# Beyond Financing – The Power of Backers as Consumers in Reward-Based Crowdfunding

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Supervision by Kirsten Jæger

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**Abstract**

This thesis originates from an initial interest in crowdfunding, especially reward-based crowdfunding (RBCF), as a recent, yet significant phenomenon in contemporary global consumer culture, which despite its relative novelty has skyrocketed during the recent decade, and with future prospects foreseeing an even more explosive growth. In reviewing the existing, though limited, body of RBCF literature with a focus on consumption, a knowledge gap is identified concerning the role and power of backers in influencing RBCF projects and the products thereof, other than via financing, leading to the preparation of the problem formulation, *how are backers as consumers powerful in influencing projects and the products thereof in reward-based crowdfunding beyond financing?* Initially, a theoretical framework focusing on consumption and power is established, enabling the analysis of power relations in the space of RBCF, followed by the devising of a methodological approach, where an in-depth, qualitative interview study design is employed, conducting six individual, semi-structured interviews with experienced backers and creators, and analysing these by means of thematic coding. It is concluded that backers are involved in the immaterial production process of RBCF projects and the products thereof, and thus beyond financing. In the relation between backers and creators, the power is found to be ultimately located mainly at the backer side of the relation, and in general, the collective body of backers – the crowd – is extensively powerful in governing both creators and individual backers through a set of dynamic norms which emerge and are altered and reproduced within the relations, which creators have practically no ability to individually influence, but must comply with if they want to succeed. Non-compliance may have significant consequences, especially for creators, whose reputation may suffer extensive, permanent damage. Knowing the potential consequences, backers and creators discipline themselves to comply with the norms, conforming with the expectations that emerge around their respective roles in their relation with the crowd, which may be repressive, but is also enabling in the benefits it entails. This norm (self-)enforcement makes this space extensively regulated, though no structured or central regulatory force is present; as backers and creators regulate themselves and each other, the RBCF communities govern and subjectivate themselves. Thus, if creators want succeed in RBCF, they must actively participate in the communities and maintain their backer relations to learn the norms that govern this space and ensure compliance with them, where their continuous participation in and maintenance of these communities and relations are crucial, given that the norms emerge within these and are constant subject to change.

*Keywords:* crowdfunding, reward-based crowdfunding, online consumer power, backer power, power relations, online communities

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## 1.0 Introduction

In contemporary global consumer culture, the phenomenon of crowdfunding continues to grow and become ever more significant, though its emergence is relatively recent. Numerous definitions of crowdfunding exist, but the seemingly most cited one is formulated by Belleflamme, Lambert and Schwienbacher (2014), who define the phenomenon as "an open call, mostly through the Internet, for the provision of financial resources either in the form of donation or in exchange for the future product or some form of reward to support initiatives for specific purposes" (p. 588). Though being a phenomenon that occurs online, crowdfunding has its roots in more traditional, offline measures of raising funds, where it "draws inspiration from concepts like micro-finance and crowdsourcing, but represents its own unique category of fundraising, facilitated by a growing number of Internet sites devoted to the topic" (Mollick, 2014, p. 2). The first of such sites, also known as crowdfunding platforms, began emerging in the early 2000s (Baumgardner et al., 2017, p. 118), but the phenomenon did not immediately gain mainstream traction. As Brüntje and Gajda (2016) explain, the financial crisis of 2008 left the general public with "a deep distrust of financial institutions and economic theory [which] created a welcome breeding ground for the idea of crowdfunding" (p. ix), and in 2013, "crowdfunding received worldwide recognition and captured the interest of the established financial services industry, economists, politicians, and corporations" (p. ix). Since then, "crowdfunding has exploded in popularity" (Short et al., 2017, p. 149), which also becomes evident when examining the statistics that exist around the phenomenon. According to Oruezabala and Peter (2016), "crowdfunding campaigns raised more than five billion USD in 2013, representing an 85% increase compared to 2012" (p. 23), and whereas "the World Bank believes that crowdfunding could account for over $300 billion in cumulative transactions by 2025" (Short et al., 2017, p. 150), Forbes "anticipates a market of 1,000 billion USD by 2020" (Oruezabala & Peter, 2016, p. 23).

There are multiple reasons as to why crowdfunding constitutes an interesting and relevant topic for this master's thesis. From a practical perspective, an increasing number of companies are starting to realise the potential of crowdfunding; as Srivastava (2016) argues, crowdfunding has "the potential to boost manufacturing- and service-related business activities" (p. 170), and according to Moritz and Block (2016), "crowdfunding allows companies to exploit their market potential more effectively" (p. 32). As such, the growing

significance of crowdfunding and its business potentials will presumably lead to an increased demand for substantiated knowledge that companies, but also other relevant entities, such as individual people wanting to fund and realise their project ideas, can strategically employ and benefit from.

From an academic perspective, the topic of crowdfunding is relatively new and, as seen in the following section (1.1), unexplored, meaning that a great research potential exists here. For the master's programme of Culture, Communication and Globalisation, this topic is highly relevant to its core themes, and it holds inherent international and intercultural aspects. The phenomenon of crowdfunding is in itself a result of globalisation and the technological developments resulting thereof. According to Bouncken, Komorek and Kraus (2015), "crowdfunding is a Web 2.0 based phenomenon [and a] crucial factor for success of the concept is the digitalization of society with growing presence of the Internet" (p. 407), and similarly, Imarhigabe (2015) explains that "globalisation and web technology has provided the driving force for a quicker expansion of crowdfunding all over the world" (p. 203). Thus, crowdfunding is facilitated by the Internet, which has created this rapid and dynamic online space in which geographical, time and cultural borders are dissolved (Hunsinger, 2005, p. 279; Wong-MingJi, 2009, p. 80). Furthermore, the global extent of crowdfunding often creates unique situations where the project creator, the project backer and the crowdfunding platform host are located in three different countries (Beaulieu, Sarker & Sarker, 2015, p. 6), and according to Müllerleile and Joensson (2015), "crowdfunding dynamics, as well as geographic crowd dispersion, enables project [creators] to overcome financing barriers and utilize globalization for successful financing" (p. 272). In the words of Beck et al. (2016), "crowdfunding is the next step in the world's progress towards a globalised society promoting cultural and geographical diversification" (p. 2).

Furthermore, the topic of crowdfunding is equally highly relevant to the master's specialisation stream of Consumption and Market Communication. According to Scholz (2015) crowdfunding has fostered "new consumer dynamics" (p. 5), and as is elaborated further in section 1.1.1, the dominant crowdfunding model, known as 'reward-based crowdfunding', entails a direct form of consumption in that those who financially contribute to a project following this model receive a reward in return (Méric, Maque and Brabet, 2016, p. xxiii). Today, over 2,000 crowdfunding platforms exist (Short et al., 2017, p. 150), again illustrating the prominent extent that this phenomenon has grown to have, where the platform named Kickstarter is the largest and most popular one according to several scholars (e.g.

Belleflamme, Lambert & Schwienbacher, 2013, p. 316; Mollick, 2014, p. 4; Scholz, 2015, p. 8). As the majority of crowdfunding platforms, Kickstarter adheres to the model of reward-based crowdfunding, and since its launch in 2009, "15 million people have backed a project" (Kickstarter, 2018a) – one third of these being repeat project backers (Kickstarter, 2018e) – "$3.7 billion has been pledged, and 144,841 projects have been successfully funded" (Kickstarter, 2018a) on this platform alone, suggesting an immense magnitude of the crowdfunding phenomenon, its implications to global consumer culture and the number of consumers involved in it.

As is suggested above and accounted for in further detail in the following section, the emergence and continuously rising popularity of crowdfunding have caused fundamental alterations in the market mechanics, where project backers are described as ever more influential. At the same time, recent consumption theory suggests significant systemic changes in the underlying power relations within the market, in which consumers have generally become increasingly powerful, and as opposed to the traditional, passive consumer who was placed at the end of the supply and value chain, the contemporary consumer is stated to be increasingly actively participating in and an integral part of the production process. This thesis seeks to explore the topic of crowdfunding – reward-based crowdfunding, to be exact – from a consumption perspective with a special focus on the power of project backers as consumers, which is accomplished by means of an interview study of key participants in the crowdfunding process. Thus, this thesis, its empirical investigation and the results thereof contribute to the existing bodies of literature concerning crowdfunding and consumption, and to the understanding of how consumers are increasingly powerful in contemporary society. However, before being able to further specify the concrete research issue of this thesis and prepare a problem formulation, it is necessary to conduct a literature review of previous research that exists around the topic of crowdfunding.

## 1.1 Literature Review

As seen above, the phenomenon of crowdfunding has grown immensely over the recent decade, and the future prospects foresee an even more rapid growth, with a continuous increase in prominence and popularity. However, despite increasing significance and positive outlooks, several scholars emphasise that the academic focus on crowdfunding has been limited, and that the topic remains largely unexplored (e.g. Beck et al., 2016, p. 1; Beaulieu, Sarker & Sarker, 2015, p. 2; Gerber & Hui, 2013, p. 4; Short et al., 2017, p. 149), which is further underlined by the fact that the great majority of literature found in academic journals

and databases on this topic is published post-2010. The aim of this section is to provide background knowledge on crowdfunding, as to establish a basic understanding of the phenomenon, to explore which aspects of crowdfunding have previously been researched and to identify a potential knowledge gap in the existing body of literature.

**1.1.1 Background – Understanding the Basics of Crowdfunding**

The existing literature generally identifies three key entities in crowdfunding, which are the project creator, the project backer and the crowdfunding platform. Creators are the individuals who launch the online fundraising campaign for a given project, backers are the individuals who decide to financially contribute to a given project, and crowdfunding platforms are the websites on which creators can post their projects and backers can browse through available projects, functioning as intermediates for communication and financial transactions between backers and creators. It is in the interplay between these three entities that the phenomenon of crowdfunding occurs, and crowdfunding activities would not be possible without all three playing an active role (Scholz, 2015, pp. 8-9).

Crowdfunding originates from crowdsourcing, and the two terms are at times used interchangeably, though there is notable difference between them. Estellés-Arolas and González-Ladrón-de-Guevara (2012) define crowdsourcing as "a type of participative online activity in which an individual, an institution, a non-profit organization, or company proposes to a group of individuals of varying knowledge, heterogeneity, and number, via a flexible open call, the voluntary undertaking of a task" (p. 197), where the group of individuals contribute with "work, money, knowledge and/or experience" (p. 197). Here, crowdfunding is concerned not with "sourcing expertise and other work of consumers but with the participation of persons as sources of funding" (Brunetti, 2016, p. 53), and thus, crowdfunding constitutes a sub-category of crowdsourcing focused on fundraising.

A large number of scholars have sought to establish a definition of crowdfunding, where the seemingly most cited one, as stated in the former section, defines it as "an open call, mostly through the Internet, for the provision of financial resources either in the form of donation or in exchange for the future product or some form of reward to support initiatives for specific purposes" (Belleflamme, Lambert & Schwienbacher, 2014, p. 588). Other popular definitions include, "the process of one party financing a project by requesting and receiving small contributions from many parties in exchange for a form of value to those parties" (Rubinton, 2011, p. 3), and "tapping a large dispersed audience, dubbed as 'the crowd', for small sums of money to fund a project or a venture […] typically empowered by

the social media communication over the Internet, through for example embracing user-generated content as guides for investors" (Lehner, 2013, p. 289). The shared aspects in these definitions is that they characterise crowdfunding as an online collaborative effort to successfully fund a given project, where one or more individuals who serve as the creator initiate an online fundraising campaign for a given project, which is then financially supported with small contributions by a large number of individuals who serve as backers.

However, Mollick (2014) argues that "a broad definition of crowdfunding is […] elusive, especially as crowdfunding covers so many current (and likely future) uses across many disciplines" (p. 2), suggesting that it is more appropriate to formulate definitions specific to individual areas. Here, Cholakova and Clarysse (2015) explain that the literature generally distinguishes between four crowdfunding models, which are donation-, reward-, lending- and equity-based (p. 147). According to Méric, Maque and Brabet (2016), the donation-based model represents "the simplest type of all crowdfunding models [where] the crowd gives money or other resources because they want to support a cause" (p. xxiii). This model differs significantly from the other three, as backers here do not receive anything in return (p. xxiii). Reward-based crowdfunding (henceforth RBCF) is "when backers make donations for a project with the expectation of a certain reward" (xxiii), which can be both material and immaterial. In projects adhering to this model, the reward is typically the product that the project aims to fund (p. xxiii), but the reward may also be, for instance "recognition or voting rights" (Belleflamme, Lambert & Schwienbacher, 2014, p. 588). In RBCF, a multitude of project – and thus product – categories exist, and most often, each project holds several reward tiers, and the more backers contribute financially, the larger and more valuable their reward is (Buff & Alhadeff, 2013, p. 35). Also, so-called 'stretch goals' often exist, meaning that whenever a project surpasses its funding goal to certain extents, for instance 150 or 200 per cent, additional features are added to the product (Steigenberger, 2017, p. 338). Méric, Maque and Brabet (2016) explain that the reward-based model can be compared to a model of pre-ordering products, and thus, the platforms dedicated to this model function as a market place for products that are yet to be funded and produced (p. xxiii). In the words of Gerber and Hui (2013), it can be "framed as a type of market, where creators produce and market their ideas or products and [backers] consume them" (p. 5). Furthermore, the reward-based model is associated with low risk to backers, as it mostly follows an 'all-or-nothing' funding model, meaning that the financial contributions are only charged from backers once, and if, a project reaches a pre-defined minimum goal (Méric,

Maque & Brabet, 2016, p. xxiv). According to Méric, Maque and Brabet (2016), the lending-based model has as its purpose to financially enable underprivileged individuals by enabling them to lend money (p. xxv). Lastly, the equity-based model allows individuals to "invest small amounts of money in projects with a share in ownership of the project proportional to the investment in return" (p. xxiv). This model is often associated with new start-up ventures, representing an alternative, and often more accessible, instrument of raising starting capital for new companies (p. xxiv).

Though all of the four crowdfunding models presented above do constitute potentially interesting research topics, the one that is the most relevant to this thesis is that of RBCF. This model is the one of the four that relates most directly to consumption, as it involves one party (pre-)paying another party in return of a specific reward, be it material or immaterial; as seen above, backers can be perceived as consumers and creators as producers. Furthermore, RBCF is stated to be the most common model (Bi, Liu & Usman, 2017, p. 12) and the dominant one in terms of "funds raised and number of projects" (Kraus et al., 2016, p. 17), and the crowdfunding platforms adhering to this model constitute "the fastest growing form of public fundraising" (Antonenko, Lee & Kleinheksel, 2014, p. 40).

### 1.1.2 Previous RBCF Research and Identification of Knowledge Gap

Several academic fields have taken on crowdfunding as a research topic, but when reviewing existing literature, it is seen that certain fields are dominant in contributing. Besides the focus seen above on defining crowdfunding and the various models thereof, a main focus in the existing literature has been on crowdfunding as a general business model and how creators can employ such as a vantage point to starting and growing a business (e.g. Borello, De Crescenzo & Pichler, 2015; Mollick & Kuppuswamy, 2014; Tomczak & Brem, 2013). A second main focus has been on the crowdfunding process itself, especially seeking to identify key drivers for project success and best practice in regard to running crowdfunding campaigns (e.g. Beier & Wagner, 2015; Kunz et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2016). A third main focus has been on legal aspects of crowdfunding and how this phenomenon is extensively unregulated both nationally and internationally, and how a need for such regulation is necessary and can be met (e.g. Cohn, 2012; Cumming & Johan, 2013; Rechtman & O'Callaghan, 2014). Thus, the majority of the existing the literature is related to the disciplines of economics, business, entrepreneurship, management and law, sometimes in combination. It generally appears that less attention has been devoted to the consumption aspect of crowdfunding, though it is possible to identify certain pieces of literature that either

directly or indirectly provide knowledge about consumption and backers as consumers in crowdfunding.

The remaining part of this literature review focuses specifically on RBCF. One of the major ideas arising across several pieces of literature is that the emergence and continuously increasing prominence of RBCF has resulted in a significant change in the power relations of the market, between consumers and corporations. This change is referred to as the democratisation of the commercialisation of innovation and access to capital, where Mollick and Robb (2016) state that "crowdfunding represents a shift from expert-based decision making to crowd-based decisions" (p. 72). Traditionally, the power was primarily located on the corporate side of the relation, with a small elite consisting of experts deciding which products and innovations would be commercialised, that is, produced and released into the market for consumers to purchase (p. 72). Now however, this decisive power is increasingly shifted to being located at the consumer side of the relation – with the people, the crowd – and though the elite remains powerful, Brüntje and Gajda (2016) characterise RBCF as a "democratic tool to take back the decision power from banks and corporations over where to put our own money and what products should be created and sold within a collaborative economy" (p. ix).

RBCF has been described as disruptive (Mollick, 2014, p. 4), and it represents an "alternative to traditional funding" (Belleflamme, Lambert & Schwienbacher, 2013, p. 324) which is "fundamentally open to everyone" (Bouncken, Komorek & Kraus, 2015, p. 407), as the only requirement for people wanting to create and back projects is Internet access (Gerber, Hui & Kuo, 2012, p. 1; Gerber & Hui, 2016, p. 40). This means that "normal people" (Scholz, 2015, p. 67), who were traditionally confined to the role of being consumers, are now also able to assume the role of being producers, and it is seen how the initial versions of several revolutionising innovations have emerged via RBCF projects, such as virtual reality and smart watch technology (Mollick & Robb, 2016, pp. 83-84). However, as Gierczak et al. (2016) emphasise, RBCF does not only enable the realisation of large, prominent projects, "but also makes funding possible for niche projects which perhaps are perceived as non-profitable, and thus are not able to raise money from traditional sources" (p. 15). As a result, Mollick and Robb (2016) argue, "crowdfunding efforts have allowed various enthusiast groups to find ways to bring their hobbies or interests together" (p. 85), thus especially enabling and benefitting the communities that exist around niche products and product categories, which are no longer limited by, for instance, large corporations that deem

certain products unviable; as Banhatti (2016) puts it, RBCF "empowers the people to choose or reject a creative idea for itself" (p. 227). In general, the existing literature characterises communities as essential to RBCF and the platforms that facilitate it (Gerber, Hui & Kuo, 2012, p. 3; Greenberg & Gerber, 2014, p. 583). According to Hui, Greenberg and Gerber (2014), "crowdfunding relies heavily on community building" (p. 63), and a multitude of communities exist around various project categories and even individual projects and creators (Greenberg & Gerber, 2014, p. 588), all of which exist in an online space where members communicate via social media, forum websites and the RBCF platforms themselves (Hui, Greenberg & Gerber, 2014, p. 63; Zheng, 2014, p. 494).

