Up close and personal: exploring the bonds between promoters and backers in audiovisual crowdfunded projects

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Introduction

The nature of cultural production and consumption continues to undergo profound changes. New platforms, new media, and new types of cultural agents, coupled with easier access to the means of production and promotion, have generated a multitude of emergent media forms, redefining the production and consumption of cultural products, and altering the relationships between media, industries, and audiences (Jenkins, 2006; Deuze 2008; Schafer, 2011). As a means of communication and production, and as a source of entertainment, the Internet has been a driving force behind the transformations in processes of creation and exchange (Braet and Spek, 2010), forcing us to reconsider traditional boundaries between the various agents involved in cultural production.

Beyond celebratory discourses, this new ecology must be characterized in terms of change, but also of continuity, even if in an unstable and conflictive relation between practices, business models and cultural agents. In the end, this is about the proliferation of spreadable content, the emergence of new cultural agents, transformations of cultural consumption patterns, but also power relations, the roles of public and private cultural institutions in promoting culture, controversies on diversity and public participation, audience fragmentation and uncertainty over business models.

Participation has become a key concept in the understanding of these emerging media practices in a context of cultural productivity at all levels. One of the most popularized expressions used to refer to this environment is 'participatory culture', defined in terms of "low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations […] informal mentorship […], members [who] believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another." (Jenkins, 2010: 238). However, Jenkins' position has generated controversy related to the actual scope of participatory culture, its

interdependences with established media power structures (Deuze, 2008), and his own conceptualization of participation (Fuchs, 2011a; 2011b). As Deuze states, not all participation is the same, nor is it equally distributed across user groups or media forms:

> [M]uch of this participatory culture is heavily regulated, constrained or embedded within company processes and practices that strive to "harness" rather than "unleash" participation. […] Thus, the role participation plays in the media industries' move online can be seen as an expression of the convergence of production and consumption cultures […] as well as in the corporate appropriation of the technology.
> (Deuze, 2008: 31).

One of the manifestations of participatory culture is the popularization of platforms that enable users to upload and to share content, blurring the traditional delimitations between producers and consumers. A high-profile instance of the redrawing of boundaries between producers, cultural products, and audiences is the phenomenon of crowdfunding. It is not just about changes fostered by technological innovations, but also about shifting mindsets and realities around new forms of process organization, providing more or less radical alternatives to the traditional organization of cultural production (Brannerman, 2012). Thus, crowdfunding allows for a closer relationship between the producers and consumers of audiovisual products than in earlier models, wherein individuals would consume artefacts that had been previously financed either by industry, by the state, or a combination of the two (Kappel 2009). With crowdfunding the audience becomes a cultural agent in a model that binds cultural production to both producers and consumers in a relationship of co-dependency (Kappel, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Roig, 2010; Leibovitz, Sánchez-Navarro & Roig, 2013).

The idea of crowdfunding finds its roots in the broader concept of crowdsourcing (Estellés & González, 2012), which appeals to the crowd into making voluntary contributions to obtain ideas, feedback and solutions in order to develop corporate activities (Howe, 2006; Belleflamme, Lambert and Schwienbacher, 2010). Crowdsourcing aims at the involvement of the crowd by means of various processes of the production stage of a product or activity. From this viewpoint, the financing process may be understood as a type of crowdsourcing in that it makes an allusion to the collaboration of the crowd for the success of a critical process.

