

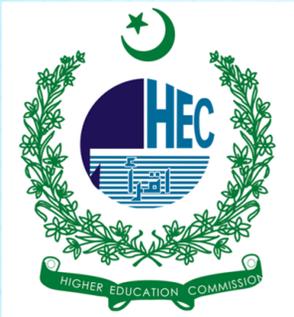
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**PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES IN CROWDFUNDING
CAMPAIGNS: ANALYZING SUCCESSFUL VERSUS
UNSUCCESSFUL KICKSTARTER PROJECT
DESCRIPTIONS**



**Dr. Neelma Riaz¹, Dr. Faisal Arif Sukhera²,
Dr. Irram Waheed³**

¹Assistant Professor, H&S, SEecs, NUST

*²Associate Professor of English, IMCB, F/ 10/ 4,
Islamabad*

³Assistant Professor, SMME, NUST H-12

¹neelma.riaz@seecs.edu.pk, ²faysel317@gmail.com,

³irram.waheed@smme.nust.edu.pk

Abstract

The proposed research explores the rhetorical devices used in Kickstarter crowdfunding campaigns descriptions comparing 240 successful and 240 unsuccessful projects in five high activity categories, including technology, design, games, film and video, and music. Based on theoretical models of classical Aristotelian rhetoric, narrative transportation theory, construal level theory, and social proof mechanisms, the study systematically examines how the creators of campaigns use words to gain commitment of their backers and attract financial support. We use ethos-building credential narratives, pathos-ridden emotional appeals, logos-driven specificity, narrative origin structures, social proof frames and concrete versus abstract language to distinguish funded and unfunded campaigns through a convergent mixed-methods design that an application of corpus linguistic analysis of more than 480,000 words of campaign text, theoretically motivated feature extraction, logistic regression modeling, and qualitative rhetorical close reading. We find that successful campaigns use a unified rhetoric frame of personal credibility storeys, precisely defined product descriptions, community framing that is emotional resonance, and accountability of budget. The abstract visionary speech, unsubstantiated credential statements, and disjointed narrative forms all are overrepresented in unsuccessful campaigns and do little or nothing to decrease the perceived risk of backers. A logistic regression model that includes 22 linguistic and rhetorical characteristics gives campaign results 79.6% cross-validated accuracy with narrative arc completeness, budget transparency and concrete language density being the best single predictors of funding success. The research will add to the field of persuasion studies, corpus-based discourse analysis research and current literature on platform rhetoric, offering a theoretically informed empirical explanation of how language serves as the main tool of financial mobilisation in digital crowdfunding situations. Research findings have direct practical implications on the creators of campaigns, platform designers, and scholars investigating participatory digital economies.

Keywords: *crowdfunding rhetoric, Kickstarter, persuasive language, construal level theory, narrative transportation, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis.*

Introduction

Crowdfunding websites have radically transformed the specifics of creative and entrepreneurial funding, where the founders of projects can raise minor funds by asking geographically spread individuals to make contributions to their projects, projects, using online networks (Belleflamme et al., 2014). All since its inception in 2009, Kickstarter has facilitated over 250,000 successful projects, raising over seven billion dollars to creators in diverse categories such as consumer electronics and tabletop games, independent cinema and musical recordings. However, although this economic and cultural importance is great, the exact linguistic processes by which descriptions

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of campaigns influence strangers in allocating financial resources have yet to be adequately theorised and empirically underresearched.

The description of the campaign has a distinctive consequential communicative position in the crowdfunding ecosystem. In contrast to traditional financing situations, in which, relational trust, in-person negotiation, and institutional reputation facilitate investment choices, Kickstarter backers regularly allocate resources on the basis of nearly nothing but written accounts of projects that are not yet present and creators with whom they have never related (Parhankangas & Renko, 2017). In this textually mediated space, language has ceased being a vehicle of information and becomes the main tool that is used to build credibility, create emotional responses, control the perceived risk, and activate collective action.

Previous studies on crowdfunding success have overrepresented structural and relational predictors such as the size of the funding goal, length of campaign, reward tier design, video inclusion, and the size of the social network of creators (Mollick, 2014; Greenberg et al., 2013; Koch & Siering, 2015). Although these aspects undoubtedly have an effect, they do not explain the high level of disparity between campaigns with similar structural features. The difference between the result of two campaigns of equal type, with equal funding, with professional-quality videos, and initiated by creators with equal social followings can be radically different, which makes lingo quality an underexplored explanatory factor.

This study fills this gap by logically examining the elements of persuasive linguistic strategies on a matched set of successful and unsuccessful Kickstarter descriptions. We combine classical Aristotelian rhetoric, construal level theory, narrative transportation theory, and social proof mechanisms into a single line of analysis, which allows considering both the particular rhetorical decisions that lead to the success of funded and unfunded campaigns and the theoretical motivation of such decisions in a unique high-psychological-distance environment that crowdfunding entails.

