

Journalism is increasingly consumed online, and **studies** tell us that the most popular media platforms in Moldova are already online. This trend is also changing how money flows as **most money no longer goes directly to the press**, but rather to social networks and major news aggregators. Major changes are also taking place in consumer behavior. Content creation is becoming easier, putting bloggers and influencers on par with the press when it comes to access to funding sources. These changes are further underscored by artificial intelligence which offers new ways to create and edit content.

As **traditional sources of funding become increasingly unstable**, community input is the best long-term solution. Our media managers should develop their relationship with the community by making use of all the available resources in the region. According to an IPSOS study, the top three criteria for someone to start donating to a media outlet are the quality and accuracy of its journalism, its independence from political and commercial actors, and its transparency regarding funds and money management.

In this edition, **we address the issue of bank accounts**. We speak with experts Oleg Khomenok from Ukraine and Petru Macovei from Moldova about money and strategies for building a community willing to pay for journalism.



Oleg Khomenok
Board member of the
Global Network of
Investigative Journalists

"Any media outlet actually sells the audience's trust in its content."

There are several monetization tools in the media industry that can help journalists fund their work. With a few exceptions, these tools can be effective on any platform, anywhere in the world. For a detailed explanation of some of these tools, [see](#) the Fojo Media Institute's [analysis](#), "Monetization tools for media outlets, bloggers, and media practitioners in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine," published earlier this year.

Models for building relationships with the public include donation and crowdfunding schemes, subscriptions, clubs, freemium models, online shops, and trade. Oleg Khomenok, a board member of the Global Network of Investigative Journalists and one of the authors of the guide, explains the differences among them:

When we talk about donations, we simply mean asking for help. You are asking the public to donate to your journalism with the promise that you are serving the public interest and using the money properly. Another approach is to announce a specific purpose for fundraising to implement specific tasks, for example, producing a documentary film, redesigning a website, etc. In Moldova, this type of crowdfunding could take place on the Particip.md platform. I was surprised, however, that there are no projects dedicated to media funding on this platform."

The club or membership model unites people around shared values and generates benefits for its members. Members can receive benefits such as premium content, behind-the-scenes information, and editorial visits, among others, offered by some media outlets and may provide its members with certain advantages over ordinary users.

Other methods include implementing a paywall, which is a paid access to all content, or allowing the user to access content without annoying ads. It could also be a subscription that gives access only to premium or exclusive content. While the general public will be able to read most news stories, access to analytical material, in-depth reports, and investigations will be by subscription only. Newsrooms can choose to offer two, three, five, or ten free articles, and once a user has read that many articles, they will be asked to pay a subscription fee."

According to the Ukrainian expert, such models are not mutually exclusive: they can be used simultaneously, for example, by collecting donations to update a website and selling access to content, but everything depends on the strategic choice that the media institution has to make.

Building a community

"When it comes to media startups, the first step is to define your target audience and the type of journalistic content you will create. It is important to form a community of people who share our values and are loyal to our publication and to satisfy their information needs. **It is essential to identify their needs and how they consume information**, including whether they can afford to pay for it. If people are faced with choosing between buying a loaf of bread or security and paying for a subscription to a publication, they will obviously choose bread. This is what happened in Ukraine. Now, Ukrainians donate more to the army than to the independent press. However, I think one underdeveloped niche in many post-Soviet countries is the diaspora link. All of these countries have large diaspora communities. They want to know what is going on at home," Oleg Khomenok explains.

"People are the most important supporters of independent media. Not donors or advertisers, but the people who consume the content. Any media, in essence, builds audience trust in its product by providing important, useful and interesting information to consumers. This is the key to long-term development. **If people trust your information and are willing to pay for what they find trustworthy and useful, then both donors and advertisers will in turn be willing to spend money** to reach that audience.

Journalists can create content that explains the real costs of media production. This will help the public understand why independent media needs financial support from people who believe in its mission and values, in addition to clicks and readers. This kind of transparency should be part of media literacy because **it encompasses more than just fact-checking and debunking disinformation**. It also involves explaining how the media ecosystem works, including where funds come from and how media outlets are supported.



Petru Macovei
Executive director of the
Association of Independent
Press

"Newsrooms must prove their usefulness."

Petru Macovei, the executive director of the Association of Independent Press, believes that many outlets in Moldova have tried innovative approaches to developing models based on public input. However, he believes that they became discouraged too quickly and gave up. "In our area, people are used to getting everything for free, without investing or getting involved. This mentality needs to change. Although we do not have many successful examples, some newsrooms are insisting on membership and selling their content for a subscription. **We need to persevere so that the audience gets used to it.** At the same time, we need to improve quality."

Communities need to be educated, the expert says: "A lot of colleagues in the media make the mistake of thinking that they make products for everyone. **We need to create our communities**, work with those communities and build their loyalty. A good example is the RISE team's crowdfunding campaign amid the US funding crisis. The campaign demonstrated that there is a community around this media project that can be mobilized to donate the money the newsroom needs."

Working with the community

Communities need to come together, Petru Macovei explains. This is not work that yields immediate results. One example is community events. "I see how some newsrooms in the regions organize meetings for businesspeople and various clubs for young people and other community groups." **In addition to their mission to inform, newsrooms need to demonstrate their usefulness.** To maintain public interest, we must demonstrate our usefulness in different ways.

At events, we give them our platform to discuss their issues and bring them to the attention of decision-makers. On the other hand, we use this opportunity for marketing purposes to promote our product and understand what our audience wants. This allows us to create and nurture human relationships. These meetings should be regular to foster a closer relationship with the community, which will result in a quicker response when help is needed. Transparency with the community is also very important. There should be a section on the website where people can learn about funding sources and how money is used.

At the same time, we must avoid overusing these calls for help. There must be well-planned communication campaigns. For example, since it is tax return filing season, now is the perfect time for the media to run campaigns to persuade the public to donate."

What audience research tools are still needed in Moldova

Petru Macovei says that existing digital tools for audience measurement are sufficient and should be explored more by our media managers. He adds that, regardless of the size or scope of the newsroom, **it is crucial for journalists to leave their offices frequently**, organize regular meetings with various audiences, and discover what they want. This interaction will provide journalists with a fresh perspective on their work. "I believe that we rely too heavily on digital audience measurement tools, and as a result, we are losing sight of the actual, physical audience. **I suggest turning to the audience.** This could also lead to greater job satisfaction."

How grants can help us develop our sources of income

Petru Macovei and Oleg Khomenok both believe that grants play an important role in the Moldovan media ecosystem and should be used to increase revenue generation capacity. "In any situation in which a media outlet requests financial support, managers must allocate some of these funds to strengthen sustainability and long-term development. This means developing alternative revenue models, not just relying on grants," Oleg Khomenok explains.



Opportunity!

The Ministry of Culture has announced a competition to award grants to media outlets for projects and programs that strengthen their capacity to ensure editorial and economic independence. Click [here](#) for details.



Get Help!

If you are experiencing ongoing stress and anxiety, you can request a free and confidential consultation with a psychologist using [this chatbot](#) or by filling out [this form](#). You will be connected with a specialist within 48 hours.

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