Spectating development and other backer perspectives on games crowdfunding

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ABSTRACT

During the last decade, crowdfunding has become a significant new means to fund creative productions. Rather than being simply about acquiring the funded product or service, a closer look at crowdfunding reveals that backers attach many kinds of meanings and motivations to it. This article describes an exploratory study on backer motivations to participate in games crowdfunding. Utilizing two sets of data from an online survey, a quantitative section (N=426) and a qualitative section with open answers, it is found out that, among others, backers enjoy spectating game development, linking crowdfunding participation to new forms of consumption in the evolving media culture.

Keywords

Crowdfunding, backer survey, game production, game production studies

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, crowdfunding has become a significant new means to fund creative productions. With crowdfunding, cultural creators seek relatively small funding contributions from a relatively large online 'crowd' to fund their venture (Mollick, 2014). Especially popular among digital and board games, crowdfunding has offered many niche projects a chance to get funded by the player-customer community, with the backers typically receiving the funded product when it is eventually completed.

Rather than being simply about acquiring the funded product or service, a closer look at crowdfunding reveals that backers attach many kinds of meanings and motivations to it. Subsequently, this study seeks to deepen understanding on why backers take part in game crowdfunding. The study utilizes a dataset from an online survey on games crowdfunding (N=426) and a subset of respondents (N=114) who answered a qualitative section in this survey. While an earlier study (Hamari & Tyni; in review) concentrated on the quantitative aspects of the data, this follow-up study is interested in how backers phrase their participation motivations in their own words, aiming to tease out emerging forms of value derived from backer participation. These open answers are then contextualized and interpreted through the quantitative data.

Crowdfunding model has been examined dominantly in business and economic studies with focus on possible factors behind campaign success (Mollick, 2014; Greenberg et al., 2013; Mitra & Gilbert, 2014), factors signaling campaign legitimacy (Frydrych et al., 2014), determinants for backing behavior (Burtch et al., 2014;

Bernstein et al., 2017; Gerber & Hui, 2013), creator motivations (Belleflamme et al., 2014; Gerber & Hui, 2013), and the effects of location (Agrawal et al., 2010), among others. Within the topic of games, research has looked into the production networks of games crowdfunding (Nucciarelli et al., 2017; Tyni, 2017), the backer influence on project creators (Smith, 2015) and the creator rhetoric surrounding the campaigns (Planells, 2015).

This study adopts a production studies perspective; by seeking to better understand a newly emerged channel for independent game production and the role of backer-players in this ecosystem, it helps to round out production studies centered on more mainstream forms of game production (Kerr, 2017; O'Donnell, 2014; Nieborg, 2014). Moreover, it deepens the understanding on the cultural aspects of game production through crowdfunding and crowdfunding in general (Planells, 2015; Tyni, 2017). By uncovering emerging backer views through open answers in an exploratory fashion, the study seeks to highlight interesting and important points of contention lying in different cross-sections of the games crowdfunding ecosystem. Among other things, it is interested in how the various interests of the backers affect this ecosystem; how backers run, speed up or slow down the machinations of the system on their part.

DATA AND METHOD

The study utilizes data from an online survey (N=426), centered on backer attitudes and motivations for participating in games crowdfunding. The survey was hosted on SurveyGizmo and was open during Sep 30th–Nov 15th, 2016. A link to the survey was distributed within: [1] the author's social networks, including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn (including a game development themed group), where it was further shared by colleagues and friends following the snowball sampling method; [2] the international Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) email list; [3] the comment sections of 26 Kickstarter game projects chosen on the basis of convenience, i.e. they were projects funded by the author; [4] a project update for a successfully crowdfunded tabletop game *Dale of Merchants 2* (Snowdale Design 2016), where a smaller questionnaire related to that game linked to the research survey; [5] the official fan forum of the crowdfunded digital game, *Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night* (505 Games, 2018); and [6] Reddit, in a sub-reddit of a crowdfunded digital game, *Battle Chasers: Nightwar* (THQ Nordic, 2017).