Research Problem

The issue that is examined in this study is to investigate the great lack of knowledge of how linguistic processes contribute to backer involvement and funding success of Kickstarter crowdfunding campaigns. Although the structural and relational factors, including funding aims, campaign length, and creator social networks, have been noted in the previous studies, the absence of these factors in explaining the apparent inconsistency between the campaigns with ostensibly alike attributes reveals the necessity to look deeper into the impact of persuasive language. Since crowdfunding is a system in which creators seek the support of an anonymous audience by writing descriptions of their projects, the textual information becomes central to how the perceptions and decisions of the backers are made. This paper assumes that the quality of linguistic decisions in the campaign narratives have the potential to significantly affect the levels of trust among the backers, emotional reactions and fundraising results. Thus, the scholarship on the subject has not paid much attention to the rhetoric complexities that support effective and ineffective campaigns. This gap will be addressed in this paper through the systematic analysis of the utilisation of rhetorical devices, based on the classical Aristotelian principles, the theory of narrative transportation and the mechanisms of social proof in a similar sample of funded and unfunded projects. This study will be used to explain the linguistic characteristics that make campaigns effective by interrogating the way in which creators use ethos, pathos, and logos in their descriptions, and exploring how narrative structures such as the origin storeys play a role. Finally, this work aims to offer both the theoretical

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and practical knowledge which could empower the creators, platform developers, and scholars working in the fast changing environment of digital economies, thereby transforming our perception of persuasive communication within the context of high stakes of a crowdfunding.

Research Questions

1. How do successful and unsuccessful Kickstarter projects differ in their use of ethos, pathos, and logos, and which appeals predict funding success?
2. What role does narrative structure play in distinguishing effective campaign descriptions and enhancing credibility through origin stories?
3. In what ways do funded and unfunded campaigns differ in language specificity, and the psychological distance relate to construal level?
4. What social proof markers emerge in successful versus unsuccessful campaigns?

Significance of the Study

This study has a contribution to various fields of study and practise. First, it takes persuasion research out of controlled laboratory situations and into naturalistic high-stakes online communication, which offers empirical confirmation and fruitful development of classical and modern persuasion theory in a context where financial stakes are actually tied to rhetorical decisions.

Second, the research contributes to the corpus-based discourse analysis through showing that computational extraction of linguistic features, combined with theoretical understanding of qualitative rhetorical analysis, can be fruitfully synthesised to provide information that is not present to either approach alone. This contribution to methodology has the implications in the research of discourse analysis far beyond the field of crowdfunding.

Third, the study focuses the linguistic aspects of campaign messaging, thus filling the gaps in the existing scholarship of crowdfunding which has prioritised the structural and network factors and considered the textual content as incidental. The implications of the specific rhetorical choices being discussed as a source of success can be applied directly to campaign creators, platform designers, and educators on the side of entrepreneurs and other creative professionals.

Fourth, the research fits into the growing body of research on platform rhetoric, which investigates how digital platforms determine, facilitate, and restrict specific communicative acts. The affordances of Kickstarter such as category taxonomies, character threshold, reward tier arrangements, and public comments, form a unique rhetorical context that imposes a twist on the persuasive tactics afforded to campaign developers that should be subject to ongoing academic investigation.

Literature Review

Crowdfunding websites represent a unique communicative space, where creators need to act as entrepreneurs, narrators, product showcasers, and community managers at the same time, targeting users of both domain expertise and user-casual profiles with no previous experience of the project category. Such a variety of communicative jobs provokes rhetorical requirements that are incomparable to those that the conventional fundraising, advertising, or pitching an investment offer because genre, history of relations, and institutions offer common interpretive frameworks (Mollick, 2014; Davis et al., 2017).

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The description of the crowdfunding campaign operates in what the rhetorical theorists would identify as an exigent situation, which is a communicative situation characterised by a particular problem that is the (funding gap), an audience that can solve the specific problem (potential backers), and a correct response (compelling campaign text). But crowdfunding, in contrast to the majority of exigency scenarios of classical rhetorical theory, pitches creators to a crowd of unknown readership, expectations, and skill levels, and demands rhetorical approaches versatile to attract both technically savvy and informal followers at the same time (Foss, 2009; Davis et al., 2017).

Rhetorical possibilities are determined by the shape of the platform architecture in significant ways. The all-or-nothing funding principles of Kickstarter, which means that designers do not get any funds until they accomplish the specified target, form unusual incentive systems that shape the way creators construct fiscal goals and the way followers perceive the impact of choices to make individual contributions. This design effect promotes the social proof dynamic where the commitment of the initial supporters indicates a viable project to later visitors, resulting in the momentum effects which can be catalysed by language or prevented (Zhang & Liu, 2012; Koch & Siering, 2015).

Modern persuasion studies have gone a long way to expand classical paradigms to explain cognitive processes behind attitude shift and behavioural obedience. Likely to be part of a central route processing that requires a reasoned and methodical evaluation of the message arguments and evidence, the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) separates central and peripheral route processes, which make use of heuristic cues like the credibility of the source, the opinion of others, and emotional relation. Both paths are provably applicable to decisions in crowdfunding: technically eligible backers in product-oriented categories can use central processing of specifications and budget rationalisations, whereas casual backers in creative categories can appeal more to peripheral judgments like apparent enthusiasm for the project by the creator, and aesthetic appeal of bounties.