Though to a limited extent, previous research does highlight certain tendencies in consumer behaviour and expectations among backers. Several scholars highlight that a central motivation for backers to participate in RBCF is that it enables them to be part of a community (e.g. Agrawal, Catalini & Goldfarb, 2013, p. 14; Gerber & Hui, 2013, p. 9; Zheng, 2014, 488) and obtain what Belleflamme, Lambert and Schwienbacher (2014) term "community benefits" (p. 589), referring to backers feeling "that they are part of a community of 'special' or 'privileged' consumers" (p. 589), through which they achieve "feelings of connectedness to a community with similar interests and ideals" (Gerber, Hui & Kuo, 2012, p. 1). Belleflamme and Lambert (2014) explain that backers "are consumers who have a strong taste for the announced product and who therefore decide to pre-order it, that is, to pay for it before it is actually produced" (p. 291), and for this reason, Scholz (2015) labels them as 'presumers', referring to "pre-purchase and later consumption" (p. 31). Backers are highly motivated by the "early access to new products" (Agrawal, Catalini & Goldfarb, 2013, p. 14) that RBCF facilitates, but they do not know the actual product quality at the time of pledging finances (Zheng, 2014, p. 490), which may be why "projects that signal a higher quality level are more likely to be funded" (Mollick, 2014, p. 2). Scholz (2015) explains that to convince backers, a project and its campaign must signal high levels of "attractiveness, usefulness and feasibility" (p. 50), and though backers have a "high willingness to pay" (Belleflamme, Lambert & Schwienbacher, 2014, p. 589), the project and its campaign still "[need] to convince a pool of consumers […] that the product is worth their money" (Scholz, 2015, p. 50). This latter point emphasises that though the power is increasingly located with the many, it is not given that all projects gain enough crowd support to be successful. At the time of writing, Kickstarter has a success rate of 36.12 per cent (Kickstarter, 2018e), meaning that approximately one third of projects here successfully fund, which underlines the fact that

democracy also entails the possibility of a negative vote. Essentially, the success of a project in RBCF depends on backers and whether they are convinced by the given project and its creator, as they are ones making the choice of whether or not to make financial contributions (Scholz, 2015, pp. 9, 50); in the words of Gábossy (2016) "the power of the crowd legitimises the idea and confirms market demand" (p. 535).

Some scholars do challenge the extent to which RBCF is truly democratic, as it "usually does not follow the 'one man one vote' principle, which is essential to modern democracies, but allows a stronger influence of wealthier actors" (Hörisch, 2015, p. 638). As such, the financial influence of backers depends on their spending power and willingness. Nevertheless, RBCF is more accessible than traditional financing methods, and it represents a more transparent and legitimate funding channel compared to traditional ones (Röthler & Wenzlaff, 2011, pp. 36-37). As Méric, Maque and Brabet (2016) argue, the production of goods, "once little more than the output of things, is today increasingly based around people-powered processes and products that help us create and grow things collaboratively. […] We're seeing people take back control of the means of production" (p. xii).

The idea of democratisation largely assigns the power of which products become funded and commercialised to the crowd, that is, as RBCF platforms have enabled regular people to act as both creators, launching their project ideas, and backers, financially supporting the projects they like. However, several scholars emphasise that the influence of backers and their communities in RBCF goes beyond mere financial support. It is true that backers hold the power of contributing financial resources to projects and thus collectively decide whether funding goals are reached, but according to Greenberg, Hui and Gerber (2013), "the financial nature of crowdfunding has obscured the critical and overlooked exchange of other resources on crowdfunding platforms" (p. 884). Rather than only financial resources, Scholz (2015) argues that "the crowd provides a large pool of 'collective wisdom' for a crowdfunding project in terms of knowledge, feedback, financing as well as viral and word-of-mouth marketing" (p. 23), and that "crowdfunding denotes space for co-creation and the involvement of the backers in the final product definition" (p. 16), meaning that backers and the communities they belong to play an integral role in shaping and promoting projects and the products thereof. According to Colombo, Franzoni and Rossi-Lamastra (2015) "crowdfunding projects are often underdeveloped at the time they are posted for funding" (p. 78) and "backers offer suggestions and feedback that [creators] use to modify their projects continuously during a campaign, [which allows them] to anticipate problems, to know their

customers' preferences, and to meet the needs of a broader audience (pp. 78-79). These non-financial backer contributions are highlighted by several scholars (e.g. Beck et al., 2016, p. 2; Brunetti, 2016, p. 59; Greenberg, Hui & Gerber, 2013, p. 885; Hui, Greenberg & Gerber, 2014, p. 63; Torkanovskiy, 2016, p. 119; Zheng et al., 2014, p. 491), and their existence generally results in "blurring the role between producer and consumer (Gerber, Hui & Kuo, 2012, p. 5).

However, though Scholz (2015) acknowledges these "new consumer dynamics" (p. 31) and that "the collective intelligence of the crowd gains increased power in the innovation cycle of new products/services" (p. 29), she does question the extent to which backers do and are able to influence projects in RBCF and thus the products that result thereof (pp. 67-68). Here, she notes that backer involvement does present certain challenges to creators, such as "the speed of development, scalability and power relation shifts" (p. 30), and that creators are at times reluctant to incorporate community feedback (pp. 48, 52). Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that Agrawal, Catalini and Goldfarb (2013) found that a demotivating factor for creators to launch projects is the risk of backers having too much power, where creators have "no way to prevent [backers] with differing visions and strong personalities from joining and adversely affecting the community's dialogue" (pp. 17-18). Thus, the existing literature paradoxically presents the influence of the crowd beyond financing in RBCF projects and the products thereof as both major and minor, and positive and negative. The previous research on the democratising effects of RBCF on the market largely focuses on backers' financial power in influencing whether a given project successfully funds or not, but it is not possible to identify any previous research addressing the extent of the power of backers as consumers beyond this financial power, for instance their contribution of idea input and influence in shaping a given project and the product thereof. Thus, it appears that a knowledge gap exists here. Whereas the role and power of backers in the funding of a project is clear – if enough backers decide to financially contribute to a project, it will successfully fund and thus be realised – the role and power of backers in contributing non-financial resources, such as idea input, knowledge and promotional efforts, and the extent to which these contributions actually influence the projects and thus final products remain unclear.

## 1.2 Problem Formulation

Based on the literature review and identified knowledge gap, the following problem formulation has been prepared: *how are backers as consumers powerful in influencing projects and the products thereof in reward-based crowdfunding beyond financing?*

## 2.0 Theoretical Framework

In essence, the existing literature on RBCF characterises backers and the communities thereof – the crowd – as a creative, influential and powerful group, constituted by individual consumers who are collectively increasingly dominant in the decision making processes of which products get funded and commercialised, but also influencing the actual RBCF projects and final products thereof. However, Zheng et al. (2014) argue that in general, "there is a lack of underlying theories and theoretical support in the current crowdfunding literature" (p. 489), which is also – and seemingly especially – the case for the consumption aspect thereof. The aim of this section is to establish a theoretical framework which can aid a better understanding of backers as consumers in RBCF, with a special focus on consumer power. Based on the core ideas of the existing literature, this framework combines relevant consumption theories that characterise consumers and consumer communities as creative, active, influential and powerful. Most of the theories presented in this framework have to some extent previously been individually employed in relation to RBCF, some more than others, but it is not possible to identify any literature that provides a collective, overarching theoretical framework that can help establish a more holistic understanding of the power of backers as consumers in RBCF.

This thesis calls for concrete conceptual instruments which are applicable in addressing the identified knowledge gap and answering the problem formulation, but it also calls for a general theoretical foundation, providing a broader understanding of the RBCF phenomenon, as it is, as emphasised earlier, under-researched, especially in relation to consumption. Thus, the theories presented in this framework are relevant on two levels. On a broad level, they introduce recent key developments in the power dynamics within the market, that is, systemic changes in the power relations between corporations and consumers, which underlie the phenomenon of RBCF and provide a general theoretical orientation that aids the understanding of the universe within which it exists and occurs, along with the philosophy by which it operates. On a more specific level, they also introduce concrete concepts related to consumer power that are thus directly relevant and applicable to the identified knowledge gap and the problem formulation. Section 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 each present individual, and at points overlapping, theories that are deemed relevant to this thesis, though none of them were developed directly in relation RBCF. The theories presented in these sections are identified by thoroughly scanning the body of existing literature concerning consumer relations and empowerment, where those that seem relevant and translatable into

the field of RBCF and the power of backers as consumers therein are included, seeking to open up the under-researched area of RBCF from a consumption perspective. Subsequently, section 2.4 initially summarises the essence of the broader implications of the included theories and then focuses on identifying concepts within these theories that are relevant and applicable to understanding the power of backers as consumers in RBCF, along with the ways in which they are helpful in doing so.

## 2.1 The Sharing Economy and Collaborative Consumption

"The sharing economy is an emerging economic-technological phenomenon that is fuelled by developments in information and communications technology (ICT), growing consumer awareness, proliferation of collaborative web communities as well as social commerce/sharing" (Hamari, Sjöklint & Ukkonen, 2016, p. 2047). This phenomenon started gaining mainstream attention in 2013 (Slee, 2015, p. 9) and has, according to Hamari, Sjöklint and Ukkonen (2016), generally entailed "the development of new ways of consumption" (p. 2047). Today, multiple diverse examples of the sharing economy can be observed, all similar in that they are largely facilitated by recent technological developments, namely Web 2.0, and "share the characteristics of online collaboration, online sharing, social commerce, and some form of underlying ideology, such as collective purpose or a common good" (p. 2048).

A central consumer development of the sharing economy is that of 'collaborative consumption', which entails some form of exchange of both material and immaterial matters between consumers (Möhlmann, 2015, p. 193), and in recent years, the world has seen the emergence of "a wave of new businesses that use the Internet to match customers with service providers for real-world exchanges" (Slee, 2015, p. 9). Here, Hamari, Sjöklint and Ukkonen (2016) emphasise that collaborative consumption "relies heavily on social dynamics for the actual sharing and collaboration" (p. 2050), emphasising the important role of consumers and communities in collaborative consumption, and further explain that platforms, such as the above, in many cases exercise little control and primarily function as mere facilitators, or "economical-technological coordination providers" (p. 2050).

Ertz, Durif and Arcand (2016) state that collaborative consumption constitutes a resource circulation system, which entails a "two-sided consumer role which goes beyond the notion of buyer" (p. 197), where "consumers are able to switch roles, engage in embedded entrepreneurship and collaborate to produce and access resources" (p. 197), as opposed to the one-sided consumer in more traditional, linear supply and value chains. Collaborative

consumption activities and platforms are extensively accessible to the people, and the sharing economy is often highlighted as having a disruptive impact on traditional models of economy and consumption, and organisations and industries adhering to these (Belk, 2014, pp. 1595-1599). Here, Slee (2015) argues that collaborative consumption is stated to enable individuals to "rely more on each other and less on faceless, distant corporations" (p. 9) and "help previously powerless individuals take more control of their lives by becoming 'micro-entrepreneurs'" (p. 10), which can generally "help to build our community instead of being passive and materialist consumers" (p. 10).

## 2.2 The Increasingly Blurred Lines Between Production and Consumption

There are multiple theories that concern a general trend concerning – as is also resonated in the collaborative consumption theory – the merging of production and consumption, as well as producer and consumer roles, into one, which, though pre-dating to an offline world, was, and is continuously, extensively fuelled by technological developments, most notably Web 2.0. Several terms and concepts describe the increasingly blurred lines between production and consumption, where section 2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 outline the main theories that exist around this shift in contemporary consumer culture.

### 2.2.1 Prosumption

In 1980, Toffler (1980) described the increasing dedifferentiation between the acts of producing and consuming, in relation to which he coined the terms of "the 'prosumer', one who is both producer and consumer, and of 'prosumption', involving a combination of production and consumption" (Ritzer, Dean & Jurgenson, 2012, p. 379). However, Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson (2012) argue that prosumption is not a new phenomenon, and that this behaviour has been observed since the earliest hunting and gathering societies (p. 380). In general, they criticise the long-running tendencies of treating production and consumption as binary and "[ignoring] the fact that production always also involved consumption, and conversely, consumption always involved production" (p. 381). Rather than binary, they argue that these should be perceived as co-existing in a continuum, where the middle represents "pure prosumption" (p. 381) and one of them may constitute the dominant, though never exclusive, focus at a given point in history (p. 381).

From this continuum perspective, Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) explain that Toffler distinguished between three waves of consumer society or culture through history, representing shifts in the focus between production and consumption. The first wave covers the pre-industrial period and represents the primordial economic system, largely being that of

prosumption, in which individuals were both producers and consumers of goods and services. The second wave represents the industrialisation, which largely, though never fully, resulted in the division of the spheres of production and consumption, along with the roles of producer and consumer. In this period, spanning over several centuries, the core focus was on production. However, after WWII, especially during the 1960s, the focus was increasingly shifted towards consumption. This period was characterised by comprehensive shifts in consumer culture in terms of "changes and increases in the objects of consumption, the subjects of consumption (the consumers), consumption processes, as well as the kinds of consumption sites" (p. 15), with the rise of what is termed 'cathedrals of consumption', such as shopping malls, and a similar "growth in marketing, advertising, branding, and the like" (p. 15).

This period also marked the initial steps of a re-merging of a more equal balance between production and consumption, and thus the beginning of the third wave, returning to the tendencies of the first wave. The most significant development towards increased prosumption was the "trend toward putting consumers to work" (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010, p. 18) in the form of increased self-servicing, which is further elaborated in the following section. Consumers became increasingly involved in the production process, and since the 1990s, this tendency has been extensively fuelled by technological advancements and the emergence of Web 2.0. As Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) argue, "prosumption was clearly not invented on Web 2.0, but given the massive involvement in, and popularity of, many of these developments (e.g. social networking sites), it can be argued that it is currently both the most prevalent location of prosumption and its most important facilitator as a 'means of prosumption'" (p. 20). Furthermore, "it is in the immaterial worlds of Web 2.0 that it is hardest to distinguish between producers and consumers" (Ritzer, Dean & Jurgenson, 2012, p. 385).

In relation to this, Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson (2012) explain that much of contemporary production is "less material and more immaterial, and it is happening throughout society rather than only in designated settings such as factories" (p. 382); an idea rooted in the 'social factory' or 'factory without walls'. Thus, the majority of contemporary production is centred more around ideas than actual, physical products. Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson (2012) exemplify this with the automobile industry, in which "the actual material production of cars by automobile workers is now of less importance than the immaterial production of ideas to improve the manufacturing, marketing, or design of the product by

those who work in and around the automobile industry" (p. 382). It is especially in relation to immaterial production that prosumption occurs, as consumers are increasingly involved in the development of ideas; "since immaterial production takes place in the realm of ideas, and these ideas are part of what is called the 'general intellect', it becomes increasingly possible […] for consumers to draw on this general fund of knowledge and information. As they draw upon – or consume – this knowledge, they produce and further contribute to it" (p. 382). Consumers may participate in this immaterial production process by own incentive, but it is also seen how corporations are today inviting consumers to participate in the production of immaterial matters, such as ideas for product design and innovation or marketing material. On a more abstract level, "consumers [also] play a major role in producing the shared meanings that are the brand; they do not simply accept the brand messages created by marketers and advertisers. Thus, in a real sense, prosumers produce the meaning that surrounds brands" (p. 382).

     Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson (2012) emphasise that on one hand, prosumers can be seen as being largely exploited by corporations in their lack of financial compensation for their labour, from which the corporations benefit in the form of added value. On the other hand though, they also emphasise that prosumers constitute a powerful actor, in that they are able to reach a great number of other or potential consumers online, where they decide the attitude of the message – be it positive or negative – and in that their labour and value contributions are made free of direct control from corporations, meaning that the prosumer is more difficult to control than an actual employee and more likely to exercise resistance (p. 383).

### 2.2.2 The Working Consumer

     Traditionally, consumers held a passive role and were firmly placed at the end of the supply and value chain, where they would "buy and use [products and services], and that is all" (Kleeman, Voß & Rieder, 2008, p. 6). However, according to Kleeman, Voß and Rieder (2008), a new type of consumer has emerged, known as the 'working consumer', which challenges the traditional separation of the spheres of production and consumption, thus altering corporate-consumer relations (pp. 5-7). They argue that consumers "are becoming more like co-workers who take over specific parts of a production process, whereby this process ultimately remains under the control of a commercial enterprise" (p. 5). The working consumer is defined by the presence of three central traits, which are "a) working consumers are active in the production process and can be utilized as value-adding workers; b) the

capacities they possess are valuable economic assets; and c) they are systematically integrated into corporate structures, where their actions can be monitored and manipulated by corporate managers much as if they were employees" (pp. 8-9).

The term 'working consumer' was coined in 2005 by Voß and Rieder (2005), but the phenomenon is not new. In the 1970s, the corporate world began looking for ways to integrate external production factors, such as consumers, into the production process, and society witnessed an increase in consumer activities involving self-service as opposed to traditional service (Kleeman, Voß & Rieder, 2008, pp. 6-7). This marked the beginning of a tendency of perceiving consumers as "a central resource for corporations" (Kleeman, Voß & Rieder, 2008, p. 7) and of these "increasingly [taking] part actively and directly in firms' production and service-delivery processes" (Rieder & Voß, 2010, p. 4), and today, numerous corporations are considering ways in which they can outsource tasks to consumers through which they participate in and contribute to the given corporation's value-creation process (Kleeman, Voß & Rieder, 2008, pp. 7-8).

According to Kleeman, Voß and Rieder (2008), recent technological developments, most notably Web 2.0, have played "an important role in expanding forms of cooperation between firms and consumers in the production process" (p. 6), and today, a great variety of activities performed by working consumers are conducted online. These for instance include product development and configuration, innovation and design contests, rating and reviewing products and services, self-service activities, such as buying tickets and creating user-generated content, and other user activities on various platforms (pp. 4, 7). Rieder and Voß (2010) argue that technological developments are one of three key driving forces behind the increased integration of consumers into the production process, the other two being "the aim to further rationalize processes" (p. 2) and "the desire of consumers to gain more control of the consumption processes of products and services" (p. 3).

These developments have not just blurred the lines between consumer and producer, but also private and professional life (Rieder & Voß, 2010, p. 5), where unpaid consumers and their resources and capacities are exploited by corporations, which benefit from being able to "cut firms' personnel needs – and related costs – significantly" (Kleeman, Voß & Rieder, 2008, p. 8) and add value to their business and products. Thus, "customers not only serve themselves, [but also] other customers and work for the benefit of the enterprise" (Rieder & Voß, 2010, p. 4). However, the increasing prominence of the working consumer may also empower consumers, while affecting corporations negatively, as these "now depend

on working consumers to carry out their 'jobs' reliably and in accordance with the plans and needs of the firm" (Kleeman, Voß & Rieder, 2008, p. 9), and whereas Web 2.0 may enable corporations to exploit consumers, "it is also a powerful instrument in the hands of [consumers, who] may significantly influence the image and turnover of enterprises" (Rieder & Voß, 2010, p. 8). Thus, these power relation developments may have positive and negative effects on both parties involved.

### 2.2.3 Co-Production and Co-Creation

Two common theoretical concepts that often emerge when exploring theories related to the increasingly blurred lines between production and consumption are those of co-production and co-creation. Though often used synonymously, there is a difference between them, which may be defined in terms of the extent of consumer agency and involvement in the immaterial production process. Instead of viewing the two as the same or two separate concepts, they should be perceived as poles in a continuum of consumer agency (Chathoth et al., 2013, p. 11).