A related research paper based on the quantitative data from the survey (Hamari & Tyni; in review) aimed to uncover which kinds of consumer value backers attach to their crowdfunding participation. The study utilized a modified version of the perceived value framework (PERVAL) (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Respondents attitude towards usefulness, cost, quality, enjoyment, community, social influence, altruism, co-creation, anti-corporate sentiments, novelty, rarity and cynical perceptions was measured to see which aspects were positively associated with enjoying crowdfunding participation, along with continued backing intentions. Each value category was tested with two hypotheses ("X is positively/negatively associated with funders' attitudes towards crowdfunding" and "X is positively/negatively associated with funders' backing intentions").

While the main section of the survey was quantitative and consisted of seven pages of Likert-items, this study primarily examines a qualitative section situated at the end of the survey which asked the respondent to freely "[d]escribe other reasons why you participate in crowdfunding". Consecutively, for many it presented a chance to elaborate and reflect on their survey answers or for example any disagreements they had. This section received 114 usable answers, with many of them surprisingly long (from single sentences to several lines long passages). Additionally, a smaller follow-

up survey was sent to a randomized subset of the respondents (50) who answered one of the open questions in the main survey. This survey had four open questions centered on issues concerning backers' backing and playing habits, including questions on how much they used time for these activities and whether they saw crowdfunding to be a hobby of theirs. The follow-up survey resulted into 39 usable answers.

All of the open answers were coded and organized into thematic groups. The open section in the first study was intended to be explorative and we did not set any hypotheses to be confirmed or refuted in advance. However, the preceding analysis of the quantitative data contextualized the emergence of the themes and informed the subsequent analysis. The follow-up survey was inspired and informed by the results of the first survey and focused on giving more information on what were the primary motivators for backers' funding activity, i.e. were there backers who strongly stressed other motivations to back game crowdfunding projects besides getting the game and playing it. Some themes started to saturate, whereas some were more uniquely explored by one or two respondents. The analysis presented here is mostly based on the main survey, with the answers from the follow-up survey mostly fleshing out and deepening the same themes. The responses were organized under wider frames of meaning, elaborated in the analysis chapter. The highlighted categories are in no way exclusive, instead overlapping in various ways.

On secondary level, the analysis is supported by a long-term observant participation in game crowdfunding campaigns[1] and research interviews with professionals involved with crowdfunding campaigns, including game developers, crowdfunding intermediaries, and Kickstarter staff. The study is focused on games crowdfunding, particularly on digital and board games. In addition to distributing the link to the survey in game-related channels, the survey included a question 'Have you backed game projects?', and only those who answered 'Yes' were included in the data. Yet, some respondents talked about projects in other categories too, such as 'design' and 'technology', and this is consecutively reflected in some of the included quotes. Furthermore, the focus is on reward-based crowdfunding, i.e. it is assumed that campaigns offer the (eventually) finished game as a reward for backing the campaign on a high enough level.

ANALYSIS

The analysis of the quantitative sections in the survey confirmed many of our hypotheses (Hamari & Tyni; in review), including that perceived usefulness, cost, enjoyment, and social influence were all positively associated with both funders' attitude towards crowdfunding and their continued backing intentions. As expected, it was also proven that various cynical perceptions towards the model (e.g. that it is hard to trust the model since large corporations have appropriated it for marketing purposes) had a negative association with attitude and continued backing intentions.

There were also some surprising discrepancies in the results related to either or both of the associated hypotheses. First, product quality, community and co-creation

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[1] During 2013-2018, we have participated in 68 crowdfunding campaigns, 56 of which were successful and 12 unsuccessful. 37 were digital game projects and 19 tabletop gaming projects. 7 digital games and 7 tabletop games were backed on high enough to get the game as a reward, whereas all the others were funded on minimum level to receive the project updates.

aspects did not have relevant significance (i.e. clear positive association) with enjoying crowdfunding participation. In fact, valuing community aspects had a clear negative association with continued backing intentions. Second, altruistic, anti-corporate, novelty and rarity aspects all were positively associated only with one of the two hypotheses. For example, while the ideological aspects such as altruism and anti-corporate sentiments had a positive association with the attitude towards crowdfunding, they did not seem to translate further into actual continued backing behavior. Instead, the more individualistic, gain-seeking related motivations, such as usefulness and seeking cost benefits were proved to be dominant predictors of continued backing. We concluded that while many backers with the willingness to help others and support independent production may perceive crowdfunding more positively, they might not be more willing to actually fund more crowdfunding projects than those backers for whom such aspects are not important in crowdfunding.