This knowledge model of persuasion (Friestad & Wright, 1994) presents another complication by underlining the fact that the audiences are not mere receivers of persuasive efforts but active decoders of persuasive efforts who can apply metacognitive awareness of persuasive strategies to their reading. Supporters who are sensitive to formulaic elements of persuasion composition, too many superlatives, artificially created urgency, implausibly positive projections, etc. can react with resistance that decreases instead of increases compliance. This implies that successful rhetoric of crowdfunding must strike a balance between tactical persuasion and communication authenticity in a manner that circumvents, but does not produce, knowledge defences to persuasion.

The use of ethos in crowdfunding is essentially different as compared to credential presentation in the normal professional setting. When an author targets strangers who do not have a background of evaluating their credibility or expertise, ethos is an aspect that must be constructed using the text as opposed to being intuitively based on an institutional position or existing reputation. Studies of source credibility on the Internet indicate that the two aspects of ethos that are especially consequential include expertise, which is the perception that the creator possesses knowledge and skill applicable to the project, and benevolence, which is the perception that the creator is sincerely obliged to provide the value to the backers and not merely embezzling their resources (Tanaka et al., 2019).

Pathos appeals in a crowdfunding work in a number of overlapping ways. The personal storey of

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the creator can produce emotional interest which will result in the willingness to contribute regardless of the technical or commercial quality of the project. The backers who subscribe to that set of values are activated by identity-consistent motivations, which are accomplished through appeals to shared values, including sustainability, independent artistry, community resilience, technological democratisation. And projective emotional appeals, where the appeals encourage the support of the funder to visualise positive feelings of using, owning, or interacting with the product being funded, create anticipatory affect, which makes the intangible promise of delivery seem more tangible and desirable (Green & Brock, 2000; Kim et al., 2018).

Logos in crowdfunding looks most explicitly through the particularity with which creators write their plans, budgets, and previous work records. Detailed production schedules, clear budgets, recorded prototyping efforts and allusions to testing or validation in the market are all logical evidence that the project is not only desirable but actually practical. Logos is not just the function of rhetoric, associated with rational persuasion in the most limited sense: certain numerical statements and written evidence can also be viewed as implicit ethos appeals proving the competence of the organisation and the discipline of planning that supports the production of successful delivery (Xu et al., 2014).

One such theory is construal level theory (CLT; Trope and Liberman, 2010), which suggests that psychological distance in terms of time, space, social, and hypothetical dimensions affects how individuals encode objects and events in terms of abstract and high-level, or concrete and low-level, terms. The theoretical framework has fruitful implications to persuasive communication design because being able to match or off-match a message construal level with the psychological distance of the involved decision influences persuasive effects.

This prediction can be substantiated by empirical studies of the effects of concreteness on product communication. Schlosser (2003) discovered that reminding the audience of a tangible sensory experience with the use of a product enhanced the intentions to buy the product over abstract description of benefits. When applied to crowdfunding, vivid descriptions of what it would be like, sound, look, and feel like to use a funded product, should create more engagement in comparison with the same descriptions with focus on the abstract value proposition associated with the product. This prediction was partially supported in a Kickstarter corpus analysis by Kim et al. (2018), but with a moderating effect of the product category and the magnitude of the campaign goals.

It has been demonstrated that collective identity framing, whereby supporters are framed as part of a group that shares common values, aesthetics commitments or social purposes, leads to a greater willingness to contribute in both charity and business settings (White and Argo 2011). In crowdfunding in particular, a campaign addressed to backers as part of a community, such as as a form of solidarity with independent creators, or as a founder members of a movement, can evoke social identity processes that prompts a higher rate of contribution and higher size of contribution than do informational or an otherwise emotionally neutral appeal (Brehm & Brehm, 1981).

The current paper fills these gaps with the help of an extensive mixed-method research that incorporates a corpus-based computational analysis and theoretically oriented rhetorical close reading, where the researcher considers various rhetorical dimensions at once with respect to five categories of campaigns to yield both broadly applicable and category-specific knowledge.

Methodology

In this study, the convergent mixed-methods design is used, combining the corpus linguistic

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analysis, theoretically-founded feature extraction, logistic regression predictive modelling, and qualitative rhetorical discourse analysis. Such a multi-methodology allows triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data sources as well as the ability to identify the macro-level statistical trends distinguishable in funded and unfunded campaigns and micro-level rhetorical acts through which these trends are brought to life in particular textual decisions and structural ones.

Data Sources and Construction of the Corpus

We sampled texts about campaign descriptions on 480 Kickstarter projects: 240 projects that were successfully funded and 240 projects that were unsuccessful projects matched on category, amount of funds that the project was trying to raise (up to within 20%), and duration of the campaign (up to within 7 days). It sampled campaigns in 5 high activity categories; technology (n = 96), design (n = 96), games (n = 96) and film and video (n = 96), and music (n = 96). A total of 48 successful and 48 unsuccessful campaigns were chosen under each category.