Co-production has a firm-centric focus in relation to consumer involvement, and according to Chathoth et al. (2013), consumers are here, though involved, "essentially given very little choice in defining the product/service" (p. 12). Instead, "the producer predominantly predefines both the tangible and intangible aspects of various product/service bundles […] before the [consumer] becomes involved in the process" (p. 12). Thus, this form of consumer involvement is similar to product customisation or personalisation, in which corporations pre-define the ways in, and extent to, which their products can be customised by consumers. The range of features available for customisation, along with the extent of this customisation, may vary greatly between corporations and products. Regardless of customisation possibilities, the shared aspect of all instances of such consumer involvement is that corporations remain in control of the production process, and though involved, consumers still remain mostly at the end of the supply and value chain. Consumers here do hold more agency than in traditional consumption, in which they would have to select between products that were fully pre-defined by corporations, but even in customisation, consumers are limited to making selections within a pre-defined framework, where they then select "the best available option that comes closest to meeting [their] need(s)" (p. 12). Thus, consumers here largely remain "a bystander in the production process" (p. 12) and may be forced to make compromises (pp. 12-13).

Co-creation, on the other hand, assigns more agency to consumers and integrates them to a greater extent into the production process and at an earlier stage, placing them in the middle and even beginning of the supply and value chain, rather than just the end. Co-creation has a great focus on "interactive value creation" (Eichentopf, Kleinaltenkamp & van Stiphout, 2011, p. 650), through which consumers can contribute to the values that exist around a given corporation, brand or product. Thus, co-creation mainly relates to the immaterial production processes, that is, the production of ideas that exist around corporations, brands or products, and the involvement of consumers therein, and whereas co-production limits consumers to making choices within a pre-set, firm-decided framework, co-creation enables them to participate in the creation of that very framework. Kristensson, Matthing and Johansson (2008) explain that corporations increasingly enter into dialogue with consumers and "involve [them] in the early stages of the new product development process by inviting them to suggest ideas for innovative products and services" (p. 475), which they argue enhances the end-value of these, as it integrates the innovative ideas of consumers; it "produces ideas that are more creative, more highly valued by customers, and more easily implemented" (p. 475). Co-creation thus involves consumers to a greater extent than co-production, and it assigns them more agency. Both approaches do create more end-value than traditional processes and products, but co-creation generates more end-value as consumers are more involved here (Chathoth et al., 2013, pp. 12-15).

Of these two approaches, co-creation seems dominant, at least in the theoretical literature. Co-creation is mostly used to describe processes that occur online, facilitated by Web 2.0, and often focuses on consumers' production of online user-generated content in the form of, for instance, social media updates and blog posts featuring text, pictures and/or video. In their online content generation, consumers are actively participating in the immaterial production process of ideas centred around the product of a given corporation, again emphasising the merging of consumer and producer. Thus, consumers are actively reproducing the product and its brand, but the corporation behind the product is not in control of the content and its attitude, though many may attempt to be. In general, consumers are increasingly integrated into all aspects thereof, even the initial stages of innovation (Kristensson, Matthing & Johansson, 2008, p. 475). As Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) explain, consumers of today are "informed, networked, empowered, and active" (p. 5) as ever before, and they now actively "seek to exercise their influence in every part of the business system" (p. 6). Furthermore, consumers are not only entering into dialogue with corporations,

but also each other, making them more critical towards, and less dependent on, the communications from corporations (p. 6). "As customers become more knowledgeable and increasingly aware of their negotiating clout, more businesses […] feel pressure to adopt an implicit (if not an explicit) negotiation" (p. 7), and it is important that corporations acknowledge the increased power of consumers; as Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody (2008) state, "the ideological recruitment of consumers into productive co-creation relationships hinges on accommodating consumers' needs for recognition, freedom, and agency" (p. 185).

## 2.3 Online Consumers and Communities – Innovation and Empowerment

Until this point, technological advancements have several times been characterised as key to the development of a new type of consumption and consumer culture. This section focuses on two central theories that relate to online consumers and communities thereof, along with their increasing levels of creativity, innovative involvement and power. In particular, the rise of Web 2.0 has enabled individual consumers to gather in online groups, that is, communities, in a space that transcends time and space. Today, there are endless numbers of communities dedicated to every conceivable topic, gathered via a multitude of online mediums, from fora and dedicated websites to blogs and social media, and in general, the world has witnessed the emergence of "new participatory web cultures that have risen to prominence over the last few years and which have now become established parts of mainstream culture" (Beer & Burrows, 2010, p. 4).

### 2.3.1 Innovation-Oriented Consumer Communities

According to Kozinets, Hemetsberger and Schau (2008), recent technological developments have resulted in increased connectivity, but so in a networked sense rather than a linear one, which has "enabled a flowering of online communities and their attendant collective production and innovation" (p. 340). Consumers and their communities are now increasingly found at the very centre of the production process, where "consumers have been recognized as full-fledged collective creative forces in their own right" (p. 339) and each community comes to constitute a collective intelligence in relation to the topic at the heart thereof. These online communities – also termed 'innovation-oriented online consumer communities' – represent a great variety of "cultures, subcultures [and] groups [which] blend personal interests in hobbies and consumption activities" (p. 342), and they consist of various members, who come from widely diverse backgrounds and hold different knowledge, experiences and capabilities. As a result, these online spaces constitute fertile grounds for sparking collective consumer creativity and innovation, and they are thus able to collectively

realise innovative ideas that individual consumers can neither produce nor fulfil; "the consumer group's talents, networks, and ability to keep one another motivated are likely helpful in developing and realizing the idea, and propagating and promoting it" (p. 341).

Kozinets, Hemetsberger and Schau (2008) have established a typology that consists of a matrix delineating four types of innovation-oriented online consumer communities, which are crowds, hives, mobs and swarms, and each of them involve a certain level of creative collaboration. The four community types are distinguished on the basis of two dimensions, each with two poles, and it should be emphasised that the lines between these four types are fluid, and that the different categories may overlap (p. 351). The two dimensions are termed 'collective innovation concentration' and 'collective innovation orientation'. The former "assesses the concentration of innovative contribution among the community" (p. 344), that is, the amount of community members involved in and contributing to the creative process. At one pole, there is a high concentration, where "only a few individual consumers (or even a single consumer) contribute the vast majority of the work" (p. 344), whereas the remaining members function more as a consuming audience of these few individual specialist members' contributions. The opposite pole represents a low concentration, where "the contribution is spread among a large number of contributors, many of whom contribute quite modestly […], but whose aggregate contribution may end up adding significant value" (p. 344). The latter
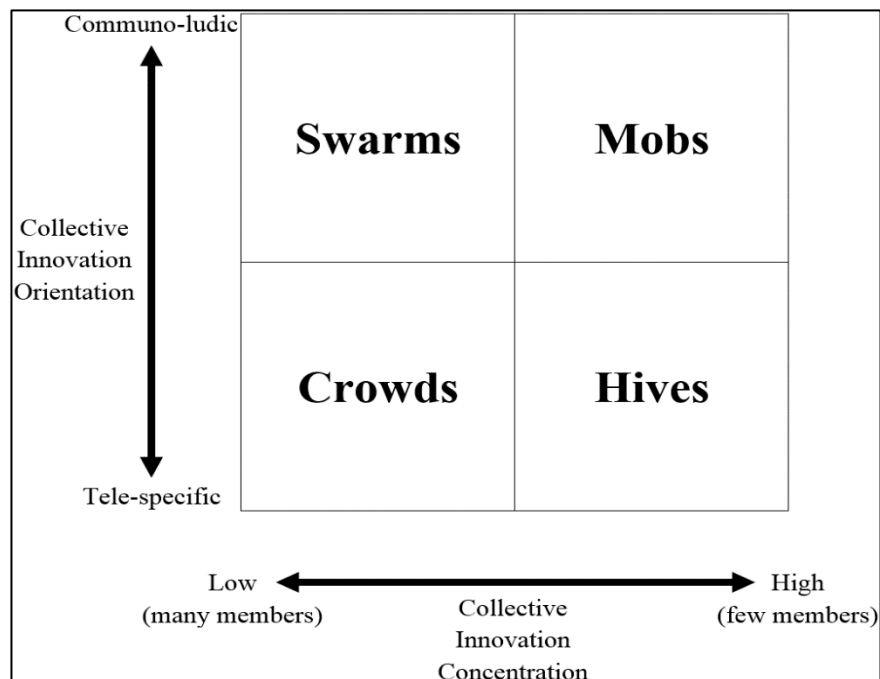


Figure 1: Typology of online creative consumer communities (Kozinets, Hemetsberger & Schau, 2008, p. 345).

dimension distinguishes time, that is, whether the goals of the community are short- or long-term. Within this dimension, one pole defines a given community as having a 'tele-specific' orientation, meaning that such "tend to be goal focused, to be oriented fairly deliberately toward particular innovative outcomes and to reaching generally delimited goals that pertain to particular creations" (p. 344). Contrarily, communities found at the opposite pole have a 'communo-ludic' orientation, which means their innovativeness is "a sort of by-product of their other online activities" (p. 344), which are "produced not necessarily as an innovative contribution, but simply as a part of the normal routine of being involved in online communities pertaining to these interests" (p. 344); such communities and their activities are "related to lifestyles, interests, and hobbies" (p. 344). The four community types distinguished on the basis of these two dimensions are visualised in Figure 1.

**2.3.2 Online Empowerment of Consumers and Communities**

In general, recent technological advancements have, as Labrecque et al. (2013) argue, caused a fundamental alteration in the power relations between consumers and corporations, in which online consumers and the communities thereof have been extensively empowered. Especially the emergence of Web 2.0 and social media have caused consumers to be ever more informed and interconnected, and enabled them to "create content and amplify their voices, across the globe, to anyone willing to listen" (p. 257). Here, Web 2.0 represents a sharp "contrast to Web 1.0 which primarily involved one-directional provision of information to consumers who did not interact or respond to the web site or to one another" (Belk, 2014, p. 1595).

Labrecque et al. (2013) present four distinct sources of consumer power resulting from technological advancements, which are demand-, information-, network- and crowd-based power (p. 257). These sources emerged chronologically, and though they all continue to exist concurrently, each implies a higher level of power than the former. First, "the rise of Internet commerce removed geographic and time constraints, empowering consumers through expanded assortments, increased retail options, and new service features" (p. 260), which meant that consumers were enabled to exercise demand-based power, with the ability to choose between a great variety of products, and purchase and boycott as they desire (p. 260). The second power source is information-based, which consists of two sub-activities, being content consumption and production. Here, the former activity empowers consumers by enabling "the ease of access to product or service information, which reduces information asymmetry, expedites market diffusion of information and shortens product lifecycles" (p.

261), whereas the latter "enables empowerment by providing an outlet for self-expression, extending individual reach, and elevating the potential for individual opinion to influence markets" (p. 261). This dissemination of information between consumers, be it producing or consuming it, is, according to Brown, Broderick and Lee (2007), often referred to as 'word of mouth' communication, which is "a major part of online consumer interactions, particularly within the environment of online communities" (p. 2), and given that these communications are independent from corporations and the market, it empowers consumers and is generally "perceived to be more reliable, credible, and trustworthy by consumers compared to firm-initiated communications" (p. 4).

According to Labrecque et al. (2013), the two former power sources are individual-based, whereas the latter two rely on consumers' connectedness (p. 259). The third power source is network-based, and it is focused on "the metamorphosis of content" (p. 263) and "the actions by which others can add value, beyond that of the original content" (p. 236). These actions or activities are, for instance, "content dissemination (e.g., sharing and organizing content through networks), content completion (e.g., comments on a blog post that contribute to previous content, tagging), or content modifications (e.g., repurposing content, such as a video or image meme)" (p. 263). Network-based power differs from information-based in that the latter mainly constitutes "a one-way broadcast" (p. 263), whereas the former entails a "a multi-way dialog" (p. 263). Lastly, the fourth power source is crowd-based, which "resides in the ability to pool, mobilize, and structure resources" (p. 264), and is stated to be "the ultimate illustration of consumer power, [reflecting] a deliberate aggregation of all preceding power bases [...] to align power in the best interests of both individuals and larger groups, such as virtual communities" (p. 264).

It should be emphasised that certain consumers or community members are, according to Labrecque et al. (2013), more powerful than others, as these online environments are often "equipped with different, explicit signifiers of status (e.g., number of followers, badges, activity rankings, etc.)" (p. 258). Thus, certain members are more influential than others, which may be the result of, for instance, "reach, the degree of the person's embeddedness in the social network, and persuasiveness, linked to the relevance of the content the person creates online" (p. 258), but also their expertise and length of involvement (p. 258). However, this is not to say that only members of high status are powerful. The recent technological developments have provided a great amount of consumers with a voice, especially when standing together, and consumers have generally been empowered and are increasingly

difficult for corporations to control and ignore (p. 265); as Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) explain, today, corporations are "being challenged not by new competitors, but by communities of connected, informed, empowered, and active consumers" (p. 8).

## 2.4 Concepts Applicable to Understanding the Power of Backers as Consumers in RBCF

The theories included in this framework all present their understandings and conceptualisations of recent developments in the power relations between consumers and corporations, which are helpful in establishing a broader understanding of the universe that the under-researched phenomenon of RBCF exists and occurs within, at least in relation to consumption. In general, the world has witnessed the emergence of a new trend in contemporary consumer culture – a new type of consumption – which is dominated by a philosophy of collaboration and participation, and where production and consumption activities are increasingly difficult to distinguish from each other. The boundaries between the roles of producer and consumer are understood as blurred and dynamic, where contemporary consumers have come to constitute an increasingly integrated and vital part of the production process, which is in sharp contrast to the traditional consumer, who was placed at the end of the supply and value chain, serving as little more than a product buyer and user. This trend largely results from, and is continuously facilitated by, recent technological developments, especially Web 2.0, which have caused consumers to be informed, networked, empowered and active as ever before, and via online platforms, consumers and consumer communities are now able to voice opinions, pursue collective purposes and reap the benefits of bringing together their resources, knowledge, experiences and capabilities; this all while consumers become increasingly independent from corporations and represent an increasingly powerful actor in their eyes. Thus, the market has in certain areas undergone significant systemic changes in regard to its power dynamics between consumers and corporations, altering the power relations in favour of the former.

All theoretical sections presented in this framework – except 2.1, which mainly offers a more general idea of the philosophies of sharing and collaboration that underlie RBCF – also provide concrete conceptual instruments which are applicable and helpful in addressing the identified knowledge gap and answering the problem formulation, seeking to explore how backers as consumers are powerful in influencing RBCF projects and the products thereof. These concepts, along with the central questions they give rise to, are presented in the following paragraphs.

Section 2.2 presents three theories related to the increasingly blurred lines between production and consumption. Though the theory of prosumption concerns broad developments in consumer culture and the rise of a new consumer type, it also presents concrete concepts that are interesting in relation to consumer – that is, backer – empowerment, which are those of immaterial production and consumer involvement. When applying these concepts to RBCF, it gives rise to the question of the extent to which backers as consumers are actively involved in the immaterial production process around projects and the products that result thereof. Central to these concepts is the notion of control, which further raises the questions of whether potential involvement of backers would be by own incentive or direct invitation from creators, and whether backers are difficult for creators to control. The theory of the working consumer resonates highly similar ideas to that of prosumption, arguing that corporations are actively putting consumers to work and that they even depend on and benefit from the labour input thereof. Central to this theory are the concepts of consumers as a valuable and integrated resource in the production process and exploitation. The former concept gives rise to questioning creators' perceptions of backers, whether creators actively choose to put backers to work – and here, in relation to which tasks – and the extent to which creators are dependent on and benefitting from the labour of backers, whereas the latter raises the question of how backers feel about offering their labour for free. The last theory in section 2.2 is that of co-production and co-creation, in which the central concept is that of consumer agency. This concept occasions the questioning of whether backers hold any agency in relation to influencing RBCF projects and the products thereof, but beyond that, also how much agency, if any, backers then actually hold, that is, whether RBCF involves co-production or co-creation – or both or none – between backers and creators.

Section 2.3 presents two theories related to online consumers and communities, and the power thereof. Here, one theory relates to innovation-oriented consumer communities and offers the concepts of collective innovation concentration and collective innovation orientation. Of these two concepts, the former is more relevant as it relates directly to consumer empowerment, assessing whether it is many or few members who contribute to the creative work process in a given community. The latter concept assesses whether community purposes are short- or long-term, which is less relevant to backer empowerment. However, this latter concept is relevant when combined with the former, as this enables one to explore whether a given community may be characterised as a crowd, hive, mob or swarm – or

potentially something in between – which may be revealing in terms of the power relations within these community types. The other theory of section 2.3 relates directly to the power sources of online consumers and consumer communities, and introduces the four concepts of demand-, information-, network- and crowd-based power, which give rise to questioning the ways in which backers may or may not exercise power in relation to influencing projects and the products thereof in RBCF. Central to this theory is also the concept of power status, as certain consumers are stated to be more influential than others, which occasions the question of whether all backers are equally influential – if even influential in the first place – in relation to RBCF projects and the products thereof.

The consumption theories presented in this framework all focus on a general change in the role and behaviour of consumers, related to the blurring of the lines between consumer and producer, and the increased influence of the former. None of these are direct power theories per se, but they do all present their understandings and conceptualisations of recent developments in the power relations between consumers and corporations. However, these theories do not explicitly present how they understand power, and there is therefore a need to clarify how it may be understood in relation to this field. Here, the Foucauldian power conceptualisation, which contradicts the traditional perception of power as possessed, centralised and purely repressive, held by thinkers such as Weber and Marx, seems most appropriate. Foucault adopts a relational power perspective, in which the focus is on the subjects, not in terms of power as an acquired possession, but rather the relations between them, meaning that power is not possessed, but exercised through the relation. In Foucault's (1978) own words, "power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (p. 94). In terms of consumers and consumer communities, these have thus not become increasingly powerful in terms of a change in, for instance, possessed economic power, as this remains indifferent from that of traditional consumers, in that the choice here continuously lies purchasing or not purchasing. Instead, the increased power resides in a relational change – between consumers and corporations – that has caused the consumer role, and in that way all individuals assuming this role, to generally become increasingly powerful in their relation with corporations, as the power has changed to be located more at the consumer side here. However, despite a general relational change, it should be emphasised that the location of power in the relation with

corporations differs between consumers, as some consumers are, as stated earlier, more powerful in the relation than others (Gutting, 2005, pp. 91-96; Sawicki, 1991, pp. 20-25).

Another central point in regard to relational power is that whereas traditional power theory perceives power as centralised and exercised on a top-down basis, Foucault perceives it as omnipresent and exercised at the microlevel of society, thus on a bottom-up basis. As Foucault (1978) himself argues, "power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix" (p. 94). In this way, individuals are subjects in multiple power relations, in which the location of power varies. Discipline and subjectivation constitute central concepts in Foucault's conceptualisation of relational power. Within these relations subjects may discipline each other, but emphasis is also put on individual self-disciplining, where subjects, besides being regulated by others in a given power relation, are also "controlled as self-scrutinizing and self-forming subjects of [their] own knowledge" (Gutting, 2005, p. 96). This means that subjects are monitoring and regulating themselves, seeking to conform with the norms and expectations that exist around their given role within a given relation. In this way, through self-disciplinary practices, the subject is itself actively contributing to the reproduction of the very power that governs it. Thus, this self-regulation in the pursuit of fitting role expectations in a given relation may involve an act of subjugation, but given that Foucault, as stated above, does not perceive power as purely repressive, it may also be an act of enablement (Gutting, 2005, pp. 91-96; Sawicki, 1991, pp. 20-25).