Following Schwienbacher and Larralde (2008) we understand Crowdfunding as "an open call, mostly through the Internet, for the provision of financial resources either in the form of donations or in exchange for some form of reward and/or voting rights in order to support initiatives for specific purposes" (2008: 4). Tim Kappel adds some important specifications, defining crowdfunding as "the act of informally generating and distributing funds, usually online, by groups of people for specific social, personal, entertainment or other purposes" (2009: 375). This approach is remarkable, as it does not make references to the benefits or rewards received by the sponsors for their donations. Both agree in the importance of the Internet and mainly the web 2.0 (Brabham 2008), to mobilize a large amount of people, "the crowd", and making it possible the communication and networking between entrepreneurs and investors (Lambert and Schwienbacher, 2010, Brannerman, 2012)

There are basically four types of crowdfunding (De Buysere et al. 2012, Brannerman, 2012): Donation-based, reward-based, lending-based and equity-based. It is possible to consider two more, which are not mutually exclusive (Belleflamme et al. 2011): direct crowdfunding, where the financing recollection process is carried out independently, and indirect crowdfunding, which is mediated by specialized platforms dedicated exclusively to promotion of projects like Kickstarter, Indiegogo or Verkami.

Crowdfunding platforms have facilitated the mobilization of ideas, the interconnection of funders with creators, the bringing together of ideas and resources, and new organizational possibilities (Brannerman, 2012). In this modality, trust becomes a drive for agreement, as there are no legal constrictive modalities that ensure the compliance of these agreements. In the creative industries, crowdfunding has been taking place mainly in a reward-based form through specialized platforms.

As a multi-faceted phenomenon, crowdfunding enables us to reflect on many different sides of participatory culture: thus, contributing to the financing of such projects not as much an economic activity than an act of symbolic exchange. Fully aware of the fact that they are unlikely to see a return on their investments (in the case that this possibility is even considered), contributors effectively act as the traditional patrons of the arts did: that is, sponsoring art for art's sake, rather than for potential monetary reward (Frederick, 1964). The return is usually channelled through rewards with symbolic value pointing out to the engagement of the crowd with the project, which they can identify themselves with (Wojciechowski, 2011). In economic terms, the rewards are not usually equivalent to the pledge. A key difference is the collective

nature of crowdfunding; joint action is needed because of the high amounts of money needed to fund even a small audiovisual production.

In terms of the creative process, crowdfunding turns what we might previously know as a creative practitioner or an artist into a finance manager. Such figures differ from their forerunners insomuch as they must cultivate relationships with the public prior to executing their creative practice – although the public still exerts little or no direct influence over content once a project is in production. Furthermore, crowdfunding serves a function of community building by forging a common bond between those individuals who donate to a project and also follow its development (Leibovitz, 2013).

As a relatively new phenomenon, crowdfunding has only recently drawn scholarly attention, with early studies tending to emphasize economic issues over production and creative processes. Therefore, scholars tend towards studying crowdfunding as a potential viable alternative to traditional financing systems, and to ascertain the conditions that favour the success of some particular calls. It has been suggested that difficulties in accumulating sufficient contributions to fund a production indicate that it might best serve as a complement to traditional financing systems; as a means of facilitating larger contributions by entrepreneurs, companies, and state bodies (Braet and Spek, 2010). Furthermore, as Chris Ward and Vandana Ramachandran (2010) have shown, crowdfunders are influenced by the success or failure of related projects, as well as by the choices made by their peers who backed projects previously.

From another point of view, scholars have pointed to the relevance of the personal network as the grounds and prime support involved in the crowdfunding process. In this direction Belleflamme, Lambert & Schwienbacher (2010) question the elements involved in crowdfunding as a model for entrepreneurs. The results of their research conclude that the model highlights the importance of community-based experience for crowdfunding to be a viable alternative. Small entrepreneurs without access to venture capital have traditionally relied on their primary support network, informally known as "friends, family, and fools" (The 3Fs) or bootstrap financing (use of personal finances as opposed to loans or venture capital) (Kotha & George, 2012; Brannerman, 2012). From this perspective, crowdfunding may be seen as a wider concept other than merely fund collecting.

Agrawal, Catalini and Goldfarb (2010) focused their research in the role of the geographic distance in an online platform for financing early stage artist-entrepreneurs. They found out that investment patterns over time are independent of

geographic distance between entrepreneur and investor, suggesting in their conclusions a reduced role for spatial proximity in online relationships (Agrawal et al. 2010). However, they emphasize the important role that friends and family may play online and offline in generating early investment in entrepreneurial ventures. Later, investors may use this initial boost in order to increase the likelihood of further funding by way of accessing distant sources of capital. (Agrawal et al. 2010).