In the following, the identified themes from the open answer section are elaborated and reflected through the quantitative results. As a qualitative study, this analysis aims to give depth to the findings from the quantitative part of the survey and tease out findings that partly or entirely fall outside of the quantitative results.
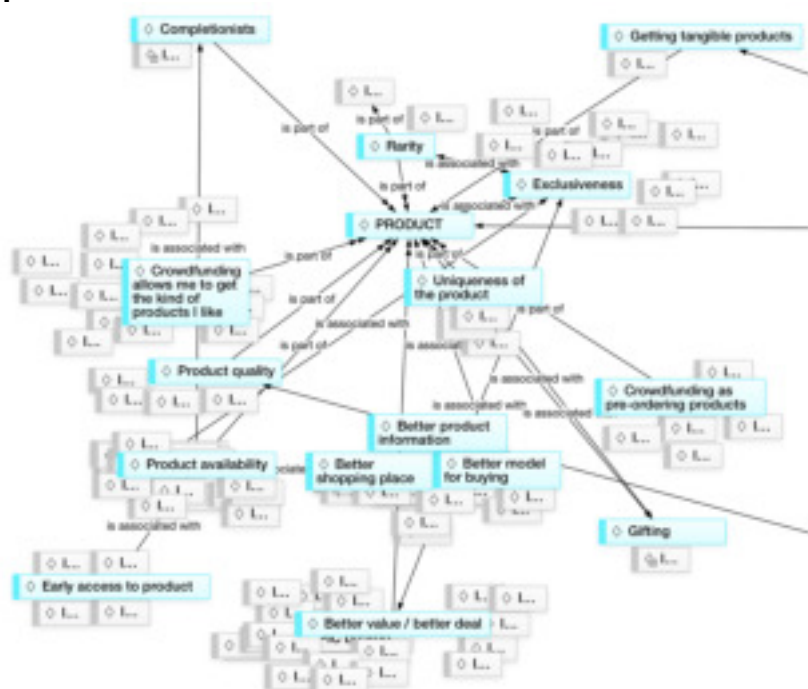
Game product

Figure 1. Game product

The topic that garnered most mentions were the different aspects related to **the game product** itself. First of all, quite a few answers simply highlighted crowdfunding as a means to acquire a product they wanted for whatever reason (such as an interesting game mechanic or theme). Contrasting this notion with the philanthropic possibilities of crowdfunding, one respondent told: "I wish I'd honestly say I back project for any humanitarian, social justice kind of reasons and feel like Bono but reality is, I back to get the product." (ID39)

Many respondents detailed that crowdfunding allowed them to get products that were 'tailor-made' for them, i.e. items that are aimed at a very specific but narrow audience

and would be difficult or impossible to get from anywhere else. For example, one respondent told that:

> *"I can get 'niche' items that would never be made or available elsewhere. HP Lovecraft goods, Douglas TenNapel art books, etc -- nowhere else can I get these products" (ID118).*

Another respondent continued that: "Most of my gaming interests are in niche markets where traditional funding and manufacturing just won't work" (ID112). One respondent participated crowdfunding as a way to fund an independent game mimicking a successful old franchise that was in danger of being discontinued by the IP holder due to not being profitable enough anymore (ID158). For one respondent, crowdfunding allowed getting digital games as physical copies, something they described as the return of the tangible product (ID167).

On the other hand, many answers highlighted a less focused attitude where the respondent expressed a wish to be entertained, i.e. they wanted to be presented **exciting, interesting or unique products** that captured their imagination – something that the crowdfunding platforms with their social recommendation systems are designed to do. One respondent described how crowdfunding represented an environment that keeps producing "unique and interesting" games they wanted to see more of (ID159). The model was complemented for both acting as a place where users could find new products that they could not find anywhere else and as a filtering mechanism, that sometimes helped to "find a new, useful, good idea" (ID126) from the plethora of products on offer on the internet as a whole.

Interestingly, in the survey data, higher-than-average **product quality** did not register as a significant factor to crowdfunding backers' attitude or continued backing intentions, either in positive or negative way. Coming back to the "tailor-made" product, this suggests that instead of higher quality products, backers are simply satisfied with getting the *right kind* of product. The open answers mostly support this; few respondents brought up high product quality as the distinct reason for their participation, with some answers highlighting how crowdfunded products vary greatly in quality.