### 3.0 Methodological Approach

This aim of this section is to establish the methodological foundation and approach of this thesis, where it addresses research strategy (3.1), research design (3.2) and research quality and ethics (3.3).

### 3.1 Research Strategy

In researching RBCF, the majority of existing literature seems to employ a quantitative research strategy, often using large datasets to establish broad findings. Here, examples of noteworthy studies include those conducted by Calic and Mosakowski (2016), using an algorithm to establish a dataset of 87,261 Kickstarter projects, Kuppuswamy and Bayus (2017), analysing 300,000 project-day observations from different 10,000 Kickstarter projects, and Mollick (2014), whose exploratory study draws on a dataset of 48,526 Kickstarter projects. According to Bryman (2016), a quantitative research strategy employs numerical data and "emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis" (p. 32) of such.

This strategy enables one to gather and analyse large datasets, thus facilitating broad findings, and is especially suitable to test hypotheses. However, as this thesis is explorative – departing from a problem formulation consisting of an open question as opposed to a hypothesis – and seeks to understand how backers as consumers are powerful in influencing RBCF projects and the products thereof, a quantitative strategy is deemed inappropriate. The problem formulation calls for an in-depth understanding of the power relations between participants in RBCF, which a quantitative strategy lacks the ability to deliver. Here, a qualitative strategy, which employs textual data, is deemed more suitable, as such emphasises "how individuals interpret their social world" (p. 33) and is focused exactly on understanding – as opposed to explaining – social phenomena, processes and relations, and though it may lack the ability to deliver the breadth that a quantitative strategy facilitates, it is able to deliver the depth that is necessary here. Thus, a qualitative research strategy is employed (pp. 31-33, 149, 375).

Qualitative research "starts from the notion of the social construction of realities under study [and] is interested in the perspectives of participants, in everyday practices and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study" (Flick, 2007, p. 2), and a qualitative research strategy is thus typically associated with an epistemological orientation of interpretivism and an ontological orientation of constructionism (Bryman, 2016, p. 32). Schwandt (2003) aggregates interpretivism and constructionism under the research paradigm of social constructionism, which is the paradigm assumed in this thesis. The central ideas and focus of social constructionism are highly consistent with what is sought to be explored and understood in the problem formulation. This thesis seeks to explore how the power of backers is constructed within RBCF, that is, how the power of backers is experienced and understood by the two key social actors in their relation within this phenomenon, being backers and creators. Social constructionism asserts that knowledge is actively constructed by social actors, that is, individuals, as they "invent concepts, models and schemes to make sense of experience, and […] continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience" (p. 305). In other words, social phenomena, processes and relations are constructed and constantly reconstructed through social interactions, which means that knowledge is subjective and that an endless number of individual, subjective and dynamic realities exist. This is in sharp contrast to positivism and objectivism, which claim the existence of only one single truth or reality; a stance often assumed in the quantitative tradition. Furthermore, proponents of social constructionism argue that individuals "do not construct [their] interpretations in isolation, but against a backdrop of shared understandings,

practices, language, and so forth" (p. 305). In the same way, it is deemed impossible for researchers to rid themselves of their historical and sociocultural backgrounds, thus acknowledging that they can never be fully unbiased. Instead, the predispositions of researchers serve as the basis for how they construct interpretations, and thus, the subjective understandings of social actors cannot be reproduced objectively and in isolation from the predispositions of researchers (pp. 305-307).

**3.2 Research Design**

  This thesis employs an interview study design to explore the power relations within RBCF. Answering the problem formulation at hand requires a method that enables one to delve into the experiences and understandings of those participating in RBCF and thus explore how they construct the power of backers in relation to influencing projects and the products thereof, for which an interview study seems the superior choice. As Kvale (2007) argues, "the qualitative interview is a key venue for exploring the ways in which subjects experience and understand their world. It provides a unique access to the lived world of the subjects, who in their own words describe their activities, experiences and opinions" (p. 9).

  In terms of data collection method, netnography and focus groups were considered, but eventually opted out in favour of individual qualitative interviews. At first sight, netnography, that is, ethnographic observations in online communities, seems suitable given that RBCF occurs online and is closely related to communities. Netnography holds the advantage of providing data on interactions between community members and thus how power may be constructed and negotiated between them, but it holds limitations in that researchers risk information overload, given the vast amounts of data available, and "informants […] may be presumed to be presenting a more carefully cultivated and controlled self-image" (Kozinets, 2002, p. 64) online, which may be further enforced by their awareness of being observed. Furthermore, data collection seems more selective here, in that one is able to pick and choose between available pieces of data, and netnography may not enable the same depth as interviews, as one cannot take for granted that community members are available to answer elaborative follow-up questions on their experiences and understandings (Bryman, 2016, pp. 448, 494-495). Focus groups equally hold the advantages of providing data on how social phenomena, processes and relations are constructed between respondents, but its limitations are similar to those of netnography, as respondents may modify their answers to reflect a certain image to other respondents, some respondents may be uncomfortable sharing their experiences and honest perceptions in a group, and it holds

the risk of certain respondents dominating the conversation, potentially cutting others off and thus risking loss of valuable data (Bryman, 2016, p. 522). Furthermore, the online and global nature of RBCF makes it practically impossible to gather respondents physically, and even if conducted via Skype or similar, it would be challenging to gather respondents across time zones and clearly distinguish respondents from each other (Bryman, 2016, pp. 515-519).

Here, interviews are flexible and allow for gathering more in-depth data, given that data collection through such, as opposed to netnographic observations, takes the form of a dialogue with respondents and allows one to ask follow-up questions to clarify answers and ensure correct interpretations. Furthermore, given that respondents are ensured anonymity and interviews are conducted individually, they may feel less external pressure to adopt certain attitudes and limit their answers, and be inclined to talk more in-depth about their understandings and personal experiences, thus facilitating more representative and rich data (Bryman, 2016, pp. 466, 494-497, 522).

To collect data, semi-structured interviews are employed. Whereas structured interviews allow no deviation from the pre-defined list of topics and questions, risking neglecting interesting points and perspectives that respondents may hold, unstructured interviews hold the inherent risk of respondents wandering off into less relevant areas and not providing the necessary data, thus limiting data quality and comparability. Here, semi-structured interviews offer a combination of the two and their respective strengths, in that these employ a guide with pre-defined topics and questions to be addressed, but yet allow respondents to pursue topics and ideas that they find relevant, even if they are outside the contents of the guide (Bryman, 2016, pp. 466-469). Semi-structured interviews are flexible and emphasise "how the [respondent] frames and understands issues and events (Bryman, 2016, p. 468), and as Kvale (2007) explains, "there is openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the specific answers given and the stories told by the subjects" (p. 51).

As a means of preserving a relevant research focus during interviews, ensuring coverage of all desired areas and enabling comparability, two interview guides (Appendix A and B, section 9.1 and 9.2) are employed. The questions in these are formulated based on the concepts identified in the theoretical framework, though without direct reference thereto, and potential follow-up questions have been formulated. In terms of focus, the guides function as a funnel in that the questions are initially related to RBCF in a broader sense with the intention of understanding respondents' background within this space and getting them to

start reflecting on the phenomenon, and then, as the interviews proceed, the questions become increasingly related to respondents' experiences and understandings of the power of backers in regard to influencing RBCF projects and the products thereof. Besides the questions appearing in the guides, follow-up, probing, specifying and interpreting questions are employed when relevant (Kvale, 2007, pp. 61-62), arising from the specific interview situation, with the purpose of ensuring richer data and enabling one to have immediate interpretations "verified, falsified or refined" (Kvale, 2007, p. 60); as Kvale (2007) emphasises, the analytical process already begins during the interview process (p. 102).

As for sampling of context, this research employs the project category of 'games' to sample respondents from. All respondents are sampled from the same context, as this increases comparability of the data collected. The sampling is not confined to respondents employing the crowdfunding platform of Kickstarter, as the games category exists on multiple platforms, but the argument for selecting games as a context from which to sample is based on the fact that on Kickstarter – the largest and most popular platform – games represents the dominant project category on several levels. Games is the category that has achieved the highest amount of successful dollars pledged, that is, more than $760 million, while also being in the top three of categories with the lowest amount of unsuccessful dollars pledged (Kickstarter, 2018e), and in 2017, "games represented 26% of all the money pledged […] and 15% of all the funded projects" (Bidaux, 2018). Furthermore, games is the category with the highest number of live projects – 571 at the moment of writing – over 100 more than the category that comes second (Kickstarter, 2018e). Being the largest and most successful category suggests that this is the most developed context within the space of RBCF, and that this is the context in relation to which one will find the largest and most established communities. As such, it is assumed that this context holds the most competent respondents in that they are presumably highly experienced in operating within this space and the relations thereof.

To sample respondents from this context, the non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling is employed, which, according to Bryman (2016), means that respondents are sampled "in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research question that are posed" (p. 408), rather than randomly sampling them from a large population, as is the norm in the quantitative tradition (p. 408). As the aim of thesis is centred on backers, that is, exploring how these as consumers are powerful in influencing RBCF projects and the products thereof, and as the theoretical framework is built around theories

concerning consumer power, it is first and foremost important to interview backers. However, it is also deemed relevant to talk to actors holding the other key role within this space, that is, creators, as these are at the receiving end of this potential backer power and the ones who make the final calls in regard to their projects and the products thereof. Interviewing respondents of both roles enables insights into how they experience and understand the role and power of backers in RBCF. As the problem formulation calls for an in-depth exploration of the power relations within RBCF, the key sampling criterion is that respondents must be experienced within their respective roles, which is to ensure that they have gone through the process of backing or creating multiple times, and that they have personally experienced being part of the community and thus seen how matters are generated, developed and decided upon within this space. For the same reason, it would not be sensible to use a probability sampling technique, as randomly selecting respondents would risk that those sampled would be new to the field and thus inexperienced.

Access to experienced backers and creators in the games category is secured via the researcher's professional network, established via an internship and student job at Cartamundi, "the world's largest manufacturer and distributor of playing cards and board games" (Cartamundi, 2018). As such, the respondents, with whom the researcher has no personal relation, are referred to by experts in the field and found to be extensively experienced in regard to RBCF and highly active and long-term members of relevant communities. An overview of the respondents is provided in the beginning of the analysis (section 4.0). Given the online and global nature of RBCF, the interviews are conducted via Skype. As stated earlier, two separate interview guides are employed, which is to accommodate and address specific aspects of the two roles, though it must be emphasised that they are similar in structure and themes to ensure comparability. As this project focuses on experiences and understandings, the transcripts include what is stated by respondents, but not, for instance, articulation and non-verbal communication, which are crucial in fields such as discourse analysis (Bryman, 2016, pp. 527-528), but not considered necessary here. Respondents are cited by respondent number, followed by the given line(s) in the transcripts (Appendix C to H, section 9.3 to 9.8), an example being (R1, 23-45).

As for the method of analysis, thematic coding is employed, which is "a way of indexing or categorizing the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas about it" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 38). Thematic coding constitutes an appropriate method of analysis for this thesis, as it facilitates thorough analyses of interview data, text bit by text bit, enabling in-

depth insights into the understandings and experiences of respondents, and it furthermore allows for the identification of thematic patterns both within and across pieces of data (Bryman, 2016, pp. 548-549). In broad terms, there are, according to Gibbs (2007), two approaches to coding, that is, data- and concept-driven. In this thesis, a mix of these is employed, though the initial focus is on the latter approach. Concept-driven coding means that the data is coded with a pre-defined array of themes in mind, which is in this case based on the concepts established in the theoretical framework, ensuring that the analytical process remains theoretically relevant. However, as is also the case with structured interviews, being strictly bound to a pre-defined array of codes risks overseeing or neglecting valuable ideas and perspectives emphasised by the respondents, which one did not consider in defining the themes by which to code. Thus, there is an openness in the coding process to deviate from the pre-defined themes, allowing the data to drive the analysis, though only to the extent that it remains relevant to the overall theme of consumer – or backer – power (pp. 44-46). Having a pre-set theoretical framework provides initial guidance on codes and themes to look for in the data, but one should allow for "[amending] the list of codes during analysis as new ideas and new ways of categorizing are detected in the text" (p. 45). In the coding process, the software called NVivo is employed, not to perform automated data coding, but simply to ease the manual coding process, making it more manageable and creating a better overview. The final coding scheme can be found as Appendix I (section 9.9).

**3.3 Research Quality and Ethics**

Ensuring a high level of research quality is crucial, for which Gibbs (2007) establishes certain measures to be employed when conducting qualitative research. Here, the central concept is that of reflexivity, which is "the recognition that the product of research inevitably reflects of some the background, milieu and predilections of the researcher" (p. 91), emphasising that qualitative research cannot be fully objective and unbiased, as was also recognised earlier in assuming a social constructionist paradigm. In terms of reliability, conducting research alone comes with inherent quality risks, but measures to counter certain issues do exist, such as transcription checking, meaning that transcripts are reviewed several times to ensure data accuracy (p. 98). Furthermore, constant comparisons are employed during the coding process to secure comprehensive data treatment, that is, "to check the consistency and accuracy of the application of [codes and themes]" (p. 96).

According to Gibbs (2007) constant comparisons are also a measure to secure higher validity. Here, another means of ensuring such is triangulation, meaning that "by getting

more than one different view on a subject, an accurate (or more accurate) view of the subject matter can be obtained" (p. 94). Triangulation usually refers to employing, for instance, different methods of data collection or analysis (p. 94), but in the case of this thesis, it refers to interviewing respondents who hold different roles within RBCF. In other words, as opposed to only interviewing backers, also interviewing creators can contribute to exploring backer power in their relation from more than one angle, thus producing more holistic findings. Furthermore, respondent validation and evidence are employed, meaning that transcripts are sent to respondents, thus giving them the option to review their own data (p. 95), and that citations from the interviews are provided to support findings and "demonstrate clearly how [they are] grounded in the data collected and interpreted" (p. 97).

In terms of external validity, or generalisability, qualitative research is often challenged. However, as Bryman (2016) argues, "because qualitative research typically entails the intensive study of a small group, or of individuals sharing certain characteristics (that is, depth rather than the breath that is a preoccupation in quantitative research), qualitative findings tend to be oriented to the contextual uniqueness and significance of the aspect of the social world being studied" (p. 384). This thesis is focused on RBCF, which is generally an under-researched area, but especially so in terms of consumption. As such, the amount of pre-existing knowledge to hold up new findings against is limited, and the aim of this research is rather to explore and gain initial insights into this phenomenon in relation to understanding the power relations within it. However, it should be emphasised that sampling respondents from the largest, most successful, and thus presumably most developed and established context within this space is a strategic choice, hoping to find the respondents who are the most representative for RBCF. Thus, it is suggested that moderatum generalisations can be made, meaning that the sampled respondents "can be seen to be instances of a broader set of recognizable features" (p. 399). Moderatum generalisations are moderate in the sense that they, according to Geoff and Malcolm (2005), "are not attempts to produce sweeping sociological statements" (p. 297) and may be refined as further research is conducted within the given area (p. 297). As such, it is believed that the findings of this thesis are suggestive of broader tendencies within the space of RBCF, but at the same time, it is acknowledged that, given the new and under-researched nature of this phenomenon, the findings may be refined as RBCF is more extensively researched in the future.

Lastly to be discussed in this section is research ethics. A high level of research ethics adds to the research quality, but the primary reason for securing such is to ensure that those

agreeing to serve as respondents are not harmed. One crucial measure in eliminating harm to respondents is informed consent, meaning that respondents are provided with sufficient information as to be able to make informed decisions on whether they are willing to participate in the research, ensuring that they are not deceived. Therefore, respondents are provided with research information both in the initial interview request and in a briefing before the actual interview. However, it is equally important that respondents are not overinformed, as this might bias their answers. Furthermore, respondents are ensured full anonymity in the initial interview request, the briefing and the debriefing. Anonymity may be considered more important when researching more delicate topics, which RBCF is not deemed to be. However, it is always important to consider how respondents' participation may affect their relations with and within their environments, in this case the communities. One cannot foresee how the respondents' participation is perceived within these, and a negative perception of participation may have extensive consequences, such as reputational damage or exclusion. It is thus the safest choice to ensure respondents anonymity to avoid harm, also because doing so does not negatively affect data quality. Also, the aforementioned act of giving respondents the option to review their own data is furthermore a way of allowing them to check if they their answers are correctly conveyed (Bryman, 2016, pp. 125-131; Gibbs, 2007, pp. 101-103).

Finally, the choice of making an interview study can in itself be perceived as ethical. As mentioned earlier, employing netnography to collect data may seem an obvious choice in relation to RBCF, given its online nature, but this method holds several pitfalls in relation to ethical research conduct. First of all, it is challenging to separate private and public spheres online, meaning that those observed in online communities may have their privacy invaded by one's data collection. Secondly, netnographers are able to collect data covertly, that is, without disclosing their presence, but this would be extensively unethical. As emphasised above, informed consent is crucial, and one cannot simply collect data on community members without them knowing. Here, it must be stressed that gaining permission from community administrators to collect data is not sufficient, as not all members may be willing to accept one's presence. This further leads to the issue that many online communities have hundreds, even thousands of members, meaning that obtaining full informed consent is practically impossible (Bryman, 2016, pp. 425-426, 447-451).

**4.0 Analysis**

The aim of this section is to report the key analytical findings from the interview data, uncovered during the coding process. First, the communities of RBCF are analysed to provide a fundamental understanding of these, which is essential to understand the power relations within them (4.1). Then, the scope and boundaries of backer power are analysed, the former referring to the concrete aspects that backers are able to influence of projects and the products thereof, and the latter referring to the extent of this influence (4.2). This is followed by an analysis the key ways of exercising backer power, that is, exert influence (4.3). Next, the analysis focuses on unwritten rules and community expectations, and how these are governing the space of RBCF (4.4). Lastly, the importance of maintaining backer relations is analysed, along with the general positive and negative perspectives on and experiences of backer influence (4.5). At the end of each analytical sub-section, a condensation of the key findings and their relevance to the theoretical framework and existing literature is provided, serving as a point of departure for the discussion (5.0).