Tim Kappel (2009) goes further and argues that *Ex ante* crowdfunding can lower the risk for the creators, not only by distributing the initial investment between creators and fans, but also by providing a mechanism that ensures that the production becomes popular and therefore more likely to be commercially successful. (In Brannerman 2012).

Through our research on backers of audiovisual projects funded via crowdfunding, carried out mainly through quantitative data analysis, we propose a more nuanced approach to analyze the affective engagement between backers and creators. The research is focused on motivations and perceptions regarding the crowdfunding backing process along time, which allow us to get a much deeper insight of what is going on during such cultural processes.

Our results show that personal connection between creators and backers are the main reason to engage with an audience in a reward-based crowdfunding project. However, as collaboration extends across time and across different projects, interpersonal bonds get weaker and other reasons for collaborating arise. Thus, new factors like quality perception, offered rewards or shared interest emerge. Moreover, the engagement with the creative project tends to relay on a larger interconnected crowd.

This way, crowdfunding can be approached as a creative practice where users put into play affective engagements and social values, drawing a complex picture that go far beyond a economic model based only on pecuniary contribution.

Data Collection

The present study is based on data obtained from several sources, using quantitative research techniques. The starting point is the Spanish crowdfunding platform Verkami who provided data related to their first years of operation (from 2010 up to 2013). This data entails information about the projects carried out, as well as the donations

received from all the sponsors. As we'll see later, this allowed for the identification of two main typologies: 'occasional' and 'frequent' backers.

The second phase of the research was aimed at gathering perceptions about collaboration practices, motivations toward crowdfunding and the way in which the campaigns were carried out, on the part of the backers of the platform. Bearing this in mind, an online survey was carried out between June and July 2013.

Data was gathered by means of a web-based questionnaire, which was distributed to crowdfunders primarily via Verkami crowdfunding platform administrators and through an open call on several social networks like Facebook and Twitter. This call provided a link to an online questionnaire, using the Netquest survey platform for this purpose.

As our research was focused on audiovisual production, the universe of the study is comprised by all of those who collaborated with at least one audiovisual project in Verkami whether they supported another project or not. The total of completed surveys was 134, which made up the sample for the second phase. The questionnaire was anonymous and self-administered.

The survey included a set of 25 close-ended questions about different elements involved in crowdfunding. In order to measure crowdfunders' attitude towards multiple dimensions of crowdfunding, a rating scale (the Likert scale) was used in some of the survey questions. Once the data was collected a quantitative analysis process was performed using the computer statistic software SPSS (Statistical Software for the Social Sciences).

The Verkami Platform

Verkami is a crowdfunding platform specialized in the crowdfunding of cultural projects. It is based in Catalonia, and it was set up at the end of 2010 as part of an entrepreneur project incubator, becoming one of the first Spanish platforms specialized in this type of financing. Verkami based its model in similar initiatives such as Kickstarter or Indiegogo in the United States. Up to date, Verkami is considered one of the biggest crowdfunding platforms at a national level.

Until June 2013, the platform has collected around €5.000.000 distributed in 1.581 projects already carried out, with a success rate of nearly a 70%. These figures, in comparison to the results obtained by Kickstarter, may be seen as insignificant; nevertheless, these results are obtained within a field of continuous expansion and accelerated growth.

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It is not the objective of this research to carry out an in-depth analysis of the results of the projects carried out in the platform. Therefore, we will focus on the sponsors with the aim of examining the practices and dynamics of mediatised collaboration for digital platforms aimed at audiovisual production. An important aspect deals with the sponsors' frequency of support, where we differentiate between those who have contributed more than once, and those who have done it occasionally. This will help us to reflect on the elements involved in the process while keeping track of the differences that may arise between both groups.