The **exclusiveness of the products** was brought up as a reason for participation many times. After the campaign, a crowdfunded product might not be available anywhere in the same form. It is a widely used practice to offer extra content or material on top of the core product that is exclusive to campaign backers. Some games are even directly advertised as crowdfunding exclusive, i.e. that the game is only ever available through that campaign. Several respondents specifically told that they enjoyed getting exclusive content. Crowdfunding projects also often offer opportunities for customizing products. Semi-unique products also make good personalized gifts, with some respondents bringing up how they crowdfunded products to give to their friends.

Contrary to our initial hypothesis, in the survey answers enjoying 'rarity' aspects were negatively associated with positive attitude towards crowdfunding despite having a positive association with continued backing intentions. This discrepancy could be seen to be the flip-side of the exclusiveness: some respondents dislike campaigns offering exclusive product features during the campaign phase, i.e. the use of artificial scarcity mechanisms. Offering campaign exclusive content might feel like strong-arming interested consumers to back campaigns instead of waiting for a general release. It is also possible that exclusive extra content feels like something cut

from the main product, something that is missing from the general release. Despite these feelings of resentment, backers might still feel compelled to continue backing, i.e. collecting these nevertheless interesting products while there is still a chance to do so. As one respondent put it:

> *"I really hate the shift toward Kickstarter. I wish companies would do things themselves. However, I find myself almost forced to participate in these campaigns in order to get complete products."* (ID28)

It is interesting to consider how crowdfunding campaigns apparently are able to capture backers' imagination so effectively while the games are still in a stage of incompleteness. Perhaps it is precisely this incompleteness that works for their favor: in their unrealized stage games are still full of promise and possibilities, with the reality of the finished product possibly years away. If the project is not able to convert the backer during campaign phase, it might be too late. "[I]f I didn't back [the projects I'm interested in], I probably wouldn't get around to buying them when they are released", one respondent told (ID21).

Many respondents saw crowdfunding offering **a good deal** in terms of content-price balance, overall price, or delivery. "You definitely want to get see a campaign meet its goal, but I definitely feel that 'getting a deal' (price, early delivery, a special edition) is part of the appeal", one respondent explained (ID170). Particularly, several respondents brought up that the crowdfunding option offers **more or better value** than the eventual retail option. For most cases, this opinion seemed to revolve around crowdfunding campaigns offering a lot of extra content. While digital games campaigns sometimes offer exclusive digital content on top of the base game, many board game campaigns are based on offering more and more campaign-exclusive miniatures, unlocked as the campaign clears its stretch goals. Many singled out that the crowdfunding option felt like a better deal because of campaign stretch goals. The more stretch goals the campaign cleared, the more there was content, and the better the deal started to seem like – especially compared to the retail version which presumably would be a bare-bones version of the game. As such, the available campaign version felt cheap(er), but, specifically, in relation to the retail version of the game. In fact, this is not always true; retail version often has the same price (but comes with none of the extra content). The argument about the price applies especially to board games. When talking about the games on digital storefronts, the retail release actually quite soon decreases in price after the first month of sales.

Many respondents highlighted the issue of physical **delivery and distribution**. While digital games campaigns sometimes offer a physical game copy or physical extra content that needs to be posted, board game projects, by default, need to place a lot of attention on delivery. With a large number of delicate miniatures this might cost substantially. Many answers brought up how many crowdfunded games might not be available at all in a retail store in their country or that the retail version might cost substantially more because of distributor costs or taxes. This refers to the fact that, because of the special relationship with crowdfunding creators and backers, backers are sometimes able to inform and influence campaigns about the most inexpensive solutions for delivery, a possibility they might not have with local game stores. Many respondents also told that the games might simply not be available in their country at all – that the campaign phase was the only option for them to get the games.

Some respondents felt that the crowdfunding model offers **better information** on the qualities of the product, sometimes also on **how the product develops** over time.