Before initiating the analysis, providing a brief respondent overview is appropriate, of course within the boundaries of anonymity. A total of six individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted, lasting between 50 and 105 minutes. In terms of demography, all respondents are male, which seems typical for this space, with ages spanning from late-twenties to start-fifties, the average age being in the mid-thirties, and they come from various European countries and the US. The respondent group consists of three backers (R1, R2 and R3) and three creators (R4, R5 and R6), who can all be characterised as extensively experienced within the space of RBCF, given their numbers of projects backed and created. Here, all three creators are also active backers, whereas none of the backers have ever served as creators. All three backers and two creators hold a 'superbacker' badge on Kickstarter, as they have "supported more than 25 projects with pledges of at least $10 in the past year" (Kickstarter, 2018b), and one creator is featured in Kickstarter's expert list, thus further manifesting their experience level. The respondents are divided over two sub-categories within the games category, where R1, R2, R4 and R5 belong to tabletop games, sometimes referred to as board games, and R3 and R6 belong to playing cards, sometimes referred to as custom playing cards. Within the games category, these sub-categories represent the largest and third-largest ones, respectively, and the ones currently experiencing the highest level of growth (Bidaux, 2018). A summarising respondent overview is provided in Table 1.

| | Respondent (main) role | Sub-category within the games project category | Number of projects created | Number of projects backed |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **R1** | Backer | Tabletop games | 0 (created a game 15 years ago without crowdfunding – has no desires to be a creator in RBCF) | Well over 100 / three to five every week |
| **R2** | Backer | Tabletop games | 0 (will create one in the future) | 319 |
| **R3** | Backer | Playing cards | 0 (would like to create one, but does not have time) | App. 270 |
| **R4** | Creator | Tabletop games | Over 20 | App. 100 |
| **R5** | Creator | Tabletop games | 4 (with a fifth project being launched soon) | 65 |
| **R6** | Creator | Playing cards | 8 (the eighth project campaign running at the time of the interview) | App. 120 |

Table 1: Respondent overview.

## 4.1 Mapping the Communities in RBCF

Before analysing the power relations within RBCF, it is important to analyse and understand the basic features of the communities within which these relations unfold. In general, RBCF is extensively community-driven and people focused (R4, 216; R6, 8-9), where the communities are described as highly open and tightknit (R2, 221, R4, 219-220). The communities that exist around project categories consist of members holding the role of either backer or creator, or both at once; "you'll actually often see that creators are also backers, backing campaigns of other creators" (R4, 214-215). Here, it is furthermore seen that respondents often simply refer to the two roles together under the label 'community members'. Thus, in the remaining part of this thesis, the term 'backer' also covers a great number of creators who are backers as well.

For each project category, one can speak of a general community, though it must be emphasised that these exist across a multitude of sub-groups or -communities, which, according to R4, are "built for various, but quite specific, goals" (24). These communities are online and exist primarily on social media platforms, where Facebook constitutes the dominant platform, though Instagram, Twitter and Reddit are also employed (R1, 257; R2, 186-187; R3, 70-71; R4, 22, 175; R5, 110-117; R6, 121-124). As R4 states, "Facebook has a ton of communities. I'm in more than 100 groups at this point. Every single project can have a Facebook group. Every single creator or publishing company. Every single thing that you can think of in board game production, from marketing, reviews and crowdfunding to design and testing (165-168). In other words, sub-community groups are often focused on highly specific aspects of, or niche genres within, the given project category (R1, 207-208; R3, 70-17; R4, 73-75, 165; R6, 123-124). Besides social media, Kickstarter itself also functions as a community platform (R4, 175; R5, 103-104; R6, 120), and it is also seen how various website fora dedicated to the different project categories exist (R2, 188; R3, 69-70; R4, 189-193; R6, 123). Though this thesis is not confined to focus exclusively on Kickstarter, it is found that all respondents employ this as the main RBCF platform, the use of others being practically non-existent (R1, 62-65; R2, 13-14; R3, 10-11; R4, 31-32; R5, 46-47; R6, 39). In relation to this, it is also worth noting that the respondents generally use the terms 'Kickstarter' and 'Kickstarters' synonymously for crowdfunding and crowdfunding projects, again manifesting the significance and presence of this platform.

Members, that is, backers and creators, typically participate in multiple sub-community groups – across and within platforms – which can vary greatly in member counts, where some have thousands (R2, 23). In the interviews, it is seen that backers hold similar reasons for participating in communities, all emphasising a desire to see the general community grow and creators succeed (R1, 248; R2, 262-268; R3, 147-149). Here, R2 and R3 participate in the community because it is a hobby and a lifestyle (R2, 155-156; R3, 84), whereas R1, though initially backing projects personally, now participates for professional reasons, selling the products in his store (59-60, 78). Within the community, members generally engage and participate in a series of interactive activities, including posting original content – such as tips, questions, reviews, discussion threads, blog posts, etc. – commenting, following, creating and voting in polls, liking, tagging, sharing, building and using email lists, and private messaging, either via the actual platform or external mediums, such as emails (R1, 237, 527-528; R2, 198-199; R3, 166; R4, 27, 51-55, 175; R5, 136-137; R6, 82-

85, 120-121). Furthermore, two of the respondents are administrating sub-community groups on Facebook (R2, 22-23; R4, 22-23), which are extensively regulated to ensure order and topical relevance, meaning that the activities here include "a lot of banning, blocking, deleting and redirecting people to where they should post, like if their post belongs in another forum" (R2, 148-149).

In terms of backers, these are generally characterised as the earliest customers of creators, that is, the beta testers and alpha consumers, who are superfans of creators, following them and their project history (R1, 133; R2, 461-462; R4, 85-86, 103-104; R5, 92-93); in the words of R4, "generally speaking, they are your number one fans, but also the people who expect the most of you" (144-145). From the data, four central backer types can be delineated. First, there are 'silent backers', who "just back a campaign as if they're buying something, like abandon the campaign, be charged 30 days later and then have their product delivered six months later in the mail" (R4, 204-205), thus perceiving RBCF simply as pre-ordering (R1, 489; R2, 313-315). This type constitutes the majority of backers (R4, 206), R6 assessing that these account for 70 per cent of backers (102). Second, there are 'interactive backers', who follow creators on social media, comment and ask questions, and give input to projects (R4, 207-210; R6, 82-85), who account for 24.5 per cent of backers (R6, 103). Third, there are 'VIP backers' or 'hardcore followers', who are highly similar to the second group, but even more interactive. Accounting for five per cent of backers, creators tend to build close relationships with these, who back all their projects and support them unconditionally (R4, 209-211, 402; R6, 97-103). Fourth, there are 'negative backers', who go by multiple names; 'dark backers', 'toxic backers', 'complainers' and 'trolls'. These backers are counterproductive, make harsh demands and complain without providing any constructive input. The aim of these backers is often to do damage and limit creators' success, and though they account for a minimal share of the total backer population – 0.5 per cent according to R6 (103-104) – they are louder than the rest (R1, 85-93, 503-506; R4, 312-320; R6, 85-91, 103-110). The positive and negative influences of backers are examined further in section 4.5.

Though this section mainly intends to establish a basic understanding of RBCF communities and the members thereof, it does present certain theoretically relevant findings. Here, it is seen that the communities are oriented towards particular interests, hobbies or lifestyles, rather than short-term goals, suggesting a communo-ludic collective innovation orientation. Also, it is found that the majority of backers are silent, suggesting a higher level of collective innovation concentration. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the backer role,

along with its distinction from the creator role, is far more complex than indicated in the
existing literature.

**4.2 The Scope and Boundaries of Backer Power**

The aim of this section is to explore the extent of backer involvement and influence in
RBCF projects. It first analyses concrete ways in which backers seek to and do influence and
contribute to projects and the products thereof, along with their feelings about making these
contributions. Then, it examines the influence expectations of backers, to then lastly focus on
the degree of the influence of backers, that is, the extent to which backers actually get to
influence projects and the products thereof.

When speaking about the results of the emergence of RBCF, all respondents highlight
the increased access and ability for regular people to create and obtain new products,
lowering the risk and barrier of entry, and that a large number of products in the niche
categories would not exist without RBCF, given the traditional dominance of large
companies (R1, 50-53; R2, 59-63; R3, 18-24; R4, 45-46; R5, 72-84; R6, 2-4, 21); "it has
changed the power" (R1, 44-45). Furthermore, several respondents emphasise that RBCF
enables backers to be much more involved in and with projects, the products thereof and the
creators behind, especially compared to traditional consumers (R2, 88-95; R3, 55-65; R4, 92-
100; R5, 25-36; R6, 8-10). In the words of R3, "the products found in a regular store are not
pre-funded by consumers, but already exist, and consumers here are not at all influencing and
involved in the product in the same way" (66-67), and as R2 explains, "being a backer, you
get to go along on the journey, sometimes you'll have creative input in it, sometimes creators
will listen to that. […] With crowdfunding, you generally get to become part of something
new launching from the very start of it. […] It's the experience of being part of an initial
creation" (90-95).

R1 states that "as a backer, you have power" (118), and just as R3, he explains that
are two basic ways that backers can influence RBCF projects and the products thereof (R1,
113; R3, 59-65). The first way is by backing projects, that is, contributing financially,
through which backers are collectively enabling the realisation of a project – and potentially
its stretch goals – and in this way, backers have a say in whether or not a product is made, as
opposed to in traditional retail; "if there were no backers, the project wouldn't be funded"
(R3, 59-60). Here, several respondents highlight that the actual backing functions as a filter
for what should be created, proving and disproving ideas (R2, 483-484; R4, 50-51; R5, 337-
360; R6, 21-23), where two respondents directly refer to it as the democratisation of

production and retail (R1, 200-203; R4, 439-450). In terms of financial contributions, backers have the choice of backing or not, where R1 states that "the level of influence here is more limited than the second way" (125-126). Whereas the first way that backers can contribute to and influence products in RBCF is purely financial, the second way relates to immaterial contributions; "just as you can crowdsource money, you can crowdsource ideas" (R1, 544).

As this thesis focuses on how backers are powerful beyond financing, the focus is on immaterial influences and contributions, where three direct categories of such can be identified in the data. The first category relates to aspects of the actual products that backers may influence, where they will provide idea input, suggestions and opinions before and during project campaigns on different matters, such as artwork, design and components (R1, 137, 284, 534-536; R2, 107-115; R3, 89-90, 110-111; R4, 167-168, 259-265, 347-349, 481-483; R6, 91-94, 136-139), rewards, reward tiers and reward prices (R1, 281, 309; R3, 111-113; R6, 150-152, 177), stretch goals (R1, 128-129; R4, 186-187; R6, 177), product names (R1, 284-285), materials (R1, 470; R4, 155-159), product dimensions and packaging (R1, 284; R3, 110-111), number of copies (R3, 89) and product text, such as in rulebooks (R2, 101-103; R4, 270-273, 479-481; R5, 283-285). What is furthermore interesting here is that larger financial contributions may allow backers to make certain immaterial contributions to products. R2 explains that if pledging at higher tiers, sometimes "you'll get to put your personal stamp on the game" (107-108), such as getting names in rulebooks, getting to decide a character's appearance, becoming a game character or card themselves or getting to add a piece of content, for instance a joke (R2, 107-115; R4, 199-201). The second category of immaterial backer influence and contributions concerns the processes around the project and the product thereof, where backers provide idea input, suggestions and opinions on matters such as the actual crowdfunding process, marketing and the campaign itself (R1, 425-426, R2, 216-221, 264-268, R3, 109-115; R4, 167-168; R6, 177-178), manufacturing (R1, 301-303; R2, 202-203; R4, 167-168), fulfilment, especially the logistics of shipping out rewards (R1, 300-301; R2, 166) and business knowledge in general, including financial and legal advice (R2, 162-169, 231-235). The third category relates to project promotion, where backers can be influential by sharing or talking about projects in their social networks, including communities, via social media or website fora. This does not influence any aspects of the actual product or the processes around the project and product thereof, but it may influence the project by attracting more backers (R1, 559-563; R2, 399-401; R4, 46-58; R5, 305-321; R6, 127-132).

In terms of immaterial influence, the interviewed backers generally enjoy contributing, and it is found that they perceive a clear benefit from doing so. Here, R1 explains that he benefits from helping creators, as it enables him to get new and better products for his shop (248-254, 439-445). R2 states that "at the end of the day, it's all about being part of that community" (181-182), though he also participates to learn and gather backers for his first project, stating that he believes in karma (173-183, 270-280). To R3, the benefit of providing input is, besides the rewarded products, similar to R2's joy of community participation; "I don't care if I give my opinion for free […]. I get something out of it myself. If I'm helping the community, I'm helping to build the community and increase its quality. So I'm also gaining something because I'm there, […] I'm part of that community" (R3, 145-149).

All three interviewed backers state that they personally do not expect to have influence on RBCF projects and the products thereof, though two of them do like when they can (R1, 488-492; R2; 296-304; R3, 154-155). However, it is seen that certain backers do expect to have influence. Here, R1 makes the example of a creator he knows, whose backers expressed discontent with a certain collaboration within her project and threatened to withdraw their pledges if it did not cease; it was "the stipulation of them backing her project" (161-162). As he further explains, "if you invite people in and tell them that they're special, some of them develop entitlement issues" (167-168). This is supported by R4, who similarly explains that some backers expect to have influence, and that they are more demanding than regular consumers, as they perceive themselves as the ones enabling the realisation of projects through their financial contributions (145-146, 443-452); "if you compare it to traditional business, imagine me trying to convince Hasbro not to make this certain type of Monopoly, I mean, it just wouldn't happen. But backers feel more entitled to make such requests" (335-337). However, R1 states, "I think most backers don't expect to have an influence" (488-489), which is consistent with the fact that the majority of backers are silent. As R2 explains, "some backers do go into crowdfunding thinking that it's like retail, like buying a product, whereas other people go the far other way, thinking that it's a 100 per cent collaborative community and that everyone is supposed to mashup an idea together and make it come to life" (304-307).

Backers may seek to "encourage creators down a particular line" (R1, 127-128) with their projects, but ultimately, it is up to creators to make the finite decision on whether to integrate a given piece of backer input, where the level of openness is found to vary between

creators (R2, 117-125; R3, 119-129). In general, though, creators are to listen to backers and their input (R2, 111-113; R3, 60-63; R4, 370-375; R5, 362-368; R6, 135-136). Backers may provide input and suggestions by own incentive, commenting on projects, the products thereof and the various processes around (R1, 422-424; R2, 252-258; R4,362-365; R5, 289-292; R6, 286-289), but creators do also directly invite backers to participate in shaping the project, for instance by asking questions, seeking opinions or creating polls for backers to vote on, though this is mainly in relation to concrete aspects of the actual product and less the processes around (R1, 530-537; R2, 252-255; R3, 109-117, 132-136; R4, 186-196; R5, 267-286; R6, 136-141).

When examining the third category of direct immaterial backer influence and contributions, promotional efforts are found to constitute a more autonomous action in the sense that backers can choose themselves, without creator involvement, whether or not to share, and thus promote, a given project in their social networks. Here, several respondents highlight that creators are extensively open and encouraging towards backers sharing and talking about their projects in their social networks (R1, 559-562, R2, 50-51; R5, 305-321; R6, 127-132); according to R4 "Kickstarter is the best marketing push for a product that you can ever do [...]. It proves the concept, because you have enough people who are excited about the project and willing to back the campaign, and they will share it with their friends because they want it to fund. And they're going to continue to be excited and talk about the project as you're manufacturing it. You get this constant recycling of interest [...], like backers will share in the communities when they get an update on the projects they back. And then they also do it when the game is released, for instance through reviews. So you get this constant marketing of your project. Before, during and after production. You can't achieve the same elsewhere" (46-57).

Whereas creators are open towards backers promoting their projects, they are found to be more reluctant towards backers influencing the actual projects and the products thereof, along with the processes around, and though all the interviewed creators state that they are willing to listen to backers and their input, none of them feel obliged to accommodate all individual backers and integrate every suggestion (R4, 374-375; R5, 367-371; R6, 199-201). All interviewed creators emphasise that they refuse to make any drastic or fundamental changes to their projects and the products thereof (R4, 369; R5, 437-450; R6, 154-168, 205), where two of them state that if backers do not like the basic idea, they should not back them (R5, 446; R6, 189). As R4 states, "there's a limit to how much creators will change their

projects […]. Creators kind of have a set variance of what can be in this project […]. What can be changed is fixed. You can add content or update content, but don't change what the content is" (295-301). Thus, when making polls, the voting options are pre-set by creators, and when backers pledge enough financially to get to add a personal touch to a product, the aspect they get to personalise and the extent thereof are pre-defined by creators; "the base product remains the same" (194-195).

This reluctance towards major project changes originates in creators' fear of alienating the great amount of backers who like the project in its original state and did not opt in for a given alteration (R4, 295-302; R5, 130-140; R6, 89-91). Certain vocal backers may "care a lot about the game, but they are not necessarily indicative of who your audience is" (R4, 309-310), and if creators make drastic changes, they risk that backers withdraw their pledges (R4, 301-302). As R6 explains, "I can't deliver an altered product […]. It's important to keep the product consistent with what you show. Imagine ordering a blue shirt online and they send you a red one. They can't just tell me that they changed the colour" (232-236). For the same reason, he emphasises the importance of informing backers of even minor changes (244-247). Two of the interviewed backers directly state that they would never attempt to fundamentally change products (R1, 136-142; R3, 135-141), and similarly, R5 states that he "can't imagine why any backer would show up and try to fundamentally change something" (445-446), though several respondents do state that certain backers do ask creators to make major changes (R1, 143; R3; 135-141; R4, 304-312; R6, 85-97).

Another reason that creators are at times reluctant to integrate backer input is their perception of backers as often not holding the necessary capabilities and qualifications to provide correct and beneficial feedback and suggestions, simply because they do not perceive them as knowledgeable enough to advice about given matters or because backers may provide input out of self-interest, seeking to get as good a deal as possible (R4, 331-353, 389-393; R5, 143-172; 388-403). Though two of the interviewed backers express that they only advice within their fields of expertise (R1, 300-305; R2, 226-235), they too acknowledge that backers are not always qualified to provide appropriate input, and that some simply pretend to be knowledgeable (R1, 172-198, 355-363; R2, 318-232, 433-437). Additionally, all respondents emphasise the mere impossibility of accommodating all backers and their individual desires, and of creating a product that everyone likes (R1, 196-197; R2, 131-132, 342-350; R3, 179-181, 334-336; R4, 413-420; R5, 371-388; R6, 188-225); "you just can't satisfy everyone, and if you tried to, you would end up with a project that is all over the

place" (R5, 385-386), or as R6 puts it, "if I listen to everybody, my project turns into Frankenstein" (191).

 In relation to the theoretical framework, the findings in this section generally suggest that the level of backer agency in directly influencing projects, the products thereof and the processes around leans mostly towards co-production, as there is a set variance to how much creators are willing to change these, though the act of promoting leans more toward co-creation, as backers are free to share and speak about the project as they want. In terms of the prosumption and working consumer theories, it is seen that backers partake in the immaterial production process in regard to projects and the products thereof, and that creators do feel obliged to listen to backers, though they do not always find their input to be of value and at times the exact opposite, and they do not feel obliged to integrate all pieces of individual backer input. Creators do, however, often choose to actively invite backers to be involved in their projects, though these will also get involved by own incentive. Furthermore, backers enjoy being involved, and though backers are not compensated financially, they do perceive a clear benefit and return for their labour, meaning that they do not feel exploited. In general, this involvement of backers in the immaterial production process challenges the dominant definitions of crowdfunding, suggesting a need for a redefinition, at least in regard to RBCF.

## 4.3 Key Ways of Exercising Backer Power

 Despite creators' reluctance to integrate backer input, it is found that backers do have certain ways of exerting power that increase their chances of being influential in terms of immaterially shaping projects, the products thereof and the processes around; this section aims to examine the key ways.