Findings and discussion

Repeated collaboration may be understood as an indicator of the possibilities of crowdfunding becoming a consolidated model of cultural production, because it implies a collective of sponsors who are willing to undertake a longer-term cooperation. But most of all, repeated collaboration means a commitment to the possibilities of cultural consumption that crowdfunding offers, and therefore, it supports the consolidation of the model in the future. A committed audience that understands sponsorship as a practice would support the model, the platform, and the projects. Thus, it is fundamental to understand the behaviour of this population of repeating collaborators, since it is the basis for thinking that microsponsoring can be seen as a stable financing model through time, replicable for all sorts of cultural production.

According to the data provided by Verkami, up to the first semester of 2013, 129.955 donations had been made and distributed among the 1.581 projects that have been able to end their campaign. Nevertheless, these donations come from a total of 98.776 sponsors, which means that there is a considerable number of sponsors who back more than once, whether by repeating their donation in the same project or supporting other projects within the same platform. This corresponds to 17% percent of the collaborators. Although there is a large proportion of sponsors who collaborated more than once, this does not mean that the collaboration was carried out in different projects. The analysis of the data about donations, with emphasis in the supported projects, shows a slight variation that has to be accounted for. Thus, we see that 88% of the sponsors have done it; which shows a 5% increase in relation to the previous portion. This figure helps us to establish a general parameter of the frequency in the collaboration with crowdfunding campaigns. In the survey provided to members of the platform focused on audiovisual production, the proportion

changes considerably. This way, the proportion of sponsors who supported one project is 34.3%, whereas 64.7% have supported more than one project.

The distinction between collaborators who are frequent from those who are occasional allows us to establish the differences inside the population- an interesting matter worthy of further study. Through the results of our survey, we have noticed a favourable tendency towards cooperation among those having supported more than one project: this is why we consider them under the category of frequent backers.

The survey revealed a number of reasons given by backers for supporting financially a project (see table 1). It showed that interpersonal relationships play a key role in successful crowdfunding initiatives; sixty-seven percent (67,3 %) of the surveyed donators had previous relationships to one or more of the applicants.

Table 1: Reasons for donating to a project

	Occasional Backer	Frequent Backers	Total
I know the filmmaker or someone in the team personally.	65.5%	68.1%	67,3%
I like the idea behind the project	55.2%	68.1%	64,4%
I like to support independent projects	13.8%	45.8%	36,6%
I know about the career of the filmmaker or someone in the team.	13.8%	29.2%	24,8%
I would like to receive the offered reward	3.4%	20.8%	15,8%
I am in solidarity with other filmmakers like me	6.9%	16.7%	13,9%
I know a friend/relative of the filmmaker or someone in the team.	17.2%	9.7%	11,9%
Other	0.0%	1.4%	1,0%

Another important factor in donating to a project is the idea behind the project. The data shows that there is a solidarity based on personal ties, but also subjected to critical evaluation. The relevant fact is that 64% of the sample acknowledged that the content of the project (embodied in the idea) was a motivating factor. While prior personal relationships are the basis of the partnership, it does not mean unconditional help: there is also a search for content based on certain interests, which eventually materialized in the success of a campaign. An established relationship between an applicant and a donator by no means guarantees that a donation will be forthcoming.

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An interesting case to point out is The Cosmonaut[1], a transmedia film directed by Nicolás Alcalá in 2011. The Project raised over €300,000 from 5,000 contributors. It was the first crowdfunded film in Spain and helped to pave the way for the foundation of the Spanish platforms we can see today. From €2 on, people could be part of the founders group who "Saved the Cosmonaut". It was a cutting edge project which caught the atention of new group of sponsors by their innovative aproach.

Conversely, potential rewards do not appear to be a driving force behind donations, with only sixteen percent (15,8%) of respondents suggesting that material or financial returns had inspired them to crowdfund.

Even if the analysis focused on the type of collaborator highlights important differences, the significance of previous personal relationships is maintained without substantial differences. This way, the idea behind the project was the second most important motivator of support after personal ties. In the group of frequent donors this becomes even more important, turning to be as important as personal ties (68.1% in both groups). Frequent collaboration goes a step forward seeking certain characteristics, opening the door to different subjective ways of evaluation based on personal taste and preference.

