholder Alignment

A second, often-neglected aspect emerging when delivering an exploitation strategy in EU-funded initiatives is the establishment of a unified conceptual and working language among stakeholders. This concept extends beyond mere communication; it involves harmonising the understanding of critical terms, concepts, software and tools, and strategies across diverse consortium members. The challenge of aligning stakeholders becomes particularly endemic to the creative and media sectors, where high-level concepts may hold different meanings for different parties. An “online academy for data-driven skills” in terms of its design, service quality, user experience, technical platform section, and audience conversion strategy may well mean opposites for a research partner and a innovation agency partner. Yet, to successfully create and make that academy available to European stakeholders, both need to work in perfect alignment.

This dissonance can especially surface in projects involving academic, public service, and commercial stakeholders, despite those sharing a common strategic objective, such as equipping European media professionals with advanced data skills.

In MediaNumeric, this challenge manifested in two primary areas: attracting the right target audience within the broad European Media ecosystem and defining the necessary professional tools, platforms, and collaborations. For example, much of the effort in the working sessions with the stakeholder board were spent on discussing whether the course

should focus solely on students, journalists and archive professionals, rather than focusing on what would be the most effective actions to gain the maximum presence and foothold for the course in the European media industry landscape.

A second example to highlight was developing a CRM-based approach. Here, a landing page was launched during the development of the content and the platform to attract potential prospects during the Academy's development phase, which underscored the need for varied product offerings and consistent consortium-wide communication. Overcoming these obstacles required active dialogue and cooperation among consortium members as well as explanations of how and why this strategy is a “market standard”. However, in projects with large or diverse consortia, such misalignments can lead to delays or complications in meeting project objectives, emphasising the critical need for establishing a common language from the outset.

6.3 Pinpointing MVP or a Product

The third challenge in projects like Medianumeric involve identifying during the proposal, planning, and delivery phases, the ideal balance between available time, resources from financiers (e.g., the EU or other public entities), and the tech stack and competencies available for the consortium. This balance is crucial for determining whether the outcome is a state-of-the-art Minimum Viable Product (MVP) that aligns with initial assumptions and requirements, or a "gold standard" product that fulfils the desires of potential audiences and customers.

This pivot from an envisioned comprehensive product to a fully functional, and well-delivering MVP is often a matter of resource allocation and strategic focus. In projects like Medianumeric, where the ambition is to deliver cutting-edge educational content and tools, the reality of funding and time constraints surfaces quickly. Decisions have to be made regarding which features are essential for the MVP and which can be deferred, and what the resulting outcomes are for attractiveness and exploitation outcomes based on feedback from end-users and stakeholders.

For example, during the last 8 months, the consortium ran user tests of selected modules of the course and the platform amongst a test base of 10+ students, the stakeholder board and a 28+ pre-launch cohort. Some of the feedback that described the shortcomings of the platform in comparison to market competitors included recommendations of content and platform enhancements such as gamification and overall user experience optimization, along with some requests to re-edit already produced educational materials. However, improvements had to be set aside due to the constraints mentioned above.

Thus, being aware of this prioritisation process is critical but can lead to a product that, while functional and valuable, might not fully satisfy all the stakeholders' expectations or fully exploit the market potential.

Understanding the final product's nature—whether an MVP or a "gold standard" product—becomes a strategic endeavour. It influences not only the development process but also how the product is marketed, exploited, and ultimately received by users. Clear communication about the product's scope and its alignment with available resources can manage stakeholders' expectations and guide user engagement strategies. In the case of Medianumeric, despite the constraints, the focus remained on delivering a product that, while perhaps not the envisioned gold standard due to resource limitations, provides significant value to its target audience of students, HEIs and media professionals.

6.4 Navigating Institutional Limitations

Navigating institutional limitations in projects like MediaNumeric involve overcoming significant challenges that can impede exploitation, promotion, and visibility efforts.

Two prominent hurdles include perceived GDPR compliance and the personal and institutional barriers to pooling of contact networks for broader exploitation, alongside the hesitations of consortium partners based on knowledge, motivation and available resources to actively engage in exploitation activities. GDPR compliance, especially for data sharing in particular, presents a complex obstacle, as it severely limits the project's ability to reach and engage potential users.