 In general, it should be emphasised that any one backer is able to influence a project and the product thereof. It may be that an individual, first-time backer suggests something a creator did not consider, but likes and adopts, or it may be that they pledge $1 and in that way gains access to, for instance, proofreading and commenting on a game rulebook, and thus end up influencing the final product (R1, 192, 499-528, 541-546; R4, 203-212, 274-295; R5, 152-154). However, several respondents do emphasise that one backer voicing a certain opinion is less likely to be influential (R1, 193-194; R3, 175-182; R6, 227-228). When analysing the data, two key ways for backers to exert influence are found, that is, either by forming a crowd and collectively voice a given opinion or by being perceived by creators as being of high status as an individual; "you can have one very influential voice, or you can have 20 people

who have an influential voice together. That's how you can be heard in the community" (R3, 190-192).

Starting with the influence of crowds, it is found that backers are generally influential in numbers. All respondents emphasise the influence of backers as a crowd, stating that creators should be attentive towards what the majority says (R1, 193-196, 338-339; R2, 551-564; R3, 174-182; R4, 257-268; R5, 149-151, 224-232; R6, 136-152). As R6 argues, "you can't accommodate everyone. But if 100 people say the same thing and you go against it, that would be quite stupid, because that's like 25 per cent of all the backers. And if they all say the same thing, it has to be something that's worth looking into. Backers are powerful as a group" (224-228). Similarly, R4 explains that "if more people voice something, it's more influential. I mean, there's still someone at the top, the creator, who has to make the decision, but if 1,000 backers are calling for the same thing and it makes sense for you as a creator to make 1,000 people happy, there is no reason not to do it" (265-268). Here, two respondents imply that the reasoning for giving the crowd priority is that they are the ones providing the financial contributions that are crucial to realising projects, and thus going against their collective desires may cause a large amount of them to withdraw their pledges (R3, 176-178; R6, 145-147). Though individual backers are less likely to be influential, it makes a great difference if their input is supported by a crowd; "you might have one person saying it, but if there's a crowd behind it, you're probably going to want to please the crowd. I mean, you are crowdfunding after all" (R2, 362-364). Here, two respondents also emphasise the need inform and gain acceptance from the crowd before making changes in their projects once launched (R4, 292-295; R6, 244-247).

The other key way for backers to immaterially influence projects and the products thereof lies in status, and though emphasised above that individual backers are less likely to have an influence unless there is a crowd behind them, backers perceived as being of high status serve as an exception. In the data, it is seen that there are several determinants of high status within the community, including long-term participation and a high activity level (R1, 446-448; R2, 286-310; R3, 163-167; R4, 228-229), high numbers of followers and connections (R3, 163-167) administrating community groups (R2, 143-149; R4, 22-24), creating and/or backing a high number of projects (R1, 521-525; R2, 181-183, 313-320) and, in general, a high level of knowledge and experience (R5, 246-249; R6, 134-135). Backers with these attributes "are people you'll probably want to listen more to than just somebody who's looking for a party game and who has only backed four projects over the last four

years" (R2, 316-318); high-status backers are more influential and generally considered more qualified and objective in providing input to creators (R1, 180-193; 291-295; R2, 380-386; R3, 163-167; R4, 286-287). In the same way, high-status backers are also more influential in terms of promoting projects, where, if they share or talk about a project in their social networks, they "can cause thousands of backers to show up and back [it]" (R5, 332-333). Also, certain backers have high numbers of followers on Kickstarter, all of which will receive notifications whenever these backers back something – be it with as little as $1 – often causing their followers to back as well (R2, 181-183; R4, 220-229). In terms of status, it is also interesting that R6 explains that he assigns high status, and thus priority, to the aforementioned group of what he terms 'VIP backers', that is, "the hardcore followers" (98-99), who interact extensively and back all his projects, and with whom he has established close, personal relationships (99-100, 170-173). Furthermore, it is also seen that backers with high financial contributions are prioritised, for instance getting to add their personal touch to the product in a way and to an extent pre-defined by creators, but also in terms of open suggestions; though unwilling to fundamentally change his project, R6 states, "my answer to backers' suggestions and requests is calibrated based on the size of their pledge. Like, if a backer pledges €500, I would try to accommodate his wishes more" (164-166).

An interesting trend discovered during the analysis is that creators become increasingly selective as to whose input they take in and integrate as their experience as creators increases. Several respondents emphasise that backers are more equally – and individually – influential to new, first-time creators, as these are less capable of estimating the quality of backer input and are looking to please all backers in an attempt to build an audience, but as they learn how RBCF works and become more skilled in weighing backer input, they start listening more to the experienced, high-status backers in the community (R1, 225-234; R2, 127-131, 338-350; R5, 119-129; R6, 201-205). However, regardless of creators' experience level, it is acknowledged that the crowd is ultimately more powerful than high-status backers (R1, 551-555; R4, 286-292). As R4 argues, high-status backers may make a certain suggestion, but if a large amount of backers collectively wants the opposite, creators should listen to them, as they are the ones who are going to use the product (270-273); "at the end of the day, the voice of the many is always going to trump the best practice that was taught to you by someone who has done it before" (288-290).

However, R3 emphasises an interesting connection between the two key ways for backers to exert power. If a single backer is "a person with a bigger influence in the

community, they can become 20 voices, 100 voices, because a big part of the community will follow them and agree with them, starting to voice the same opinion. And then it will influence the project, and the creator has to listen to them. […]. When you're in a community, it's sometimes easier to follow the members who have power than to think and have other opinions. […] People have fear of having other opinions and going against big voices or the majority of the community. So most members listen to the powerful voices, because they don't want to be different from a big part of the community. They just agree. So in a sense, the opinion of these powerful members, I don't think it always represents what the community thinks. […] You just conform. I know it from myself, like, sometimes, I'd rather stay quiet than open my mouth if I know it goes against the popular voice. I mean, I don't get anything out of going against it and it takes too much energy. And you might even get negative reactions. […] This is happening too much these days in the community, but also society in general" (185-212). Thus, though the collective voice of the many is ultimately considered more powerful than that of high-status backers, the voice and opinion of the former often reflects the voice and opinion of the latter, and individual backers actively choose to conform with the popular opinion of the community majority, the crowd.

From the perspective of the theoretical framework, the findings presented in this section show that the collective innovation concentration within these communities may be both high and low, though it generally leans towards the high end, given that the majority of backers are silent and thus not contributing beyond financing. Here, it is also found that this concentration is dynamic, increasing as creators become more experienced. Furthermore, the findings here are also highly relevant to the concept of power status and the Foucauldian conceptualisation of relational power. The existing literature presents RBCF as having democratised the commercialisation of innovation and access to capital. However, though the collective power of crowds is emphasised as strong, the findings suggest that the power relations within this space are far from democratic. Conversely, it is seen that the opinion of the many is dictated by that of the few, and that, in the relation, the location of power may be affected by various determinants of status. Furthermore, and as is further elaborated in the following section, both backers and creators are disciplining each other and themselves to conform with certain norms and role expectations that emerge and are altered and reproduced within the relations; the community and crowd governs itself.

**4.4 Unwritten Rules and Community Expectations**

In section 4.2, three direct categories of immaterial backer influence and contributions of projects and their products in RBCF were identified. However, it is found that backers also indirectly influence projects, the products thereof and the processes around, that is, by means of unwritten rules and by affecting the reputation of creators. The aim of this section is to analyse the former, whereas the following section will, among other matters, focus on the latter.

Several respondents emphasise that RBCF and the communities thereof are governed by, in their terms, unwritten rules, which reflect collective community – that is, backer or crowd – expectations, which are extensively influential on how creators act within this space (R1, 608-621; R5, 289-298, 458-514; R6, 42-68). According to R1, "there is this overall set of unwritten rules, which the community has sort of collectively decided on" (620-621), meaning that "the rules themselves have been crowdsourced too" (612-613), where R5 similarly states that these rules have "arisen organically, just through the operation of those platforms" (460-461). R6 explains, "of course there are written rules on Kickstarter, like formal ones, and you have to read all of them" (53-54) – these relate to formal matters such as creator requirements, project content and general guidelines of usage (Kickstarter, 2018c, 2018d) – but the unwritten rules seem to be considered at least equally important, as respondents emphasise these to a far greater extent than the official ones, the only mention of such being this brief one by R6. According to R1, the unwritten rules are dominant in the communities and "creators must learn and abide to [these] if they want to succeed" (610). Backer expectations have generally increased in recent years (R4, 10-17), and it is found that the unwritten rules are highly dynamic and subject to constant change (R1, 612-653); as R4 states, "things change very quickly in crowdfunding, and the only ones keeping up with this is this body of backers. Their expectations are changing and growing, and it's influencing the platform to progress" (290-292). The unwritten rules generally cover a wide array of aspects in RBCF, where some examples highlighted by respondents relate to allowing backers to offer input (R5, 289-298), the need to listen to – but not necessarily integrate all – backer input and generally engage and interact with backers (R2, 248-251; R5, 366-369), adding stretch goals when projects surpass funding goals (R4, 77-79), delivering rewards to backers within an acceptable time frame (R5, 461-469), how creators should spend the financial contributions (R5, 469-479) and shipping prices (R6, 45-53). Thus, it generally seems that

these unwritten rules relate less to the products themselves, and more to the processes around projects and the products thereof.

Two of the interviewed creators explain that the unwritten rules are highly obvious to them (R5, 497-504; R6, 55-56); "it's very embedded into the community and developed over many years" (R5, 503-504). However, R5 does acknowledge that the community rules are far from obvious to all; "if you're all new to society with no clue of how things work, it's probably less obvious. […] The norms may be so obvious to creators that have been around for a long time, but new creators who have no experience in this field, they need to learn these unwritten rules by participating in the communities, backing and observing" (504-508). This need of creators to learn by participating in the communities, backing and observing is generally emphasised across several interviews (R1, 224-234, 279-298, 315-327; R2, 34-44, 162-171, 207-224; R4, 394-397). Here, two of the interviewed creators directly state that this is something they initially did themselves (R5, 2-11, 505-510; R6, 42-72), and one interviewed backer, R2, explains that he has been doing this for the "last couple of years" (35-36) to prepare himself to launch his first project (34-44); "I'm trying to minimise my potential for mistakes, [which is] another reason that I back a lot of the Kickstarters, to follow along the process, to see what works, what hasn't worked, when people make mistakes. I try to learn my lessons about mistakes before I make them myself" (41-44). Here, two of the interviewed backers explain that new creators often underestimate the resources needed to create a project, and that these are extensively dependent on advice from experienced people like themselves (R1, 315-327, 410-421, 465-475; R2, 210-224). Though minor mistakes are more acceptable if made by first-time creators, (R4, 152-163), R1 clearly emphasises that "a mistake can finish you" (321), which is further elaborated in the following section.

Several respondents express that new creators cannot simply enter the space of RBCF and launch a project, and if they start asking for input from the very beginning, backers feel reluctant to help them. As R1 states, "I don't believe in time serve or paying your dues in the industry, but what I do believe is that creators should go into the groups, make themselves known, comment, discuss about things, be helpful to other people, and maybe then you can pitch your project" (457-460), and according to R2, "if you spend six or eight months participating, you can really change your thing from a campaign that failed miserably to a great success, just by getting connected, sharing and participating in the community" (222-224). In this sense, the expectation of new creators to participate in the community and learn the unwritten rules before launching projects and asking for input comes to constitute an

unwritten rule in itself, and, as is seen in the following section, so does engaging, listening to and respecting backers, along with not going against or ignoring the opinions and idea input of the collective backer crowd. Given the dynamic nature of the unwritten rules, creators must sustain their community participation to stay updated, and the learning process is thus constant and ever-lasting (R4, 385-387).

In terms of theory, this section continues in line with the former one, as the findings presented here are highly concerned with how the space of RBCF is governed and how the power relations work, especially in relation to how the community and crowd governs itself in the form of backers and creators disciplining each other and themselves to fit the role expectations and comply with the norms – that is, follow the unwritten rules – that emerge and are altered and reproduced in their relations. Here, it is further worth noticing that creators are highly limited in regard to individually influencing these norms, suggesting that the agency of backers goes well beyond mere co-creation.

## 4.5 The Importance of Maintaining Backer Relations – Counteracting Trolls and Helpful Evangelists

The aim of this section is to analyse the importance of maintaining backers relations, that is, for creators to engage and communicate with backers, along with examining the general positive and negative aspects of backer influence. In terms of unwritten rules, R5 emphasises his feeling of obligation to engage and interact with backers, which he describes as "important and part of the community expectation" (368). In general, creators feel extensively obliged to engage and listen to backers, which is described as crucial by several respondents (R1, 13-27; R2, 415-434; R3, 52-67; R4, 453-472; R5, 362-368, 405-408; R6, 250-258). R4 explains that creators must engage, communicate and stay connected with backers where the community groups are key (168-173), and he further stresses the importance of continuously maintaining the relation with backers, before, during and after RBCF campaigns, where creators must keep them updated, stating that "the backers need to feel that they are being updated on a regular basis and are kept in the loop on the production timelines and everything that goes on about the project" (463-464).

Backer engagement is important because the personal connection between backers and creators, along with the ability to be highly involved in projects, are key reasons for backers to participate in RBCF (R1, 22-25; R6, 250-256). According to R5, the experience of using the product remains similar to traditional products, but "the fact that a Kickstarter campaign […] lets you interact directly with the creators of that project changes the way you

relate to that game […]. The experience by which you got it and the relationship that you feel that you have with its creator, that changes your experience of it very much" (30-36). Here, R2 states, "you really need to listen to your backers. […] They're your earliest customers […], who are willing to put money down with no guarantee, with no products, sight unseen" (461-465). He further emphasises that "most of the time, [backers are] not really getting a sweet deal on the product. […] If you're participating in crowdfunding as a backer, it's usually because you want to be the first to get it, you want to participate in the process and generally be heard, because you're throwing money after something, most probably more than you'd pay in retail later" (415-422). Thus backers are participating because they want to be engaged, and creators need to understand, acknowledge and appreciate this if they want to succeed (422-424).

Engagement does not mean that creators have to integrate all individual pieces of backer input into their projects, but several respondents do emphasise the importance of listening and treating backers with respect and empathy, and even when disagreeing with their input, the response must be polite and constructive (R6, 217-218). In the words of R2, "making someone feel heard and considered is extremely valuable to creating raving fans that positively mention or even proactively promote your brand. Bluntly dismissing their feedback risks leaving a spiteful taste in their mouth. The next convention they are at, or social media conversation, they may paint you in a negative light as rigid or dismissive or worse. You catch more flies with honey than vinegar. […] Depending on who you dismissed, it could become a loud negative force when you are in the middle of a campaign" (322-330). Furthermore several respondents emphasise the public and open nature of online communities, where everything is visible to everyone (R2, 427-459; R4, 112-114, 243), including creators' responses to backers. According to R4, "you need to verify that an idea a backer has is out of scope of the project for whatever reason and tell them specifically why something won't work. You don't need to provide a ton of details, but simply saying, 'I don't want to do that!' will give backers the wrong impression in the open forum" (355-358). Similarly, R5 explains that "if it's a public comment on the main Kickstarter page, and you're engaging in a discussion with someone, and you brutally shut them down, other backers or potential backers will come by and read that conversation, and they will think that you're an asshole, and then they will not want to back your project" (197-200).

R5 further emphasises the benefits of treating backers with respect and empathy; "if you send responses in a public forum that are compassionate and illustrate that you are very

thoughtful about the way that you've set up your campaign, and that the decisions you've already made are rooted in your expertise, then other people will come by later, thinking, 'wow, look how well this Kickstarter creator understands the marketplace and has made good decisions', that will increase their comfort level of backing my projects. […] So making those kinds of responses is marketing for your campaign for future backers who come to see those interactions. It can even turn people who are agitated with you or your project into enthusiastic evangelists for your thing" (202-210). He further explains that it is important to understand that backers provide input out of genuine intend; "these are people who are enthusiastic about your product and who are buying it from you, so it's kind of on you to reward their enthusiasm. That's presumably part of what you wanted by crowdfunding this thing in the first place. So you can listen to the spirit of their enthusiasm more than listening to the letter of their suggestion, which they don't understand doesn't make that much sense. […] They're offering you something they think is a valuable suggestion. They're not offering it to you out of thinking that you're stupid, but because they're so enthusiastic about your thing. And that's the best thing that someone can give you, […] and you absolutely want to honour that, preserve it and be compassionate about that" (168-192). Even when rejecting individual backer input, a compassionate response can help "preserve their enthusiasm" (186).

Worse than not listening and not treating backers with respect and empathy is not engaging and communicating with them at all. As R1 explains, "engagement is the most important thing of the 21st century retail and entertainment. If you fail to engage your consumers, your backers, you're dead, you're finished. Unfortunately. It's a brutal world. If you allow those people to disengage, you lost them, and if you lost them, they won't back you" (573-576). Similarly, R2 argues that "one of the worst things you can do as a creator is not communicate […]. It takes two seconds to go to your comments wall and let your backers know that you are here and listening. Not communicating with your backers is the number one killer. Because all it does is let the crowd rally and become really vocal, you know, start threatening […]. I see it all the time, when campaigns run three, six, nine months overdue, it happens, and you can solve 95 per cent of their problems by just talking to them […]. If you don't listen, you can lose your whole idea, you can lose your whole campaign, you won't fund to begin with, and if you've already funded, you're risking lawsuits and refunds" (403-413).

Failing to engage backers and make them feel heard and respected can have significant consequences. It should be emphasised that creators are not expected by the community to integrate all individual pieces of backer input, and they are often allowed to refuse it without consequences – as long as their rejection is constructive – but if a large number of backers supports and voices a certain piece of input, not integrating it may prove fatal to a given project and its creator. An immediate and direct consequence of not listening to input supported by a large crowd is that the crowd takes against the given creator within the communities, and that both existing and potential backers withdraw and withhold their pledges, thus causing the project not to fund (R1, 505-511; R2, 353-364, 395-402; R3, 175-179, 227-234; R4, 421-424; R5, 196-202). However, the consequences may also reach beyond the current project of a creator, also affecting future ones, as backers are able to extensively influence the reputation of creators. R1 explains that "creators make many mistakes, like messing up fulfilment, not listening to backers, overcharging them, underdelivering, delays… These things cause you reputational damage. […] Reputation is hard to build and easy to destroy. And we live on reputation" (576-579). Similar to R1 (269-271) and R3 (229-231), R4 states that "if you completely refuse to listen to backers or treat them unfriendly, you will lose them, you will never get their support again, and they'll write negative threads about you in the communities. They're very vindictive. They will demerge your name every time they see you comment or post a new project, anything like that. I know one creator who funded a campaign but didn't fulfil it to the backers' expectations, […] and because of that, there are various threads online stating that no one should ever support this creator again, ever. […] Now, every time he launches a new project, some backers will go into the comments section and warn others against him. This might really affect new backers" (427-437). Thus, just as backers can greatly benefit a project by positively promoting it in their social networks, they can, by posting and sharing negative perceptions, also extensively damage a project, its creator and their chances of success. As such, backers can indirectly influence projects and the products thereof by affecting the reputation of creators. The consequences will be especially negative if creators themselves invite backers to provide input and then choose not to listen, or if they make a promise to backers and fail to deliver (R1, 329-353, 446-455; R2, 330-335, 346-348). Furthermore, R1 explains that creator efforts to remedy the action that damaged their reputation are often futile (598-607); "one strike and you're out, forever" (601-602). Thus, in terms of reputation, "[backers] actually do have the power over you as a collective entity" (R4, 146-147).