The most imperative difference is found in those who say they are motivated by solidarity with the independent film creation. For occasional backers, this is only considered important by 13.8% of those surveyed. In the case of the frequent collaborators, the proportion augments to the 45.8%, a very significant difference.

The director's background or the members of the filmmaker's team, is not considered important in the context of occasional collaborators (13.8%). It is more present, though, in those who have done it frequently (29.2%). Solidarity between independent directors also shows some changes: for those who are occasional directors, solidarity is recognized as a motivating reason to collaborate in 6.9% of the cases. For those who have done it more than once, the percentage increases up to 16.7%

The rewards, which in the general context of the survey do not show a significant relevance, are considered by frequent collaborators to be more important (3.4% in the case of occasional sponsors and 20.8% for the frequent ones). The opposite effect is

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[1] http://en.cosmonautexperience.com/

seen in the importance attributed to indirect personal relations, that is, with a friend, acquaintance of the director or member of the team of the project which is viewed as more important for the occasional sponsors (17.2%) than for those who have done it more frequently (9.7%).

This way, some reasons which might be initially considered as secondary, such as solidarity with independent creation, filmmaker's background or the reward acquire a bigger prominence, while the quantity of supported projects increases. Meanwhile, personal relations lose strength as the frequency to supports increases. These differences reveal that the more the sponsors are familiarized with collaborative practice – as in the case of frequent backers - the more changes happen regarding motivations for collaboration.

This suggests the existence of certain values, which might be related to subjective perceptions of quality, which begin to appear as the collaboration is repeated over time. This trend coexists with other elements underlying collaboration based on personal relationships. These elements will reshape the collaborative practice as time and collaboration progresses.

Please note that our current research is not focused on specific projects but on a general overview of perceptions toward collaborations through crowdfunding. A deeper focus on a specific project may show different approaches to collaboration and backers dynamics. Thus, we have observed how singular projects, like The Day After (L'endemà, about the process of political independence of Catalonia)[2] show a different pattern, as they are capable of attracting occasional backers not personally attached to the creative team but actively involved in the thematic subject of the project (not unlike other similar cases like Veronica Mars, see Chin, B., Jones, B., McNutt, M. & Pebler, L., 2013). Actually, this is the biggest project funded in Spain so far, being supported by more than 8.000 backers.

Going deeper, Table 2 show the importance granted to some factors involved in the crowdfunding practice.

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[2] http://www.verkami.com/projects/4171-l-endema

Table 2: When supporting a project, what importance do you grant to the following factors?

	Very important	Important	Of medium importance	Little importance	Not important
Theme/Idea	73.52%	21.56%	4.9%		
Reward	12.74%	21.56%	33.33%	20.58%	11.76%
Quality of the project	54.9%	39.21%	4.9%	0.98%	
Amount of support received	1.96%	9.8%	28.43%	43.13%	16.66%
Information available in the web site of the project	39.21%	34.31%	21.56%	2.94%	1.96%

As it can be observed, for all the group of respondents (occasional and frequent backers) the factors granted as having the highest importance in collaboration are: idea behind the project and quality perception. The notion of perception is important because it allow us to highlight a certain kind of subjective construction of preference and even taste, bearing in mind that most of the projects are in its initial phases of production process (Leibovitz, Sánchez-Navarro & Roig, 2013). Furthermore, the importance granted to project contents (idea) and quality standards helps to keep collaboration as a matter of informed personal choice. All in all, these elements make us think on the emergence of a cooperation model based on personal expressions of interest while collaboration is repeated over time.

Again, the reward does not stand as particularly influential at the time of leaning the balance towards collaboration or augmenting the amount of contribution. For a majority of respondents, reward is not considered as something important when collaborating. Thus, contrary to what is suggested by Ward and Rhamachandran (2010), the previous support received by the project does not appear to be of relevant

importance or considered as a previous antecedent for collaboration: therefore a "contagion effect" does not seem significant.