The successful campaigns were campaigns that achieved 100 percent or above of their intended campaign fund in the period of the campaign. The campaigns that failed to achieve their target irrespective of the sum of money collected were considered unsuccessful. All the campaigns were initiated in 2020-2023 and were aimed at a minimum of 2,000-300,000 dollars. Any campaigns that had less than 150 words in the description field were excluded so as to eliminate stub projects. Campaigns made by institutional creators as opposed to personal and small-groups creators were filtered out to ensure comparability of rhetorical situation in the sample.

The last corpus consisted of 484,320 words of campaign description text and the mean length of description was 1,009 words (SD = 387.4). The means of successful campaigns were much greater in comparison with unsuccessful ones (M = 1,124.6 vs. M = 893.4 words, $t(478) = 8.17$, $p < .001$), which is in agreement with the previous results (Mollick, 2014). All frequency-based features were calculated in terms of per-word rates in order to adjust this difference in length within their analyses.

The Extraction of the Materials and Features

Ethos Feature Set

Ethos-relevant features were measured on four subcategories. Credential assertion density represented the explicit statements of the pertinent professional experience, educational attainment or knowledge in the field. Credential evidence integration determined the presence of credential claims with verifiable supporting evidences in the form of links to previous work, named professional affiliations or documented project histories. Description of team competence determined the extent to which the description of campaign offered team members pertinent role-based expertise. Vulnerability disclosure was a clear recognition of project adversity, uncertainty, or possible impediments- aspects hypothetically linked to observed authenticity. The two subcategories which needed an interpretive judgement were coded by automated pattern matching with human annotation.

Pathos Feature Set

The operationalization of pathos features was performed with the help of Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count tool (LIWC-22; Pennebaker et al., 2022) with the addition of theoretically-based custom dictionaries. The categories that were extracted were the density of positive emotion words,

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negative emotion words, social words (words that mention family, community, friendship and collective belonging), sensory words (visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic descriptors), and second person pronoun words density as a measure of direct address to the audience. density of the narrative in present tense was used to operationalize narrative immediacy and experience vividness by calculating the percentage of verbs of the main clauses that were inflected to present tense.

Logos Feature Set

Logos elements embodied the informational particularism, the evidencing support of the descriptions of campaigns. The numeric specificity was used to quantify the density of the specific quantitative statements such as dimensions, weights, processing speeds, durations and percentages as opposed to vague approximations. Budget transparency was coded as a binary variable on the presence of a description detailing how funds were going to be distributed by the production categories. Timeline concreteness assessed the intensity of particular reference dates, months or manufacturing milestones. Earlier evidence reference consisted of prototyping, testing, market investigation, expert advice or a previous project that proved production capacity.

Narrative Feature Set

Automated structural analysis was used together with manual coding to encode the narrative features. Existence of origin storey was coded as a binary variable on whether the campaign had some kind of a storey that led to the project to an individual problem that was being faced, creative inspiration or professional insight. Narrative arc completeness this examined the presence of recognisable problem, development and resolution elements in descriptions evaluated as a five-point scale by two independent annotators. The density of first-person singular pronouns was used as a reflection of the personal versus impersonal or corporate framing of the narrative. The density of discourse connectives indicating temporal movement in narrative were temporally gauged through temporal progression marks.

Construal Level Feature Set

Construal level was operationalized with two measures which were complementary. Mean word concreteness was calculated based on the concreteness norms of Braysbaert, Warriner and Kuperman (2014) of English by averaging the scores of the content words in each description. High-level construal framing density measured the ratio of description sentences using why-and-goal-directed language versus how-and-means-directed language, which is coded by trained annotators according to the adapted criteria of Behaviour Identification Form (Vallacher and Wegner, 1989). Before full corpus coding, high inter-annotator reliability was established (0.81).

Social Proof and Urgency Feature Set

Social proof characteristics were direct backer address density (the count of instances of second-person address that specifically addressed the backer community, versus instances of second-person address that addressed product users in general); inclusive collective pronoun density (the number of instances of first-person plural where the backer communities were mentioned); endorsement reference density (the number of instances of reference to the third-party validator); and momentum language density (the number of instances of reference to growing support, community building, and collective progress). The urgency markers had identified deadline-referencing language,

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scarcity framing and limited-availability claims.