Having better information on the product can further translate into seeing the crowdfunding model as a better model for making purchases:

> *"The information available to the buyer in a crowd funding campaign is far superior to almost every other commercial form. [...] KS campaigns go into great depth about the product, components, game theory, instructions, philosophy, and capabilities of the game." (ID89)*

Philanthropic attitude towards products, ideas and creators

Figure 2. Philanthropic attitudes

In addition to those backers who wanted to fund a certain kind of product to get for themselves, many respondents felt that on a more general level crowdfunding is about helping bring products that 'should exist' into reality, or more specifically, helping create products that would not otherwise get made. While these two mindsets are not necessarily mutually exclusive, a significant number of respondents did specifically feel that at its heart crowdfunding is not about acquiring the crowdfunded product (even when it is offered as a reward). The responses that highlighted this kind of more **philanthropic** motive could be divided into two stances. First, there was the product-centric attitude that was about endorsing arts or science or fostering innovation, i.e. turning interesting and worthy product ideas into reality. Respondents described wanting to support ideas and products that were, for example, innovative, experimental, interesting, fresh, fun, new, and exciting. Second, there was a more creator-centric attitude, focused on giving worthy creators an opportunity or helping a cause. One respondent for example told that "the way [the campaign creator] communicated with the backers and tried to implement their ideas was so awesome, that I decided the support his effort even if it was not financially really worth it" (ID35b). Many respondents told specifically that it was important to support small or independent creators (e.g. in opposition to large companies who did not listen to fans). One respondent saw that:

> *"I don't want all of my games made by company X all the time, they get locked in their view of how things should be. Smaller guys usually have different approaches." (ID151)*

Another respondent laid out quite aptly how the crowdfunding environment has changed in this regard:

> *"[T]here are basically at least three types of [...]: a. The "I have a dream"-campaign - usually a single person who has a creative vision. It might not be realistic or terribly well planned (neither time-wise nor financially), but their enthusiasm is infectuous. I'm willing to cut such projects a lot of slack and am largely okay with not receiving a product at the end. b. Small companies and individuals offering a more or less professional product. The product is largely planned and scheduled, but there's still room for backer input (usually, but not always for the better). c. Large, well-financed companies offering a finished product, usually with exclusive content or at a reduced price. In my experience, whereas a) used to be the norm and b) was the exception, there are very few a) project these days. b) is now the norm, with an increasing number of c) campaigns. [...]. While I enjoy getting a good product at the end of the day, I do miss more of the a) type campaigns, which I feel defines what crowd funding should be about." (ID71)*

Besides the more philanthropic views, some respondents considered crowdfunding to be a combination of philanthropy and a means to get products they like. As such, they felt that crowdfunding is beneficial for both the creators and the backers. "[I]f it's a product I'm interested in and it helps someone out it's a win win", one respondent saw and continued: "I get a cool thing and a good feeling" (ID75). Another respondent acknowledged that crowdfunded products are often available later on at a lower cost, but that "part of the joy in crowdfunding is getting something I'm interested in created" (ID7).
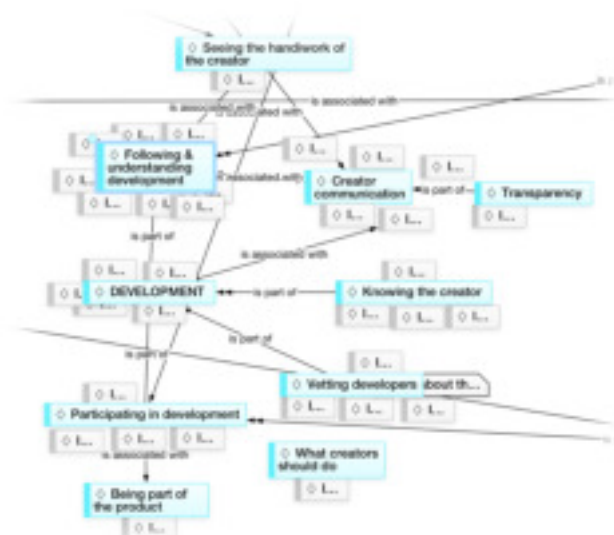
Development