Another interesting issue is related to the sources of information that make up the project support campaign. This is an important variable at the time of determining previous relationships between the sponsors and the projects, as well as in order to analyse the elements that provide the basis for these collaborations in depth. The literature reviewed shows that there is a strong connection between the majority of the sponsors and the creators they are supporting.

The table below summarizes the case of the occasional collaborators.

Table 3: Sources of Information

	Frequency	Valid percentage
Because of a friend/ acquaintance who is part of the project.	29	62.2
Saw it in Facebook / Twitter of a friend/ acquaintance	5	11.1
Saw it in a web site/ blog / Twitter/ Facebook of the project	4	8.8
Other; which one?	3	6.6
Though the page of the crowdfunding portal	2	4.4
Through a friend / acquaintance who supported the project	1	2.2
Saw it in a newspaper, television, or radio.	1	2.2
I don't remember	1	2.2
Total	46	100

For the occasional sponsors group we can see that the previous personal relationship between the sponsors and the creative team is the basis for the transmission of information, which coincides with the main motivation to support. The survey data shows that 63% (62,2%) of this group know about the project through some friend or acquaintance that is part of the project. This forms the first core support group (Belleflame et. al. 2010), that is, those who become involved in the funding of the project by virtue of those pre-existing relationships. The rest of the possible ways to

transmit information are then marginal, because the second majority of answers also allude to a previous acquaintance that could be understood as a personal relationship based on weaker ties.

In the case of those who have collaborated in more than one project, we can observe that the circulation of information is distributed differently. The survey inquired in the way in which the collaborators had heard or found out about the project, making a distinction between the first and the last supported project (when not having the possibility of asking for each one of them).

The first thing that caught our attention was that the data was distributed in the same way for the occasional sponsors and for the first project supported by frequent collaborations. It seems like when doing their first donation/collaboration they were in similar conditions as those of the first group (occasional sponsors).

The graph below shows the distribution of the answers and their differences in terms of the repetition of the support over time.

Figure 1: How did you find out about the Project?? (First and last supported projects)
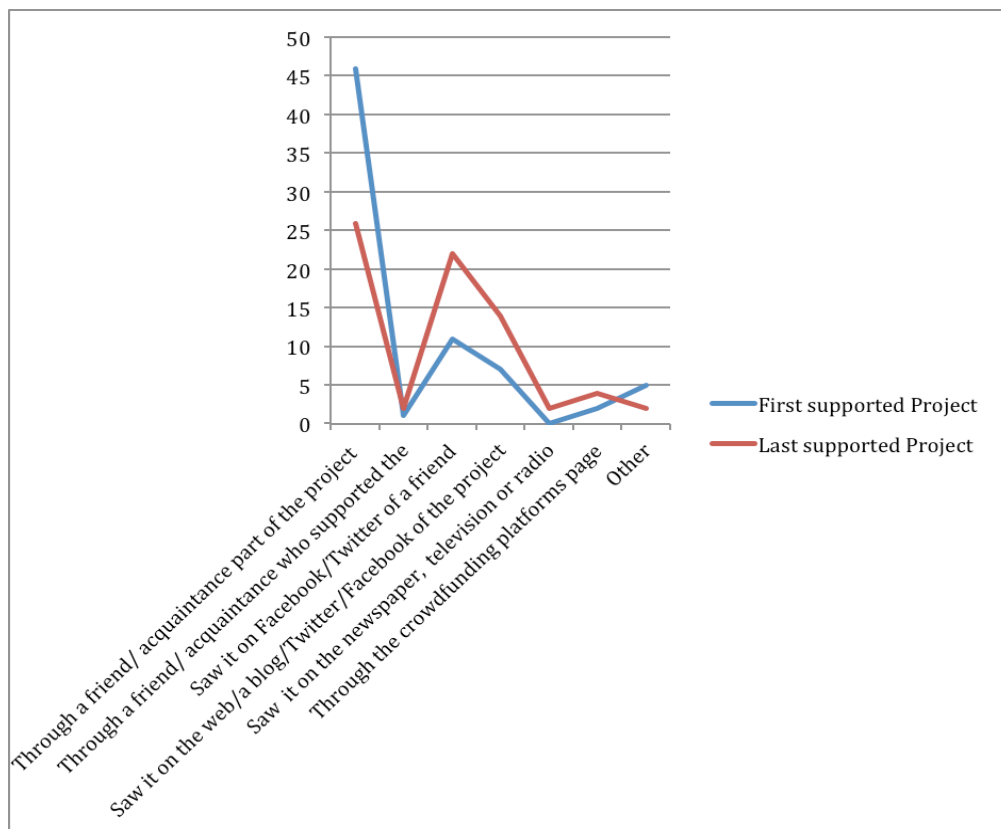
As for the last supported projects, we find certain differences that show us how the sources of information have changed as the collaboration is repeated over time. The pre-eminence of personal relationship networks seems to get diminished, hinting at the emergence of other means perceived as equally effective and based on weaker connections.