Training and Reliability of the Annotators

Attributes that needed human annotation were coded by three trained annotators working independently on a common 20 percentage subsample ($n = 96$ campaigns) and then finally coded on a full corpus. The annotators were supplied with detailed codebooks giving theoretical definitions, operational decision rules, and annotated training samples of every category of features. Cohens kappa was used to test the inter-annotator reliability of binary features and intraclass correlation coefficients were used to test the inter-annotator reliability of scalar ratings. All the features met reliable thresholds ($\kappa > .75$ or $ICC > .80$) after which full corpus annotation was performed. Any outstanding disagreements regarding the reliability subsample were discussed and adjudicated by the lead researcher, in line with which revised codebook entries were prepared in cases where systematic disagreement was reflective of definitional ambiguity.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative Analysis

The differences of groups between the successful and unsuccessful campaigns on individual features were evaluated through independent samples t -tests that were corrected by Bonferroni, relative to the family of 22 similar comparisons. The effect sizes were computed as Cohen d with a value of .20, .50 and .80 taken to be a small, medium and large effect size respectively. In order to evaluate the multivariate predictive power of the complete set of rhetorical features, binary logistic regression models were estimated where funding outcome (0 = unsuccessful, 1 = successful) was the dependent variable. Ten-fold cross-validation was implemented to unbiasedly estimate the accuracy, sensitivity and specificity. The analysis of variance inflation factor showed that there were no significant problematic multicollinearity between features before the final estimation of the model. All the analyses were done in R 4.3.2, with the packages `lme4`, `caret`, and `tidytext`.

The Rhetorical Analysis that is qualitative

To supplement the quantitative analysis and formulate interpretive accounts of the statistical patterns, we have completed in depth rhetorical close readings of 40 campaign descriptions, the 20 campaigns with the highest percentages of funding and the 20 campaigns with the lowest funding, mixed down categories. Analyses were constructed by rhetorical criticism tradition (Foss, 2017), which allowed systematic treatment of texts in terms of how they build credibility, appeal to emotions, use evidence, control psychological distance, and create roles of the audience. The qualitative insights were employed to expound and theoretically process the statistical trends found during the quantitative step as opposed to producing rival inferences.

Key Findings

Ethos Construction: Narrative Evidence of Credibility

The campaigns which were successful had much higher rates of credential evidence integration as compared to the unsuccessful ones ($M = 3.4$ vs. $M = 1.3$ evidence-supported credential instances per campaign, $t(478) = 13.21$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.21$). Nevertheless, qualitative nature of this difference ran far beyond quantitative frequency. Credential claims in failed campaigns generally emerged as single claims at the beginning of the campaign, which had nothing to do with project storytelling

and were lacking demonstrable evidence: when a technology creator made a claim of professional engineering qualifications in the first paragraph of the campaign, and then swung abruptly to feature descriptions. The supporters do not have a ground to judge such claims and a story format to comprehend their applicability.

Effective campaigns, in contrast incorporated credentials into a storey of inspired action and recorded expertise. Producers have explained their professional experience in terms of the particular objections and disappointments that made them see that the problem addressed by this project was necessary: years working on consumer packaging, creating awareness that the packaging had an environmental cost, or a decade as an independent game designer and realising the gap between what the niche audience desired and what commercial publishers would finance. It is an achievement of this narrative embedding which simultaneously fulfils several rhetorical functions: it seeks to establish ethos not by telling but by showing, it causes causal relationships between the creator background and project motivation, and it starts the origin storey structure which is one of the most effective predictors of success in all forms.

One of the counterintuitive observations is related to vulnerability disclosure. The successful campaigns included much more of the overt recognition of the project issues, manufacturing uncertainties, and possible impediments than the unsuccessful ones ($t(478) = 5.34, p < .001, d = 0.49$). These confessions increased credibility, instead of weakening it. Designers who recognised the challenge in managing global supply chains, or the complexity of regulations in their product line, or the grand scale of the production timetable were viewed as more realistic, more self-conscious, and, by extension, more trustworthy than those who made entirely positive projections. This trend is consistent with two-sided message studies which have shown pre-emptive concession to inoculate audiences to counter-arguments and enhance overall source credibility (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

The Effect of Narrative Structure and the Origin Storey

Having a recognisable origin storey was the best binary predictor of funding success throughout the entire corpus (OR = 5.12, 95% CI [3.47, 7.56]) and 81% of successful campaigns had an identifiable origin storey and only 29% of unsuccessful campaigns did. The contents of origin storeys differed significantly, but they had a fairly recognisable three-part structure, namely: an experience of precipitation (problem, frustration, or creative inspiration); a developmental period (research, experimentation); a vision of the funded project as a solution to the problem of the storey. This format builds up some sense of time in that the campaign is not a one-time request to raise money but a continuous narrative whose resolution is determined by the involvement of the backers.

Scoring based on trained annotators on a five-point scale on the criterion of narrative arc completeness, the successful and the unsuccessful campaigns were more strongly differentiated than any one linguistic feature ($M = 4.2$ vs. $M = 2.1, t(478) = 19.43, p < .001, d = 1.78$). The qualitative analysis of extreme cases helped to understand the mechanisms behind this effect. The strongest storeys in the successful subsample took readers through the process of authentic problem identification, followed by the difficulties and the revelations of the development process, and finally, to a tangible vision of what the finalisation of the funded project would be able to accomplish. This arc created an impression of narrative commitment in the success of the project that was beyond rational consideration of the technical merits of the product.