The modern digital landscape, where organic growth is increasingly difficult, and the costs of user acquisition through paid campaigns are prohibitively high, exacerbates this challenge. Today, the cost of acquiring a single user can be substantial, varying widely based on the market and the nature of the product or service. For digital Software as a Service (SaaS) products like online courses or academies, acquisition costs in 2023 could range from €200 to €800 for educational services according to various publicly available sources through a standard web search. These figures far exceed the typical budgets of publicly funded projects, underscoring the need for cost-efficient strategies like pooling potential customer contacts in a GDPR-compliant manner from all consortium partners to CRM or a mass mailing system for engagement campaigns at the heart of the exploitation strategy to achieve scale and efficiency of reach out to potential targets. However, this approach often stumbles upon the hesitance of consortium partners to share their networks, due to a lack of understanding about GDPR, partner internal policies, or personal concerns over privacy, whereas GDPR regulations in fact would permit that type

of “in consortium” data exchange.

To mitigate these challenges, MediaNumeric adopted strategies such as providing consortium members with exploitation messages, documentation formats, and tracking sheets. This allows for direct communication with potential leads in a manner that respects GDPR requirements. Yet, this solution introduced new inefficiencies, including increased project overheads, time management issues, and the barriers for timely assessment of exploitation performance. Moreover, the assumption that all partners have allocated exploitation hours can be flawed, leading to uneven participation and effort in the exploitation process.

The combination of high user acquisition costs, GDPR compliance challenges, and the intricacies of consortium dynamics necessitates a nuanced approach to project exploitation, especially during preplanning. It requires identification of institutional policies and barriers, especially for data and contact sharing, and workaround solutions that balance the need for compliance and cost-efficiency with the realities of the digital marketing landscape. Exploitation managers must not only navigate these institutional limitations but also foster an environment where consortium partners are informed, engaged, and collaborative, ensuring that the project can reach its target audience effectively and sustainably.

6.5 Selecting Your Advisors

The creation of a functional and mission-focused advisory board can significantly enhance the scope and effectiveness of projects by incorporating diverse expertise and networks. This strategic assembly, however, is not without its challenges, especially within the context of publicly funded endeavours like MediaNumeric. The commitment required from stakeholder members is often substantial, demanding a balance of time and effort that may not be compensated financially and time wise. This dynamic can deter potential advisors from participating or limit their involvement, making the selection process critical to ensure both commitment and alignment with the project's goals.

MediaNumeric's experience underscores the tangible benefits of a dedicated advisory board. Through targeted workshops and sessions, including face-to-face gathering in Paris in 2022, and online follow-ups in autumn 2023 for pre-product launch feedback from the board, the project benefited from direct, impactful feedback that was instrumental in refining its online academy. This proactive engagement from a core group of advisors demonstrated the potential for advisory boards to offer critical insights and validation, enhancing the project's development and readiness for launch. However, this positive

engagement was contrasted with challenges in mobilising the wider advisory group for essential tasks, particularly during the exploitation phase.

The varying levels of engagement among MediaNumeric's advisory board members highlight thus the fifth, and common challenge: maintaining consistent participation and leveraging the full potential of advisors' networks for project promotion. While a smaller, active group contributed significantly, the broader lack of involvement during critical phases pointed to the need for strategic approaches in advisor selection and engagement. Ensuring that advisors are both capable, motivated and appropriately reimbursed to contribute over time, and aligning their roles with their interests and capacities, are key factors in maximising the advisory board's impact on a project's success.

6.6 (Re)prioritising Resources

The evolving landscape of digital upskilling, micro-degrees, and e-learning platforms, alongside rising audience expectations for premium content and features, necessitates a strategic reprioritization of resources in publicly funded projects. This shift entails allocating resources not just towards high-quality content creation but also towards enhancing platform functionality and user experience. For MediaNumeric, it became evident that equal emphasis on developing a state-of-the-art online platform was as crucial as the content itself. Moreover, a longer timeframe for user onboarding and exploitation activities was needed, as the project faced challenges with a compressed schedule for these critical tasks within a few months.

Additionally, the importance of investing in commercially-backed advertising and marketing campaigns became clear, especially when leveraging personal networks for marketing proved insufficient. The ability to reach larger audiences through targeted campaigns could significantly amplify the project's impact and user base. Despite the constraints faced, MediaNumeric's strategic resource allocation allowed for the launch of a robust online solution that could stand alongside commercial offerings, successfully onboard users, and lay a strong foundation for future growth.