Figure 3. Development

Another category that gathered a lot of mentions was development. First of all, many respondents felt that **following the development process** through project updates is

interesting or enjoyable (e.g. ID186, ID134, ID151). The importance of crowdfunding project updates has been highlighted before: Mollick (2014) found out that project updates during the campaign were an important correlating factor with project success. On the other hand, many backers feel that regular updates *after the campaign* are a very important part of the project, whether it is to signal backers that work is progressing on the project or simply to follow development because it is seen to be interesting. Baym (2015) talks about 'relational labor' and how many creative industry employees are now required to engage in "regular, ongoing communication with audiences over time to build social relationships that foster paid work." For the author, having followed dozens of campaigns, it has come up again and again how dismayed backers are about project creators who do not update regularly. Highlighting the importance of **backer-creator communication**, one respondent told that:

> *"[A]s I do view my money as a microinvestment I do believe I am entitled to know what is going on with the process. [...] At least a fifth of my backed projects are ones I have backed without selecting a reward, but I am just as interested in knowing what happens and there's a sense of loss when a creator doesn't update." (ID2)*

As such, besides the mere obligation, there is additional value in the updates; several respondents directly said that they like to "watch" development (ID171, ID192, ID105, ID81). One respondent brought up how they knew they were paying a higher price compared to what would be later available on Amazon but, despite this, getting to see the product developed was one reason that made the process a rewarding experience (ID132). Following project updates can also offer a way to better **understand** or **appreciate the development** process, whether it was about software development or physical production process such as creating a miniature-based board game. One respondent felt that:

> *"Most people who buy things have no idea what goes into making those things. A good side-effect of crowdfunding (and similar communities, such as web comics) is that people who otherwise wouldn't be involved in creative endeavours become educated about the process. It's not an assembly line with a predictable outcome at the end and never has been." (ID194)*

Interestingly, **opportunities for co-creation** were viewed with mixed feelings among the respondents. In the open answers, there were some respondents who identified taking part in development process as an important aspect. Surprisingly however, in the quantitative results participating in the development of the crowdfunded product had a minor negative association with both backer attitude and continued backing intentions. The most immediate explanation for this is that many backers consider the crowdfunding system as a means to empower cultural creators whose vision they trust (see section: 'Bringing things into reality'). Subsequently, those backers are not very interested in controlling the final shape of the product beyond greenlighting the initial concept. This could be seen reinforcing the view that backers revere the position of a clearly appointed cultural author, i.e. the 'voice' of the author coming through from cultural products such as games. "One sometimes wonders how the money is spent", one respondent divulged, "but that is ultimately up to the creator. We're just the backers." (ID7) The autonomy of the author is supported by backers also harboring anti-capitalist sentiments, e.g. that crowdfunding allows ways to bypass the production models favored by large corporations, where individual author expression is typically not favored:

"[Crowdfunding] can be a tremendous tool to allowing smaller creators with big ideas to get their projects made. Especially without being tampered with by investors or other parties. [...]. Creator control to see a vision through start to finish is important to me." (ID76)
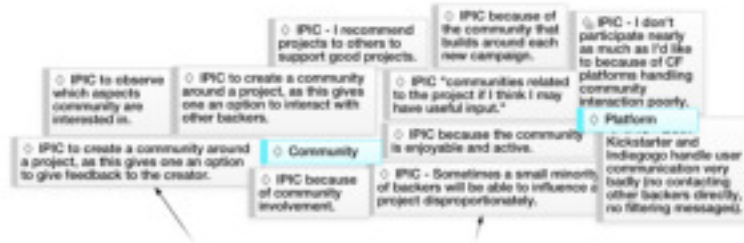
Community

Figure 4. Community

For some respondents, crowdfunding campaigns presented an opportunity to join or help create a community around a game they like. These respondents felt that interacting with an active community was enjoyable and seeing which aspects of the product others were keen on was interesting. "I get to talk to people in the comments, I have friends in real life who also back the same games (sometimes) so we discuss the new games and why we are backing them (or not)." (ID27b) Crowdfunded games bring people together on a more granular level, too: one respondent told how they use crowdfunded games to impress friends who have never heard about these games (ID12). However, as a criticism, it was brought up that crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter have poor backer communication tools, with no way to organize or filter messages on the project site; one needs to manually search through possibly thousands of messages across the general message board and different updates.