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The difference in the use of narrative across categories was significant and theoretically educative. The highest rate of origin storeys was found in film and music campaigns regardless of the success condition, which aligns with the expectations that the personal vision and authentic artistic motivation were supposed to be the genre conventions in the creative categories. Technology campaigns represented the highest proportional difference in rate of origin storeys between successful and unsuccessful projects indicating that personal narrative framing offers unique rhetoric bargaining in a group where technically-oriented impersonal descriptions are the norm. Technological category creators who come out of the prevailing genre stereotypes to give personal motivational accounts stand out of the pack in a way that is actually compelling to the sophisticated patron.

Social Proof and Framing of Collective Identity

Effective campaigns had much higher inclusion collective framing rates than unsuccessful ones, calculated as the rate of the inclusion of the first-person plural pronouns that integrated backers in the creator-backer community ($M = 0.41$ vs. $M = 0.18$ inclusion proportion, $t(478) = 11.34$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.04$). This rhetoric arrangement indicates a larger rhetorical approach of establishing a community of common intent as opposed to placing the campaign in the form of a commercial deal between producer and consumer. Good campaigns in the music category always treated backers as partners in a joint creative endeavour - co-producers of a creative vision - and not as buyers of a product that would be delivered upon the end of the campaign.

The explicit recognition, addressing and reaching out directly to backers were found with much higher frequencies in successful campaigns ($M = 5.2$ vs. $M = 2.1$ cases per 1,000 words, $t(478) = 9.63$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.88$) indicating that an explicit mentioning, mentioning and connecting with potential backers as persons with significant knowledge, values, and decision making power creates a feeling of relational recognition which leads to financial involvement. Many of the most effective campaigns in categories made use of a method of imagined community identification: direct accounts of the type of person the campaign is aimed at doing this are implicit invitations to self-identification. A writer who writes, like the one quoted as saying, you know how long it has taken us to be frustrated by the compromises that commercial publishers insist upon of the niche creative work, is not just defining an audience but is an audience.

Urgency framing had a non-linear connexion with success. Language urgency motivation predicted success in a positive way (moderate urgency: $OR = 1.79$, 95% CI [1.28, 2.50], $p = .001$) whereas there was a negative relationship between high urgency and success ($OR = 0.61$, 95% CI [0.41, 0.91], $p = .016$). This trend is in line with reactance theory expectations: supporters seem to react well to sincere recognition of the fact that the campaign window is limited yet react negatively to what they view to be pressure tactics aimed at silencing calculated consideration. The boundary separating constructive and damaging urgency was found in qualitative research to be at the stage when urgency framing ceased to be linked to any actual project-specific explanation of time-sensitivity.

Logos and the Accountability Premium

One of the strongest positive predictors of funding success in each of the five categories was budget transparency ($OR = 3.89$, 95% CI [2.64, 5.74]). After being made explicit through campaigns that detailed how the requested funds would be spent, including showing percentages that were to be

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spent on manufacturing, tooling, distribution and operational overheads, a sense of financial planning competence and accountability was instilled that could not possibly be achieved by referencing a budget in an abstract manner. The rhetorical role of budget transparency is both epistemic and ethical: it shows that the author has given serious consideration to the financial needs of the delivery, and is also an implicit promise to the holders of backers to be responsible in the management of the resources entrusted to them.

The pattern was similar with timeline specificity with successful campaigns offering much more specific production milestones and delivery date references ($M = 3.1$ vs. $M = 1.2$ specific temporal references per campaign, $t(478) = 12.44$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.14$). The rhetorical role of definite timelines is not limited to informational content: by setting definite deadlines, the creators decrease psychological distance between the contribution of the backer now and the reward, which is more or less compensated by the high-distance character of a situation of crowdfunding decision-making. Prior evidence citation-References to prototyping, testing of materials, small-scale production runs, or consulting an expert, all significantly distinguished successful campaigns and unsuccessful campaigns ($M = 2.8$ vs. $M = 0.9$ evidence citations per campaign, $t(478) = 14.67$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.34$). It was found that the rhetorical power of prior evidence was significantly influenced by its presentation in a qualitative analysis. The artefacts of production storeys, such as after a year and a half of prototyping, the fourth version has finally hit the weight and balance we wanted, were even more effective than the artefacts of a specifications table, since they conveyed not only the existence of previous testing but also the quality found in iterating the design and the effort invested in a getting the details right.

Predictive Modelling: Rhetorical Architecture of Success

The logistic regression model that included all 22 linguistic and rhetorical features had a cross-validated accuracy of 79.6 percent in predicting success in fundraising, which is significantly better than a structural-features-only baseline model that included campaign goal, type, and length (65.3 percent accuracy). This enhancement establishes that mean predictive information beyond structural characteristics that have been stressed by previous research is carried by the features of rhetoric language, and the two sets of features represent complementary aspects of what determinants of crowdfunding success, and that the two sets of features are complementary to each other.