The consequences described above result from creators failing to comply with unwritten community rules, for instance failing to engage and listen to their backers. However, some respondents do also emphasise that certain backers may unwarrantedly target creators with unconstructive criticism or make unrealistic demands, that is, the aforementioned trolls, toxic backers or dark backers, who seek damage to creators and their projects, or at least make them less successful, without particularly good reasons (R1, 82-93, 145-173, 265-267; 624-640; R2, 380-394; R4, 304-324, 451-472; R6, 85-118). Until this point, this section has conveyed numerous negative experiences with and aspects of backers, but it must be emphasised that positive perceptions of backers are also present in the data. Though creators may be less inclined to integrate backer input and are unwilling to make major changes in their projects and products thereof, backers are at times able to provide valuable input and identify problems or make suggestions that creators did not themselves recognise or consider (R4, 365-373; R5, 151-155; R6, 198-208). Also, as explained in section 4.2, backers can be extensively helpful in promoting projects in their social networks, attracting more backers. As R4 explains, creators may get backers who are "essentially evangelists for your project, and they will bring in more people. These are a positive influence, and they are worthwhile your extra time, because they will say all these great things and convince others to jump on board. You need to maintain the contact with these. If you can get 20 of these diehard fans who each have 15 or 20 friends, then your project will fund in no time, and they will essentially do a lot of the work for you in terms of marketing" (225-230). Here, creators are also able to build large fan bases and audiences, who will follow and always support them, ensuring that every new project is instantly successful (R1, 216-221; R3, 120-126, 218-222; R6, 27-29); "when you do it right, you have a fan base of people who will back you no matter what you do or say. They will protect you" (115-116). These backers will even assist creators in answering questions from other backers and support them if the aforementioned trolls target them (R4, 178-182, 402-403; R5, 214-219; R6, 209-214).

Thus, positive perceptions of backers exist as well, and though trolls do exist and can be loud, R1 explains that "we're lucky to have a smart community, and most of the people who want to engage are smart people and aren't trolls. There's a lot of people who are just happy to back your project" (274-276). Similarly, R4 states that "as crowdfunding matures, nine out of ten times, it's going to be a positive experience. Backers saying that they're really excited about this game, that they want to be part of it and the process, that it's super

awesome, and that they're happy the creator is making it. You will always have a few naysayers or questioners" (474-477). In sum, backers are extensively powerful, which can be both positive and negative, as backers at the two extremes can serve both as counteracting trolls and helpful evangelists. If creators comply with the unwritten rules – for instance ensuring to integrate input supported by the crowd and generally engage backers and treat them with respect – it can benefit them greatly, but if they fail to do so, "they're dead! Absolutely dead! I mean, it kills them!" (R1, 567). Thus, "it's a double-edged sword. If you do it right, you get these very, very diehard fans, but if you mess it up, you're crucified forever" (R4, 116-118); "you need to keep your backers happy, otherwise your project will never succeed" (R2, 424).

In relation to the theory, the findings of this section show how backers may effectively employ demand-, information-, network- and crowd-based power to negatively affect projects and the reputation of creators. On the contrary though, backers may equally employ these power sources to positively influence these. In terms of the Foucauldian conceptualisation of relational power, the findings furthermore demonstrate how backers sanction and discipline creators not complying with the norms and expectations, but also how creators discipline themselves to conform as well. Lastly, in relation to prosumption and the working consumer, this section displays the extensive power of backers as consumers and how creators struggle to maintain control.

## 5.0 Discussion

The aim of this section is to discuss the key findings of the analysis against the theoretical framework and, though limited in quantity, the existing literature on RBCF. Initially, the delineations of the backer and creator roles as conveyed in the existing literature, along with the dominant definitions of crowdfunding, are discussed against the findings, followed by a discussion of key analytical findings against the consumption theories and concepts presented in the theoretical framework (5.1). Then, the focus of the discussion turns to the power of backers, with a strong focus on relational power, norms, (self-)disciplining and subjectivation (5.2).

### 5.1 Backers as Consumers – Applicability of Consumption Theories into RBCF

When holding the findings up against the existing literature, it is found that the latter conceptualises the backer role, along with the distinction between backers and creators, in too simple terms, as it gathers all backers under the same label, rather than recognising that different types of backers exist, thus failing to acknowledge the complexity of the role, and is

too segregating in terms of backers and creators, characterising individuals as simply – and only – being one or the other, not acknowledging the fluidity and combinatory options of the two roles. Furthermore, the dominant crowdfunding definitions are deficient, as they fail to define this phenomenon and the influence of backers therein beyond financing, confining it to solely focus on fundraising. In the case of the project category of games, one third – and thus a large segment – of backers are interactive and do participate beyond financing, in that they also contribute idea input, knowledge and other immaterial resources, and though the majority of backers are silent, only participating financially, these do also have the option to engage with creators and in projects, and make immaterial contributions, but simply choose not to. In general, this suggests the need to adopt a definition more similar to that of crowdsourcing – though not as flexible and open – as it involves the sourcing of other resources than merely financing, though this latter aspect seemingly does remain the key focus. Whether this confinement to financial resources applies to crowdfunding models other than RBCF – that is, donation-, lending- and equity-based ones – is beyond the scope of this thesis and can be neither confirmed nor rejected, but in the case of RBCF, this financial confinement claim can and should be challenged.

Interactive backers are extensively interested in being engaged immaterially with creators and in their projects – a stated key reason for these to participate in RBCF – where they will, some more than others, actively participate not in the material production of the actual product – a task creators outsource to professional manufacturing companies – but in the immaterial production process of ideas that exist around a given project, the product thereof and the processes around, both by own incentive and by invitation from creators. Furthermore, though not always equally valued by creators in terms of contributing idea input, creators do indeed consider backers a crucial resource in terms of learning how to manoeuvre in RBCF and the communities thereof when initially entering this space. Thus, the concepts of the working consumer and prosumption are helpful in understanding the immaterial influence and contributions of these interactive backers.

One aspect that the theories of prosumption and the working consumer are limited in conceptualising is the mutual benefit derived from the transaction that occurs between backers and creators. These theories characterise consumers as powerful, yet exploited, but as opposed to being exploited, backers feel a clear, non-financial benefit from their immaterial contributions. The feeling of not being exploited does not rule out that exploitation actually occurs, but given the extensive power of backers, it does not seem that such is present in the

relation between backers and creators. Rather, it seems that these theories, in terms of exploitation, are too focused on the economic aspects and financial compensation, thus failing to encapsulate and provide an understanding of the relations within RBCF and the communities thereof in terms of the mutual benefits they enable, which do indeed include finances, but also go beyond.

In terms of the typology delineating four consumer community types, the general communities that exist in relation to the various project categories in RBCF, across multiple niche-focused sub-community groups, may be defined as mobs, given that they are communo-ludic in their long-term, lifestyle/hobby orientation and that the innovative work efforts, that is, immaterial contributions, are made by a few specialist members. As the majority of backers are silent and thus not contributing beyond financing, the collective innovation concentration is already high, but given that the collective opinion of the crowd of backers is largely dictated by a few, individual high-status backers, it is even higher. The creator is always the key contributor in regard to their projects, and it is found that the collective innovation concentration is dynamic, increasing as creators become more experienced and, consequently, selective in which backers to listen to. As one of the four community types is termed 'crowds', this may seem the obvious type for RBCF communities. Ironically, crowds represent the exact opposite of mobs, being tele-specific, that is, short-term and goal oriented, and having a low collective innovation concentration, given a large amount of contributing members. When focusing on the financial aspect of RBCF, crowds do represent a more suitable category, as the key goal here is the short-term funding of a given project, being financed by a high number of individual backers. However, given that the typology is developed in terms of innovation, that is, the immaterial aspect, and that this thesis focuses on the power of backers beyond financing, the communities in RBCF are here characterised as mobs.

From the perspective of the co-production and co-creation theory, one consistent level of backer agency does not exist across RBCF in its entirety. The two former categories of direct backer influence and contributions – concerning their agency in regard to concrete product aspects and the processes around projects and the products thereof – may be defined as co-productive at the most, given that backers' influence is limited here, as creators are often reluctant to integrate individual backer input, especially if unsolicited, and when they get to exert influence, the alterable aspect and extent to which it can be changed are confined within a fixed framework pre-established by creators. The third category of direct backer

influence and contributions – concerning their agency in promoting projects and creators in their social networks – may be defined as co-creation, as backers can freely pursue promotional efforts without creator involvement and by the attitude they want to convey, thus co-creating the brand of creators and their projects. However, given that the agency of backers also goes beyond that of co-creation, this theory is deemed deficient in fully encapsulating the power relations between backers and creators. A co-creative relation implies that creators are still powerful within that relation, but when examining the norms that govern RBCF and the communities thereof, the agency of creators to individually influence these is practically non-existent. This suggests the need for a new concept to encapsulate the power within the relation between backers and creators, which may be termed 'reversed co-production'. In regular co-production, creators define the framework within which backers can influence their projects and products, where they are given little, if any, leeway beyond, but when examining the norms, it is seen how backers collectively create a framework, though more dynamic and less structured, within which creators must operate and create their projects, ensuring they meet the community expectations, if they want to be successful, thus reversing the roles. As such, though the findings initially suggest that backers are less powerful in regard to directly influencing the actual projects and products thereof, they are found to be extensively powerful as a collective crowd in their ability to influence the actual framework within which these are created by creators.

**5.2 Community Norms and Expectations – (Self-)Disciplining and Subjectivation**

As seen in the analysis, community members believe in unwritten rules and act accordingly. These unwritten rules, or norms, which are perceived to represent collective community expectations, largely govern creators, in that if they want to succeed with their projects, they must comply with them. Interestingly, though these rules are spoken of as unwritten and a complete, exhaustive list establishing all of these does not exist, they are not invisible, but in fact overtly present and written out in interactions within the communities, for instance in the form of backer input on certain processes around projects or as reminders when creators fail to comply with them. These rules function as norms in that they are not official, but represent perceived community values and expectations which emerge and are altered and reproduced in the relation between backers and creators. As seen in the analysis, official rules for creators and their projects do exist – formulated by RBCF platforms – and technically, creators are able to launch a projects that do not meet the community norms. However, ignoring or directly opposing these norms will most likely cause a given project to

fail and may furthermore permanently damage the creator's reputation. Thus, these unofficial rules become at least just as important to comply with as the official ones.

As indicated above, these norms are not fixed, but dynamic and changing over time, in the sense that they are emergent in the actual relations within the community, and it is through the interactions here that these are created, altered and reproduced. Though these norms are a result of collective community expectations, they cannot be said to result from a democratic process in which all backers have voiced their opinion and collectively decided upon a set of rules to be enforced, and in the same way, alterations of these rules are not made by, for instance, popular vote; instead these norms emerge and are altered and reproduced more indirectly, through the very operation of and interactions within the relations on RBCF platforms and in the communities thereof. From an immediate perspective, RBCF may generally come across as being democratic. This is especially given that the existing literature characterises this phenomenon as the democratisation of the commercialisation of innovation and access to capital, and it portrays all backers as being able to enter into dialogue with creators and thus influence projects and the products thereof. Though RBCF does not follow the one person, one vote principle, it seems that the democratic element is mainly present in the financial aspect of this phenomenon, where everyone who is willing to make financial pledges to a given project are able to, and here, all backers are able to voice their opinions and make immaterial contributions, regardless of status and size of financial contribution. The initial findings of the analysis furthermore suggest that the voice of a crowd constitutes the dominant power – and is even more powerful than the individual voices of 'high-status backers' (see clarification on this term in the following paragraph) – within this space and one that creators must listen to if they want to succeed. However, when subjecting RBCF and the communities thereof to more thorough examination, it is learned that the voice of the many largely reflects that of these few, individual 'high-status backers', and thus, democracy constitutes a deficient concept to characterise the way in which RBCF works, at least in relation to immaterial influence and contributions, and the communities thereof are governed.

In terms of the Foucauldian conceptualisation of relational power, the findings generally show that not all backers are equally powerful, neither in their relations with each other nor creators. The power of backers is generated in the relation, and when the participation of the majority of backers is passive and silent, it leaves room for interactive backers to behave more dominantly. What enables this dominance of certain backers is the

fact that a collective understanding and acceptance of what high status is emerges and is reproduced in the relations within RBCF and the communities thereof. Status – and thus the term 'high-status backers' – implies a more Weberian conceptualisation of power, that is, power as an object that is possessed, shared, gained and lost, but it must be emphasised that this is not how neither status nor power are understood here. The term 'high status backers' is a relational one and only applies in the internal relations within this space, and it is an entity that is perceived as governing these relations from the perspective of the respondents. From a Foucauldian perspective, it is important to emphasise the relational aspect of this power, that is, that the factors determining status and the power they imply are relation-specific, and thus not transferrable to other relations. Within RBCF and the communities thereof, there is, as stated above, this general consensus of how the status of backers within their relations both with creators and each other is determined. When isolating the interactive backers, it is furthermore seen that some of these are especially dominant – the 'high-status backers' – which the others in the relation, be it backers or creators, accept and enact, and in that way, they actively reproduce the power of these. Thus, these 'high-status backers' are not powerful per se, but because they meet certain determinants of status within the relations and act accordingly, and at the same time, they are powerful as a consequence of backers of lower status in the relation accepting their higher power – and the inferior position of themselves – and equally acting accordingly, that is, by assuming a role of lesser power. As such, the power of these 'high-status backers' depends on all parties to accept and conform with the premises and expectations that emerge in the relation around their respective roles, thus legitimising 'high-status backers' as more powerful, along with their dominant behaviour.

In the case of RBCF, status within the relation is determined by matters such as knowledge and experience, which is initially suggestive of this space being governed through meritocracy rather than democracy, meaning that the power of individuals is determined on the basis of their abilities and knowledge. However, both democracy and meritocracy imply a more Weberian conceptualisation of power as possessed, and even though it is seen that backers who are knowledgeable and experienced are perceived as being of higher status and thus more powerful, it is also seen how matters such as high follower counts and activity levels also represent determining factors of high status, which are matters that do not necessarily entail a high level of knowledge and experience from a meritocratic perspective. This makes more sense from a Foucauldian perspective, as these determinants of status should be viewed as emergent and reproduced in the relation, and the power that is created

and exercised on the basis of these – even those that seem irrational from a meritocratic perspective – come to be perceived as knowledge by those within the relation, and this perception of being knowledgeable legitimises dominant behaviour within that relation. Thus, the status and power determinants that emerge and are reproduced within the relation may not seem rational outside the relation or in other relations, but they are so within the relations of RBCF and the communities thereof, within which there is no contradiction between being knowledgeable and being popular or attractive. As such, democracy and meritocracy both constitute deficient models in terms of understanding the power relations within this space. Though there are rather clear indications of how backers are perceived as more powerful if they are individually considered 'high-status backers' or collectively form a crowd, this space is governed in a way that is less structured and, to some extent, more random – as is to be expected, given that this space is governed by dynamic norms that emerge in the relation – and as such, the Foucauldian conceptualisation of power as relational proves more sufficient in establishing an understanding of the power relations that govern this space.

Though 'high-status backers' are perceived as powerful in their relations with both creators and other backers, a crowd of collective backers voicing the same opinion is perceived as more powerful within RBCF and the communities thereof. However, it is seen that the voice of the collective crowd comes to reflect that of certain backers, who, by being perceived as experienced and knowledgeable, gain a position as 'high-status backers' within this space. In general, backers are found to be governed by this herd mentality, where they simply follow the popular opinion of the crowd, which is, to backers' knowledge or not, determined by the dominant voices of 'high-status backers'. In many ways, this herd mentality resonates great similarities to the traditional market, as one respondent also emphasises, along with the economic model of demand and supply, where the former confirms or rejects the need for a given product, just as backers do in RBCF in their choice of whether or not to pledge finances to a given project, thus functioning on the basis of financial rationality; though backers have higher expenses in acquiring products via RBCF than traditional retail, it is still financially rational to them given the perceived extra benefits of them being more engaged in the project and with its creator. However, despite certain similarities, it should be emphasised that the market mechanisms in RBCF differ greatly from the traditional ones in terms of consumer – here, backer – involvement, where backers' personal engagement with creators and in their projects from the earliest idea stages – the key driver for their participation in RBCF – is extensively contrary to being a traditional

consumer, who is placed firmly at the end of the supply and value chain, serving as nothing more than a product user.

In general, within RBCF and the communities thereof, the collective crowd is governing both creators and individual backers. Creators are governed by means of norms that emerge within the relation that are perceived as representing collective, dynamic community values and expectations, with which they must comply if they want to succeed. Similarly, it is seen how this strong herd mentality prevails within the backer population, where a norm of not opposing the dominant views of the majority – reflecting those of 'high-status backers' – largely governs the crowd of backers. In relation to this norm governance, the Foucauldian conceptualisation of relational power is again highly relevant and applicable, especially in terms of (self-)disciplining and subjectivation.

Even though creators are often reluctant to integrate backer input and that there is a limit to the extent to which they are willing to alter their projects and the products thereof, creators are found to be extensively attentive and considerate towards the community norms, wanting to ensure that they comply with these, where even the creators who are most reluctant towards allowing backers to influence and alter their projects are devout to secure that they and their projects comply with these norms. If a creator fails to comply with these, be it deliberate or not, backers will sanction them by pointing out their transgressions within the communities, withdrawing and withholding financial pledges and even seeking to damage the reputation of the given creator. In other words, backers will employ all of the four power sources – described in the theoretical framework concerning empowerment of online consumers and communities – against creators failing to comply. Here, especially information- and network-based power play a prominent role, where backers, via these online platforms, are able to express their discontent with a given creator or project by producing content that paints these in a negative light. Beyond consuming this content, other backers can also enter into a dialogue with each other and the backer originally posting, either expressing agreement or disagreement with the content, and they can like or share the content and thus contribute to its further dissemination. In general, interactive backers are found to be extensively engaged and networked, and the word of mouth communication is shown to be a fast and powerful way of producing, disseminating and consuming content within the RBCF communities. This links closely with the fourth power source, here referring to the ability of backers to collectively mobilise as a crowd around strong, negative opinions and demands, which, if creators do not remedy and adjust their projects to satisfy, can cause them extensive

damage, leading both existing and potential backers to employ the first power source of demand-based power, boycotting their projects. In this way, the crowd is able to negatively co-create the image or reputation of creators and their individual projects, of which creators have highly limited control, the only means of such being to ensure compliance with the community norms.

In terms of these norms, it seen how creators are largely disciplining themselves to fulfil the expectations that the collective community is perceived to hold in relation to their role, seeking to confine themselves within the framework of norms that emerges around this role. Therefore, it may seem peculiar that creators are often reluctant towards integrating unsolicited input from individual backers and making major changes in their projects, as this implies that the power of backers is limited. However, the very reason for this reluctance is creators' fear of alienating and displeasing a large part of their backers who did not opt in for a given alteration, showing a high level of respect and concern towards the general crowd. This again demonstrates how creators discipline themselves to fit expectations, and what initially suggests low backer power in fact ultimately manifests how extensively powerful the general crowd actually is in the relation with creators. As such, within their relation with backers, creators are subjectivated by both internal and external forces.