Moreover, in our quantitative study, 'community' did not register as a significant factor related to attitude towards crowdfunding (i.e. that valuing community aspects would correlate with the respondent valuing crowdfunding participation in general). In fact, community had a negative correlation with continued backing intentions. One possible explanation for this might be that backers view community as a precarious force that can affect the development process also in a negative way. One respondent felt that: "Backer feedback to the creator is a double-edged sword - while it can give some much needed input, sometimes a small group of very vocal backers will be able to influence a project in a way that their number just can't justify." (ID71) Along with the similar results related to co-creation possibilities, this might suggest that backers feel that creators should be left to handle the creation process, with the role of the backer minimized.

Another explanation for the quantitative results might be that those backers who enjoy community aspects are more focused on a single project, instead of perceiving their crowdfunding backing as a long-term hobby. Thus, those backers might not see crowdfunding as nothing more than a (risky) tool for bringing a product they want into existence, while at the same time they might be inclined to enjoy the community aspects around their chosen project. Also, the backers might be able to find other means to engage the communities surrounding the projects besides the community features of the platforms (e.g. *ad hoc* fan forums).

Crowdfunding as an enjoyable activity

Figure 5. Crowdfunding as an enjoyable activity

Respondents identified participating in crowdfunding campaigns as a pleasant activity for various reasons. Some respondents simply felt that it was the right thing to do, highlighting philanthropic goals and that helping others felt good: "I get the impression that I'm helping things get made that would otherwise not get made. And potentially make some ones dream come true" (ID75). "Its exciting to help people realise their goals and be a part of the journey", another respondent mused (ID78). A few responses brought up how it felt enjoyable to see a product they have funded get to the marketplace. There were some respondents for whom getting, or even seeing, the product before retail release felt important, or even something they "enjoy greatly" (ID20). It was also brought up how the stretch goals represented an important part of the appeal: "Unlocking stretch goals can be very exciting" (ID131), one respondent told, while another divulged:

> *"Stretch goals are rather addictive as well--I find myself regularly monitoring the campaign just to track progress on stretch goals. I know I am being manipulated by stretch goals but it doesn't really bother me." (ID170)*

The survey data revealed that many backers have funded several projects over time, and the open answer data from the main survey supported that for some crowdfunding is **a hobby-like activity**. Consecutively, in the follow-up survey roughly half of the respondents considered crowdfunding to be a hobby of theirs.

> *"At this point, yes [I do consider it a hobby of mine]. The delayed gratification is great. It is also interesting to scroll through the comments and witness the fan base behavior." (ID31b)*

One respondent who saw crowdfunding as their hobby highlighted how they had funded several games without necessarily playing them, but wanted others to play games they had funded and considered interesting. Many saw that crowdfunding was a part of their wider gaming hobby, or that it supported their gaming hobby without being a hobby in itself. (e.g. ID7b, ID34b, ID36b) Some respondents who declined to call crowdfunding a hobby, saw it instead as a "bad habit" they cannot get rid of (ID12b, ID21b). One respondent mused:

> *"[I]t isn't a hobby. I would liken it to a parent at their child's sporting event...the parents want the kids to have fun, have a good experience, to learn something, to participate, and become a better kid, but they really don't care about the team or the actual sport or even the coaches after the fact and even winning or losing isn't all that important in the end...as long as their child grows and becomes more. [...] I would say it is more an investor mentality than a hobbyist mentality." (ID23b)*

One respondent described crowdfunding as their hobby and that they always ordered several copies of the crowdfunded product and always went for the most expensive, limited rewards, only to sell the extra copies for a large profit later on; this made the "hobby" much cheaper on the long run. Another respondent described their drive to continue this hobby through wanting to find "that special gem" – a project that becomes a huge hit akin to Oculus Rift (ID148). Another respondent, taking quite a serious stance, felt that crowdfunding was not a hobby for everybody and seemed to take pride in being able to choose the right campaigns:

> *"Backing projects is not for everyone. In over 50 projects backed I have only been burned by a creator 3 times. This is because I put a great deal of effort into choosing the projects I back." (ID2)*

Other notable attitudes towards the crowdfunding model

Respondents also had views on what the creators should do; e.g. in terms of how the model relates to wider game industries. For example, some told they wanted to make a difference, e.g. nurture a better kind of game culture through greenlighting quality games. Some respondents linked this sentiment to the existing production structures in the game industry, with one specifying that: "[I]n general [I participate in crowdfunding to] lower the influence of publishers on game making" (ID146). Another one told:

> *"Certainly for video games, which make up the majority of my backed projects, [crowdfunding] allows developers to take risks they would not be able to do under the thumb of AAA publishers. I strongly think that's worth supporting." (ID93)*

Some respondents felt that the crowdfunding model in general has become too saturated to function anymore, or that there have been enough too ambitious high-profile campaigns failing so as to make people fear (perhaps unnecessarily) that with small campaigns too.