The five attributes with the largest standardised logistic regression beta coefficients, in descending order were: narrative arc completeness ($= 0.91$), budget transparency ($= 0.78$), concrete language density ($= 0.71$), inclusive collective framing ($= 0.65$) and prior evidence citation density ($= 0.58$). The overlapping of powerful predictors across various theoretical traditions, that is, the presence of narrative structure, accountability of logos, the derived concreteness of CLT, framing based on social proofs, and evidence based on ethos, speaks in favour of the rhetorical architecture account, the fact that successful campaigns do not succeed by focusing on a single dimension of rhetorical action but through the combination of a variety of complementary persuasive resources to a cohesive and mutually reinforcing communicative unit.

Patterns of theoretically informative predictor importance, which were based on categories, were found in category-specific models. Budget transparency and previous mention of evidence were found to predict technology campaigns best, as expected by technically sophisticated supporters that focus on feasibility evidence and accountability indicators. The completeness of narrative arcs and positive emotion density were the best predictors of film and music campaigns as they

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represent the creative category audience who appreciate personal vision and emotional engagement as their main indicators of quality. The predictor profile revealed in games campaigns was most balanced in terms of rhetorical dimensions and, as such, indicated that games supporters import integrated assessments frameworks, which effective campaigns should reach out to in their entirety.

Discussion

The Target: Theoretical Contributions towards a Rhetoric of Crowdfunding

The results concur from a rhetorical architecture explanation of crowdfunding success whereby successful campaigns descriptions combine various persuasive methods of different theoretical backgrounds to self-affirming compounds. The most effective campaigns in the corpus are not based on any particular rhetorical mechanism but coordinate the narrative ethos construction, specifications of concrete logos, emotional pathos appeal, and social proof mechanisms in a manner that simultaneously can respond to various credibility issues, cognitive demands and motivational frameworks the backers decision-making entails.

This integrative image is in opposition to single-mechanism accounts, which favour specific dimensions of rhetoric. The studies that focus on the specific social proof (Zhang & Liu, 2012) or sentiment positivity (Koch & Siering, 2015) can recognise genuine persuasion processes but overlooks the dependence of rhetorical strategies on each other, which is what makes successful campaigns work as consistent persuasive units. A campaign that has strong community framing and no storey line or budget responsibility can create an initial interest, but not commit. Careful reportage of finances without being narrative can pass the rationality test without creating the inspirational action that would make backers take action. Proper crowdfunding rhetoric cannot be done with strategic optimization of single features of persuasion, but with architecture in the entire rhetorical complex.

A surprisingly fruitful application of the classical tripartite model of ethos, pathos, and logos as an organising prism of the modern digital persuasion is that it indicates that the basic framework of human persuasibility does not shift as much as one might imagine with the change in technology. Nevertheless, the particular implementation of these modes in Kickstarter rhetoric demonstrates that there are significant adjustments to the communicative requirements of the platform. In crowdfunding ethos is a narrative-performative as opposed to credential-assertive phenomenon: built through motivated action shown, as opposed to proclaimed by professional title. Pathos is not a personal but a social appeal: the most powerful emotional appeals establish a sense of communal identity and not work by producing individual excitement. Logos is responsibility-indicating rather than argument-making: the use of distinct numbers, documented evidence, is a kind of implicit promise to conduct in a responsible manner, rather than to provide rational persuasion.

Storytelling and the Creation Storey as the Infrastructure of Credibility

The phenomenon of the origin storey, which is reported in this research as the strongest binary predictor of funding success with odds ratio more than five, highlights the primacy of narrative competence as a crowdfunding asset and brings narrative transportation theory to a derived naturalistic financial setting. It seems to be this way, that origin storeys do not just serve as affectively engaging material but as credibility infrastructure: they at once assert the personal investment of the creator to the project, that the problem that the project is dealing with is real, that the creator is able to act in a serious and sustained manner, and that the narrative energy is such that

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it places backer contributions in a position to resolve the storey as one is able to purchase a product. The specific strength of creation exposition in technology categories, where narrative presentation is most deviated by the current genre standards of unfeeling product characterization, sheds light on a valuable idea of genre-based persuasion. The conventions of a generic nature determine the expectations of the audience that have been met by the majority of communications making them not memorable. Messages that leave generic expectations in non-coherent and purposeful forms, that invoke the resources of the unexpected genre in a situation where this genre is underrepresented, have a distinctiveness that in itself can serve as a quality signal. A technology campaign with an interesting personal storey in an area where most campaigns are made up of technical specifications stands out due to the genre transgression in such a way that a cultured audience interprets this transgression as a sign of an abnormal sense of self-awareness and imaginative ability.

A Discourse Study of the Evolution of Crowdfunding Discourse

The large category-specific difference in the rhetorical efficacy reported across the five types of campaigns highlights the significance of the conventions of genres and community-based rhetorical conventions in influencing what appeals can be used by creators. Every category of Kickstarter has created distinctive patterns of communicative conventions, in other words, an implicit set of genre mandates, which backers consider interpretative frameworks when assessing campaigns. Definite and motivated category conventions departures can act as positive signals of distinctiveness, whereas arbitrary and incompetent category conventions departures can act as negative signals of quality. Successful crowdfunding rhetoric is hence not the general application of broad principles of persuasion but the art of applying those principles to the context of that rhetorical situation comprised of category-specific audience expectations and communal norms.