It is unquestionable that a network of acquaintances of the members of the project is the basis for the support for a crowdfunding campaign. As in the case of the occasional collaborators, we can observe that the great majority heard of the first project because of their relationship with one of the members who belonged to the project (62 %). Conversely, this changes radically in the last supported projects, with only a 37% of the surveyed respondents stating that they heard of the project by means of their relatives.

With occasional collaborators, as well as with frequent ones, the second most answered option deals with social networks and the circulation of information. In this case, the 16% of the survey respondents found out about the first project they supported via Facebook or Twitter, or through some friend or acquaintance. This percentage increases up to the 27% for the last project. The interesting fact is that it implies expanding the network of acquaintances one step further. So, in this case, it can still be considered a personal relationship but in a more indirect way.

Thus, we see that the percentages pointing at information sites double, be it web pages, social networks of the projects or the crowdfunding platforms themselves. Thus, we see certain consistencies with the fluctuations in the motivations portrayed previously. For the occasional collaborator, the sources of information on the projects are strongly determined by the circle closest to the project promoter, other sources being less relevant. This is very similar to what happens in the case of the first project supported by the group of frequent collaborators. However, for the latest projects, other sources of information become important, in a similar way that with repeated collaboration. This may be the reason why social networks and crowdfunding platforms, as means of information, acquire more importance. Ultimately, it is again about expanding the circle of acquaintances.

Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, we've seen the role of personal bonds as a source of engaggement with a crowdfunding proyect, as well as its evolution through time. Initially, a support network based on previous interpersonal relationships exerts a positive influence towards collaboration. However, other items, like the perception of quality, the project's topics and scope, further enrich this relationship and become more and more important. In the end, we are witnessing the creation of a support network with shared interests, which lie beyond pre-existing ties. It must be stated that this is not an unconditional support; on the contrary, it is more a convenience support network based on shared interests, and therefore, connected to a cultural experience. Hence, there is a potential for expanding the network beyond the primary circle, thus becoming a bigger and more diversified group.

But as colaboration in crowdfunding projects is repeated through time, motivations also evolve. Thus, the previous personal relationship based on affective engagement is progressively blended with other kinds of engagement more oriented towards tastes and preferences, which could be considered as 'weaker' ties and closer to the kind of interest more fitting to arquetypical audiences. Thus, elements like rewards, content or social issues exert a larger role once the backer becomes familiar with the system. These changes affect mainly to motivations for collaborating and, consequently, point to other project information sources.

Consequently, affective engagment, seen as the prime motivation to back cultural projects through crowdfunding, becomes just one more variable. This way, the relationship between promoters and backers become more diverse and more aligned with the one established between producers and audiences. As our online survey shows, this evolution, where affection and personal bonds are still pressent but to a lesser extend, is key towards mantaining a sustainable relationship through time.

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