Since the basic premise of crowdfunding is to back a risky venture, it is important to make a note on how many backers seem to view crowdfunding simply as a pre-order system, for example feeling that, should a project end up failing, project creators are required to compensate them akin to a regular store. In the quantitative data, three quarters of the respondents reported to at least somewhat agreeing that crowdfunding a product is like pre-ordering it, and roughly two thirds of the respondents agreed that crowdfunding a product is the same as buying that product. One respondent wondered "is it really crowd funding or just a pre-order [...] with a social touch..." (ID157) Another respondent saw that because "[t]hings have been professionalized, […] backers have come to expect a professional product and often treat crowd funding as a preorder system" (ID71).

These views are no doubt more prevalent with board game projects. Compared to digital games that sometimes can win an audience with good audiovisual presentation alone, board games are much more dependent on a working rule system, with many projects offering a free, completely working paper prototype in their campaign phase. Board game projects also often advertise how the game has been tested on multiple different game conventions and fairs. As such, they are in a relatively more finished stage during the crowdfunding campaign, leaving many backers to consider them finished products that simply gauge how large a print run they should order.

Figure 6. The complete code network

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

This article has explored open answers given by crowdfunding backers for participating in games crowdfunding. Analysis gives ample evidence that backers participate in games crowdfunding for many other reasons too besides the obvious benefit of getting the product, such as to follow development and to access and interact with a peer-community. The results here corroborate with similar results from previous studies that have analyzed crowdfunding on a more general level. For example, Gerber and Hui (2013) found out that motivations to become a crowdfunding backer included collecting rewards, helping others, being part of a community and supporting a cause.

Describing the information behavior of players in game-related social media, Harviainen, Gough and Sköld (2012) make the case that players use game-related information behavior, such as information seeking and sharing, as expansion and substitution of play. Social media are, for example "used as pre-commentary and speculation systems" where "monitoring for the slightest morsel of new information becomes a part of the anticipation that precedes the release of new games." (p. 156, 161)

The most notable new findings of this study are the motivations that we can see to be more specific for crowdfunding of games. In the analyzed data, the role of development as a motivation for backer participation emerges as one of the main themes. We found out that some backers enjoy **spectating development**, giving grounds to view this activity as a newly emerging form of consumption. These results corroborate studies that describe how players use game-related information behavior, such as information seeking and sharing, as expansion and substitution of play (Harviainen et al., 2012). On the other hand, spectating development can be seen both mirroring the wider landscape of independent game development, while at the same time connecting to the wider landscape of media culture. Ian Bogost (2012) compared crowdfunding to shopping channels and reality TV, while we would specifically compare the consumption of crowdfunding campaigns to reality-series following different professions.

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The connection shared by crowdfunding creators and backers offers an example of newly emerging hybrid relationships evident in the wider media industry, where traditional notions of who captures value become outdated (Banks & Humphreys, 2008), and creators are forced to re-evaluate what is required of them, for example in terms of creator-fan communication (Baym, 2015). It is clear that in game crowdfunding one aspect related to the excitement of backer participation is taking part in the development process. Mostly it seems that this has less to do with designing parts of the game, and more to do with following along, being a passenger in the process with better-than-ordinary backstage pass. As crowdfunding system is a system where users pay beforehand for the development of a game, they also pay for those development processes that do not succeed (i.e. they do not yield a playable product at the end of the process). It is a system that first and foremost pays for development (not the product). As such, struggling or failing campaigns, too, have potential worth as something to be consumed through watching, as experiences (cf. "experience economy"; Pine & Gilmore 2011). Here, game development through crowdfunding can also be seen connecting to the emerging phenomenon of live streaming game development (see e.g. Consalvo & Phelps, 2019).

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