A similar qualitative observation is observed repeatedly, which is what could be described as the authenticity paradox of the crowdfunding communication. The most powerful rhetorical strategies that are closely related to success, including origin storeys, disclosure of vulnerability, concrete personal voice, community address, are also the strategies that can be reproduced most easily in creator manuals and platform materials. To the extent that these strategies are becoming increasingly familiar and common, they may be perceived as cliched, which may stimulate the persuasion knowledge defences that cause compliance to be diminished with the identified strategic communication. The humility discovery is especially applicable in this case: the overt recognition of problems can in part be effective because it breaks the norm of universalized optimism campaigning and this breach of anticipation is perceived as sincere more than a tactic.

Limitations and Future Studies

Some of the limitations of the current research lead to fruitful directions to be taken in future research. First, the analysis was only done on campaign description text and other campaign features, such as video content, language of the reward levels, creator update posts, and comment-section interactions, were not part of the analytical process. The combination of description rhetoric and video presentation, visual design and post-launch communication is a significant, yet mostly unexplored extension of this research programme.

Second, the correlational design of the study, theoretically informed and methodologically sound, will be unable to determine causal relationships between rhetorical decisions and funding results.

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Experimental research that manipulates certain features of description whilst structural variables are maintained would be more convincing causal evidence on the persuasive mechanisms that this study identifies with correlational evidence.

Three, the sample was restricted to those campaigns in English language, which did not include the rising level of international crowdfunding on both Kickstarter and similar platforms on other national settings. Cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparative research would determine whether the rhetorical strategies found here are applicable in other language and culture or that they are an expression of Anglo-American rhetorical conventions.

Fourth, the research did not consider the features of backers, so the relationship between the differences in domain knowledge, previous experience in crowdfunding, the need to be cognitively active, and the disposition to trust specific rhetorical decisions remained uninvestigated. The moderating processes would be investigated given mixed-methods designs that would combine campaign description analysis and backer-level survey data.

Lastly, longitudinal studies of the shifts in rhetorical conventions of crowdfunding over time would allow studying how the platform rhetorical conventions are established and whether the strategies that lead to success, which have been identified in this study, can be effective when they are disseminated among creator cohorts, and how literacy in the context of the platform is formed due to the experience acquired over time.

Conclusion

This study shows that the language of Kickstarter campaign descriptions is not accidental but constitutive of the result of raising funds, as it is the primary site of persuasive practise and in which the choice of the backers is developed in a situation where the projects do not exist yet and creators are unknown. The rhetorical architecture that makes the difference between successful and unsuccessful campaign, the narrative ethos building, the logos accountability concretely specified, the pathos appeals to emotions, and the social proof framing as a community-constituting element, all of which are multi-dimensional in form, are the result of the multi-dimensional structure of the backer decision-making in such an environment that is characterised by high levels of psychological distance (in terms of time, social, and hypothetical distance).

The level of the theoretical integration that has been attained in the paper, which incorporated Aristotelian rhetoric, the construal level theory, the narrative transportation theory, and the social proof mechanisms, offers by far a much richer explanation of the persuasion in the context of crowdfunding than any of the theoretical approaches could have offered. Positive, credible, and emotionally compelling rhetoric is not a sufficient attribute of a successful crowdfunding endeavour but rather, the successful rhetoric must be architecturally sound, that is, it must integrate various persuasive resources into the entire text of the description in the direction of the common interest of changing interested web goers into committed financial participants.

One of the most practically relevant contributions of the study is the findings of the construal level. The predominance of abstract visionary rhetoric among failed campaigns is an indication of a real and a general misconception of what the rhetoric situation of crowdfunding necessitates. The tangible specificity in describing a product, schedule, and budgetary allocation is not an added guide in a highly psychologically distant communicative environment, but rather a reassurance of constitutive quality, that is, the translation of an abstract desire into something that is real, evaluable and actually deliverable. Innovators that bow to the inspirational abstraction of the entrepreneurial

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pitch culture are hitting the wrong programme of backer cognition, and the financial implications of such a misfit are enormous.

The finding of the origin storey has implications outside the domain of crowdfunding on how narrative competence may be used as a social and economic capital in modern life of communication. By putting financial support in the projects of strangers on the basis of written descriptions, strangers are indulging in one of the basic acts of mediated social trust, and the trust is built, first and foremost, by narrative. Producers capable of narrating coherent narratives with familiar beginnings, growth difficulties, and how these problems will be solved show that there is a cognitive structure and a form of communication that implicitly support their success in taking complex initiatives to completion.

Beyond that, this paper adds to the knowledge base about the role of language as a major resource of economic engagement in the participatory digital economies that the crowdfunding websites are modular examples of. With the increasing size, variety and cultural importance of these platforms, the systematic intellectual knowledge of the communicative processes upon which these platforms rely continues to gain significance, both to the creators who rely on them, to the sponsors who have invested via them, and to the researchers and teachers who strive to comprehend the unique forms of communicative activity that digital economic life is producing.

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