This experience underscores the importance of flexibility in project management and the willingness to adapt resource allocation in response to evolving digital education landscapes and user expectations. By recognizing and adjusting to these needs, projects like MediaNumeric can enhance their effectiveness, reach, and sustainability, setting a precedent for future initiatives in the digital education space.

7. Our Recommendations

If ambitious, innovation-focused projects in media and the creative industries are facing challenges similar to those mentioned above, what could be the solutions or mitigation strategies looking into the future?

The following is a synthesis of our key recommendations for consortium teams, project managers, policymakers and any other stakeholders involved in creating proposals for building the exploitation strategy for cutting edge educational, media or technology projects.

7.1 Probe the Proposal for Middle Ground

At the outset of any publicly funded project, particularly in the proposal or early stages, it's critical to **identify a middle ground that harmonises the demands of tender requirements with the creative vision and eventual user-focused “product outcome”**. Employing methodologies like design thinking or rapid prototyping can provide a preliminary glimpse into the possible features, design, platform compatibility, and customer appeal of the final product. This foresight allows for the strategic allocation of time and budgetary resources, ensuring a balance between creative content production and tangible project exploitation.

Adopting a multi-stage approach, where a larger project is segmented into smaller, independently exploitable mini deliverables, i.e. mini courses instead of one fully featured platform, can facilitate a steady stream of "exploitation wins" throughout the project's lifespan. This strategy not only ensures incremental progress and visibility but also allows for the adjustment of subsequent phases based on early feedback and market reception. Such an approach aligns project milestones with market demands, fostering a more agile and responsive project development cycle that can adapt to unforeseen challenges or opportunities.

7.2 Create a Common Language

To foster a cohesive project environment, **it's crucial to schedule and prioritise stakeholder alignment sessions aimed at developing a common vocabulary across creative, technical, academic, and business domains**. This ensures comprehensive discussions on all concerns, particularly around exploitation and go-to-market strategies, facilitating a unified project vision. Transparent communication from the outset, addressing limitations and concerns, and organising seminars or workshops can significantly enhance mutual understanding, bringing all partners to the same level of

insight and commitment.

Furthermore, engaging in early audience identification and brainstorming during the proposal stages is vital. This process should outline clear strategies, access measures, and commitments, laying the groundwork for targeted user engagement. Prioritising resources for user testing, incorporating large-scale feedback, and remaining adaptable to changing user preferences or overall ecosystem conditions are essential strategies. These efforts will not only align project objectives with user expectations but also ensure agile responses to feedback and market dynamics, fostering a project that is both user-centric and adaptable.

7.3 Solve the Audience-Customer Paradox

Addressing the audience-customer paradox requires a strategic assessment of the alignment between funders' requirements and the consortium's academic, creative, technical, and content capabilities. As an exploitation lead, **determine early on whether the project's output will be a high-quality MVP or a fully functional service capable of competing in the commercial marketplace.** It's crucial to realistically evaluate the consortium and institutional resources to decide on the project's scope. For instance, universities may lack the personnel or financial capacity for product-level quality, influencing the decision towards an MVP.

Based on this thorough assessment, exploitation KPIs and messaging strategies should be tailored accordingly as KPI expectations will significantly differ from an MVP to a “market quality” solution. The nature of the product - whether an MVP or a fully developed market-ready service - significantly influences the go-to-market strategy and user engagement expectations. For projects like MediaNumeric, this distinction impacts how the online course is presented and marketed to potential users. Effectively managing expectations and planning for consortium-wide feedback and follow-up actions are essential for navigating this paradox and ensuring the project's success in meeting its dual objectives.

7.4 Identify Institutional Barriers

To ensure the effectiveness of an exploitation strategy, it is imperative to **identify institutional barriers from the outset, even though conversations might feel inconvenient within the team or the project consortium.** These barriers can include GDPR compliance issues, reluctance to share personal networks, institutional constraints, and resource limitations for participation in shared exploitation activities. Recognizing and openly discussing these obstacles early without any judgement, before finalising the

exploitation strategy and framework, allows for adjustments that accommodate potential limitations, ensuring that the exploitation hypotheses and action plans are both realistic and achievable. A good way to acquire this data through confidential questionnaires or feedback forms, to minimise institutional confidentiality related issues.

Moreover, it's crucial to **communicate from day one the realities of user acquisition costs in the marketplace during the proposal and early project phases to all partners within the consortium, even though those costs and resources are not “standard practice” within regular publicly funded projects.** This includes acknowledging the financial and resource commitments including the need to purchase marketing and advertising on platforms, tools, landing pages, CRM systems and the like necessary for "industry-level" exploitation, and providing market-based evidence to support these requirements. Transparently explaining to the consortium and addressing these factors helps in reevaluating and retooling exploitation outcomes, ensuring that expectations are aligned with the project's capabilities and market realities, thereby facilitating a more successful exploitation strategy.

7.5 Choose Your Advisors for Features not Roles

Selecting a stakeholder board with a strategic focus on the project's desired outcomes rather than organisational affiliations or titles can significantly amplify the project's exploitation strategy and overall success. By "reverse engineering" the selection process based on the project's end goals, **seek out individuals with expertise in critical areas such as network and exploitation competence, business modelling, financing, and content specialisation.** Ensuring upfront commitment from advisors by clearly communicating the project's objectives and their pivotal role, combined with offering compensation and maintaining regular engagement through digital check-ins, can sustain momentum and foster a supportive, goal-oriented advisory environment.

This approach emphasises the importance of matching stakeholder board members with specific project needs, ensuring that their expertise directly contributes to achieving tangible results. By prioritising features and expertise over mere titles or organisational positions, projects can secure advisors who are not only invested in the project's success but also have the skills and networks necessary to guide and enhance the exploitation strategy. Regular engagement and appropriate compensation further incentivize valuable contributions, creating a dynamic, supportive advisory board aligned with the project's strategic objectives.

7.6 Restructure Resources

Restructuring resources to prioritise Communication, Dissemination, and Exploitation (CoDisEx) as a central pillar of a project is crucial for unlocking its full potential, as evidenced by ourselves during the MediaNumeric project. **Take the lead to elevate CoDisEx to the same level of importance as other core elements, projects can ensure a more integrated and effective approach to reaching their goals.** This involves reallocating resources to support a market-quality exploitation strategy, including sufficient time and budget for testing, adapting to feedback, and overcoming regulatory and institutional challenges, thereby facilitating a more agile and responsive project development process.

Incorporating lessons learned from previous recommendations, a 360-degree approach to resource restructuring necessitates preparing for GDPR limitations, institutional barriers, and potential need for pivots. Allocating resources for these contingencies, along with setting aside time for active engagement with advisory boards, can significantly enhance a project's adaptability and success. Understanding the final product's position—whether an MVP or a comprehensive service—allows for more targeted resource allocation and strategic planning, ensuring that every aspect of the project is poised for maximum impact and sustainability.

7.7 Anticipate Early “What’s Next”

Early anticipation of "what's next" for consortium partners, particularly the lead, is crucial for project sustainability beyond its initial phase. This foresight involves evaluating the project's future viability, including its lifespan, the financial and legal responsibilities for maintenance, and the capacity for business arrangements with academic institutions if those are possible at all in case of mixed consortia. Additionally, exploring avenues for additional funding to sustain and evolve the project is essential but not self-evident.

By addressing these considerations early, partners can align their expectations and strategies with feasible exploitation and sustainability goals as well as get relevant clearance from their supervisors regarding financial commitments or post-project fundraising efforts and timelines. This approach not only ensures a realistic outlook on the project's future but also lays down a clear plan for continuing success and commitment beyond its completion, fostering a proactive stance towards post-project development and maintenance.

Conclusion

This Exploitation White Paper highlighted the journey of building an exploitation and go-to-market strategy for an EU-funded online upskilling platform, the MediaNumeric Academy. The paper aimed at providing insights into the challenges and learnings of taking the project to the market for academia, the media industry, and innovation players.

The primary goal of this white paper was to outline the key pillars of the exploitation strategy of the MediaNumeric project, including our agile approach but also underscoring our recommendations for future project managers such as balancing focus, creating a common language for stakeholder alignment, pinpointing MVP or a product, navigating institutional limitations, selecting your advisors, and (re)prioritising resources. It also highlighted the common challenges that we discovered, experienced, and had to solve “hands on” during our MediaNumeric journey, such as creating a common language, solving the audience-customer paradox, identifying institutional barriers, and restructuring resources.

The solutions and recommendations provided in this paper hopefully offer practical and actionable items for future project managers, media industry executives, and policymakers embarking on the journey of building a ground-up innovation and upskilling program, or a project for the creative or media industries in Europe, in their quest to create a more innovative and competitive media ecosystem in Europe.