When turning the focus to individual backers, similar patterns of subjectivation are found within the crowd, that is, among backers. As emphasised multiple times, the crowd is powerful as a collective entity expressing a given opinion, but this opinion often reflects that of certain backers who, given that they are perceived as experienced and knowledgeable within the communities, gain a position as 'high-status backers'. The crowd is extensively governed by this herd mentality norm, and similar to creators, it is seen how individual backers are subjectivated by both internal and external forces, in their case in relation to complying with a norm of avoiding deviation from the popular opinion of the crowd. Here, individual backers holding views that differ from those held by the majority of backers will either adopt the majority views, even though disagreeing with these, or completely refrain from expressing any views within the communities and stay silent in fear of the consequences it could entail to oppose the crowd, in case of which other backers may turn offensive against them. From the knowledge of these potential consequences, backers discipline themselves to either conform with the popular views or express no views at all, simply staying silent; the fact that the outcome of voicing opposing views is never perceived as positive, but neutral at the most, leaves them with no incentive to make these views heard.

As such, it is seen how both creators and individual backers are subjugated by both the collective crowd of backers and themselves to conform with the norms that emerge around both roles within their relations. As with the 'high-status backers', the crowd is not powerful per se, but because it is collectively perceived as knowledgeable in the community and acts accordingly, and because creators and individual backers also conform with the premises and expectations – of inferiority to the crowd – that emerge in the relation around their roles. This subjugation may seem repressive in the sense that this conformity is (self-)enforced, but as the Foucauldian conceptualisation of relational power proposes, power is not only repressive, but may also be enabling, which is also found to be the case here. Though creators and individual backers are (self-)disciplined to fit certain role expectations within the relations of RBCF and the communities thereof, this being a repressive act, it is also an act of enablement, which these subjects strategically undertake in the pursuit of perceived benefits. From this subjugation, backers are enabled to participate in and remain part of the communities, whereas creators, more significantly, by conforming to the norms and in that way maintaining the relation to backers, are able counter the risk of losing funds, being unsuccessful and suffering, often permanent, reputational damage, and at the same time enjoy the benefits of, for instance, backers identifying problems or making suggestions that creators did not themselves recognise or consider, or backers positively promoting them and their projects, serving as helpful evangelists. Just as backers can employ the four power sources to cause reputational damage, these can also be employed in an extensively positive way, by means of backers producing, disseminating and consuming positive content concerning creators and their projects, causing a positive crowd mobilisation in favour of them, thus increasing the demand, that is, attracting more backers. As such, though holding repressive elements, this subjugation is extensively enabling, especially to creators.

In the discussion of RBCF as democratic, it was stated that all backers are able to voice their opinions and make immaterial contributions, regardless of status and pledge size, which is true. However, it is seen that backers who find themselves disagreeing with the majority of the crowd will either adopt their views or remain silent. Had this adoption been out of simple agreement, it would indeed be more democratic, but in reality, this adoption is an act of self-disciplining out of fearing the potential consequences of not doing so. In the analysis, it is seen how the majority of backers are silent, and though many of them may indeed be so because they simply approach RBCF as a pre-ordering scheme, the findings do suggest that some of these may actively choose to be silent in act of self-disciplining,

resulting from their fear of opposing the majority. In the same way, creators, though still rather unrestrained in relation to their projects and not forced to integrate all backer input, are also forced to manoeuvre within a constantly changing framework of perceived community norms and expectations, and if a given piece of input enjoys crowd support, they may be forced to integrate it, even if disagreeing, as not complying with the norms and opposing a crowd can have extensive consequences.

Thus, backers gain their power from being and acting as a crowd, and collectively, they are extensively powerful in influencing projects in RBCF and the products that result thereof, also beyond financing. The norms that emerge and are reproduced within RBCF and the communities thereof – perceived as representing community and thus crowd expectations – largely govern both backers and creators, making this space extensively regulated, though there is no structured or central regulatory force; backers and creators are regulating themselves and each other – (self-)disciplining in the pursuit of conforming with perceived role expectations – and in this way, the crowd – under dictation of 'high-status backers' – and the general communities govern and subjectivate themselves. If creators want to be successful, they must comply with this dynamic set of norms that emerges in the relation with backers and largely governs RBCF and the communities thereof, which can, in turn, benefit them greatly. Backers hold high expectations towards creators, and their key reason to participate in RBCF is the opportunity of being in engaged in the creation of something new, and thus, listening to and engaging backers and respecting their input, along with not opposing their collective opinions, constitute central norms that creators must comply with, and in a sense, the influence and contributions of backers become a forced resource for creators to accept if they want to succeed. From the perspective of the prosumption and working consumer theories, backers – the crowd – are difficult, if not impossible, for creators to control, their only remedy being to comply with the dynamic framework of norms that are perceived to represent the collective community expectations, and as such, the power is, from a Foucauldian perspective, ultimately located primarily at the backer side of the relation between backers and creators, also beyond financing. Thus, if creators want to be successful in RBCF, they must learn and comply with the norms that govern this space, and given the dynamic and relational nature of these, they cannot simply learn the norms to then neglect or abandon the communities and their backer relations; they must consciously participate in the communities and maintain backer relations, as the norms and expectations emerge within these and are constant subject to change.

## 6.0 Conclusion

Originating from a knowledge gap concerning the role and power of backers in influencing projects and the products thereof in reward-based crowdfunding (RBCF), other than via financing, this thesis sought to answer the problem formulation, *how are backers as consumers powerful in influencing projects and the products thereof in reward-based crowdfunding beyond financing?*, for which relevant consumption theories were identified and an in-depth, qualitative interview study design was employed.

Backers in RBCF are found to be involved in the immaterial production process, and thus beyond financing – this being the key driver for the participation of interactive backers – but from an immediate perspective, they appear to be limited in power, given creators' general reluctance towards integrating individual pieces of backer input, especially if unsolicited, and fundamentally altering their projects and the products thereof, thus largely confining backers to a co-productive role, at the most, of making alterations within pre-defined limits set by creators. However, upon more thorough examination, backers are found to be extensively powerful – though more indirectly – given their collective ability to create, alter and reproduce a set of dynamic norms within their relation with creators, which the latter must learn and comply with if they want to be successful. In defining these norms, creators have practically no influence, leading to the suggestion of the establishment of a new concept termed 'reversed co-creation' to characterise the power relations between backers and creators, that is, one in which the power is mainly located at the backer side of the relation, and where creators must confine themselves and their projects within a framework of norms, collectively pre-defined by the community – the crowd – if they want to succeed.

Failing to comply with these community norms can have significant negative results for creators, as backers will consequentially produce, disseminate, consume and mobilise around strong, negative opinions and demands, which, if creators do not actively remedy, will lead to extensive, often permanent, reputational damage, causing both existing and potential backers to withdraw and withhold their financial pledges, that is boycotting creators and their projects, thus limiting their chances of succeeding with both current and future projects. From the knowledge of these potential consequences, creators discipline themselves to comply with the norms, making collective backer influence and contributions a forced resource to them. Here, it is furthermore worth noticing that creators' reluctance to integrate individual, unsolicited backer input and fundamentally alter their projects, which initially indicated backers as less powerful, is in fact a display of the exact opposite, as this reluctance emerges

out of fear of alienating and displeasing the larger crowd of backers, who did not opt in for a given alteration, showing a high level of respect and concern towards backers and how powerful these actually are as a collective entity of consumers, or rather prosumers. This general (self-)subjugation may be repressive, but it is also enabling, given that backers complying with the norms and conforming with the expectations of their roles may enjoy several benefits, mainly that of backers producing, disseminating and consuming positive content concerning them and their projects, causing a positive mobilisation of the crowd in favour of them, thus increasing the demand and attracting more backers.

As such, the power of backers can be both positive and negative for creators and their projects, as backers will co-create the image of these based on whether or not they comply with the norms that emerge in their relation, where creators have little control, the only means of such being to comply with the norms. In general, the collective crowd of backers is extensively powerful in governing both creators and individual backers – the latter being extensively governed by a herd mentality, (self-)forcing them to agree with the popular opinion of the majority, which is largely dictated by 'high-status backer', or silencing themselves, given that doing otherwise may have consequences – making this space extensively regulated, though no structured or central regulatory force is present, and as such, backers and creators are regulating themselves and each other, meaning that the communities govern and subjectivate themselves. Thus, if creators want to be successful in RBCF, they must actively participate in the communities and maintain their backer relations to learn the norms that govern this space and ensure compliance with them, where their continuous participation in and maintenance of these communities and relations are crucial, given that the norms emerge within these and are in a constant state of revision.

From a practical perspective, this thesis has positive implications, as it provides substantiated knowledge on an area in which little of such exists that can be strategically employed by creators – be they large, established companies or individual people who want to fund their idea on a hobby plan – especially new ones who are just entering the space of RBCF, where knowing on beforehand the necessity of (continuously) participating in the communities, and learning and complying with the norms that govern this space, can save them from making mistakes and the consequences thereof.

From an academic perspective, this thesis opens up a generally under-researched area – that of crowdfunding – which is especially limited from a consumption perspective. Here, it contributes with new insights into how backers behave as consumers – or rather, prosumers –

within this space, and how the power relations between both backers, and backers and creators function. In relation to RBCF specifically, the findings do give rise to new questions and issues to be addressed in future research. Given that it suggests a change in the power relations over time, where creators become increasingly selective in which backers to listen to as they become more experienced, it could be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study, following creators through a series of projects, starting with their first one, to see if, and if so, how, their relation with backers changes over time, along with their perceptions and understandings of their power. Furthermore, this research also occasions further examination of the silent backers to explore whether they simply perceive RBCF as a pre-ordering scheme or if they actively choose not to voice opinions and participate as result of their fear of deviating from the dominant crowd views. In addition to this, it would be interesting to explore whether many of the interactive backers are simply conforming to the crowd views though actually holding opposing ones.

Also specifically in relation to RBCF, there is furthermore a need for more theory development in relation to consumption. As seen, the consumption theories employed here are translatable in regard to certain aspects, and they were helpful in contributing to partial understandings of backers as consumers and the power relations within RBCF, but they are unable to provide a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon from a consumption perspective with focus on consumer power. Here, the greatest flaw of the employed theories is their implication that corporations – here creators – remain powerful and in some cases that power remains mainly located with them, where the exact opposite is found in RBCF. Also, this thesis demonstrates the strength of qualitative research, establishing its abilities to conduct thorough explorations and establish in-depth understandings of social phenomena, processes and relations, thus calling for more of such to be conducted in relation to RBCF.

On a broader academic level, it is suggested that as corporations open relations to their environments, it generates changed power dynamics, where new power relations arise out of corporations increasingly opening up and engaging consumers and other relevant stakeholders. Here, there is a lack of consumption literature that discusses these changes from a perspective that directly conceptualises power as relational, and this thesis thus emphasises the need for such to be established. Furthermore, this thesis is suggestive of how a herd mentality and norm of conformity may be generally governing online communities, but also, as one respondent directly proposes, consumers in general, manifested in the increasing power in contemporary global consumer culture of the so-called influencers on social media

and their abilities to mobilise massive consumer crowds. Lastly, this thesis is also suggestive of a more general tendency of the increasing fragility of image and reputation, again in the light of online communities and social media, where online content, concerning everything from individuals to large companies, is often not simply deleted again, but lives forever, thus causing potential damage to be more permanent and difficult, if not impossible, to fully remedy. It must be emphasised that these ideas are only suggestive, and require further research to be confirmed or rejected, thus occasioning interesting questions and issues to be addressed in future research on a more general level as well.

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**8.0 Tables and Figures**

Table 1: Respondent overview.

Figure 1: Typology of online creative consumer communities. Adapted from Kozinets, R. V.,

      Hemetsberger, A. & Schau, H. J. (2008). The Wisdom of Consumer Crowds:

      Collective Innovation in the Age of Networked Marketing. *Journal of*

      *Macromarketing*, *28*(4), 339-354. doi:10.1177/0276146708325382

## 9.1 Appendix A – Interview Guide for Backers

**Briefing:**

Hello. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this interview, it really means a lot to me and the research I am currently doing. Before we start, I would like to quickly introduce myself. My name is Sean and I am a currently studying at the final semester of my master's degree in 'Culture, Communication and Globalisation' at Aalborg University, where I am specialising in 'Consumption and Market Communication'. As this is the final semester of my degree, it means that I am currently writing my master's thesis, for which this interview will be used as data. As you probably understood from the email I sent you, the research I am doing is focused on crowdfunding, or more specifically, reward-based crowdfunding, and the role of backers therein.

Before we begin, I want to state that your identity and your answers will be fully anonymised in the transcription process. I also want to ask you if it is alright with you that I record this interview? The reason I wish to record the interview is purely for transcription purposes. I will be the only one with access to it the sound file, and it will be deleted as soon as the interview has been transcribed. If you have any questions at any point during the interview feel free to ask them. If you do not have any questions before the interview, I would like to get started.

**Interview Questions:**

**Q1:**         How did you get into crowdfunding?

**Q2:**         Do you think that the emergence of crowdfunding has changed the field of
                [project category of given backer]?

  Q2.1:        If yes, why/how? If no, why not/how not?

**Q3:**         How many projects have you backed?

  Q3.1:        How do you decide if you want to back a new project?

**Q4**:          As an experienced backer, what would you tell a new, unexperienced backer
                who is about back his/her first project?

**Q5:**         How does being a backer differ from being a regular, traditional consumer?

Q5.1:          How can you as a backer influence a given product, compared to being a
               consumer of a similar product in a store?


**Q6:**         Are you active in any communities related to [project category of given
               backer]?
Q6.1:          If yes, why do you participate in these communities?
Q6.2:          If yes, which activities do you typically engage in in these communities?
Q6.3:          What do you as a backer gain from such activities?
Q6.4:          Which communities and platforms do backers in the field of [project
               category of given backer] use most often?


**Q7**:         Do you ever do anything active to help creators? (feedback, promoting/sharing
               project, etc.)
Q7.1:          If yes, what and why? If no, why not?
Q7.2:          If yes, do you do so by own incentive or invitation from the creator?
Q7.3:          If yes, how do you feel about sharing your expertise for free?
Q7.4:          Have you ever felt reluctant to help a creator?


**Q8:**         As a backer, do you expect to have an influence on the products that you back?
Q8.1:          Why/why not?


**Q9:**         Do you think that all community members are equally influential to creators?
Q9.1:          Do you think that the number of backers voicing a given opinion makes a
               difference in whether creators are influenced?


**Q10:**        What happens if a creator does not listen to the community and its inputs?


**Q11:**        Is there anything you would like to add or ask before we end this interview?


**Debriefing:**

       Once again, thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this interview, it
is really of great value to me and my research. How did you generally feel about the
interview? Do you have any concerns or questions about it? If at any point you have any

questions here after the interview, you are more than welcome to contact me. Before we hang up, I want to restate that your identity and your answers will be fully anonymised in the transcription process. Thank you, and have great day.

## 9.2 Appendix B – Interview Guide for Creators

**Briefing:**

Hello. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this interview, it really means a lot to me and the research I am currently doing. Before we start, I would like to quickly introduce myself. My name is Sean and I am a currently studying at the final semester of my master's degree in 'Culture, Communication and Globalisation' at Aalborg University, where I am specialising in 'Consumption and Market Communication'. As this is the final semester of my degree, it means that I am currently writing my master's thesis, for which this interview will be used as data. As you probably understood from the email I sent you, the research I am doing is focused on crowdfunding, or more specifically, reward-based crowdfunding, and the role of backers therein.

Before we begin, I want to state that your identity and your answers will be fully anonymised in the transcription process. I also want to ask you if it is alright with you that I record this interview? The reason I wish to record the interview is purely for transcription purposes. I will be the only one with access to it the sound file, and it will be deleted as soon as the interview has been transcribed. If you have any questions at any point during the interview feel free to ask them. If you do not have any questions before the interview, I would like to get started.

**Interview Questions:**

**Q1:** How did you get into crowdfunding?

**Q2:** Do you think that the emergence of crowdfunding has changed the field of [project category of given creator]?

  Q2.1: If yes, why/how? If no, why not/how not?

**Q3:** How many projects have you created?

**Q4:** As an experienced creator, what would you tell a new, unexperienced creator who is about launch his/her first project?

**Q5:** How many backers do you typically have for each of your projects?

**Q6:**　　　　Could you tell me about your relationship with your backers?

**Q7:**　　　　Which channels do you use to communicate with your backers?

**Q8:**　　　　Do your backers in any way influence your crowdfunding projects?
　Q8.1:　　　If yes, are all backers equally influential? Why/why not?
　Q8.2:　　　Does the number of backers voicing a given opinion make a difference in whether you are influenced?

**Q9:**　　　　Do you in any way involve backers in your projects?
　Q9.1:　　　If yes, how and when?
　Q9.2:　　　If yes, is that by their own incentive, or do you invite them?
　Q9.3:　　　If yes, do you perceive backer input as valuable and/or useful? Why/why not?
　Q9.4:　　　If no, why not?

**Q10:**　　　Do you feel obligated to listen to backers and take in their inputs?
　Q10.1:　　Why/why not?

**Q11:**　　　Are you ever met with resistance from backers?
　Q11.1:　　If yes, how do you react to such?

**Q12:**　　　What happens if you do not listen to backers or if you go against their inputs?

**Q13:**　　　Is there anything you would like to add or ask before we end this interview?

**Debriefing:**
　　　　Once again, thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this interview, it is really of great value to me and my research. How did you generally feel about the interview? Do you have any concerns or questions about it? If at any point you have any questions here after the interview, you are more than welcome to contact me. Before we hang up, I want to restate that your identity and your answers will be fully anonymised in the transcription process. Thank you, and have great day.

**9.3 Appendix C – Interview with Respondent 1 (R1)**

1   **Interviewer:** How did you get into crowdfunding?

2   **Respondent:** That's a good question. I actually can't remember what the first project I

3   backed was. You know, the purpose of it was that I would be able to back projects that I

4   wouldn't otherwise see, and I have been a games retailer for about 20 years. Back in the day,

5   there used to be this magazine published by SPI, which would have in the back of it a list of

6   all the projects they wanted to do, and you had to write in to them, and the one that got the

7   most votes would be the next game they published. So you would read this and think, "oh, if

8   only that game existed, that would be great!", and of course, 90 per cent of these games never

9   got made. Sometimes I will still look through those magazines to see all of these possibilities

10  that could have become real. I think that crowdfunding gives you the ability to do the same.

11  In many ways crowdfunding is perfect, and it was something that I embraced quite early on.

12  In many ways, this magazine can be seen as sort of a predecessor for crowdfunding where

13  people could vote and so. What we want is generally to be increasingly engaged! You know,

14  if you buy sausages, you want to know that the butcher cares to make good sausages, you

15  want to know that the meat you're buying has been ethically sourced, that the pigs have had a

16  happy life. Of course I'm not equating Kickstarter games to pigs, but there is very much a

17  thread of this in modern culture, where we actually do care about the things that maybe our

18  parents care about so much. Our parents were maybe happy to just have things cheaper,

19  where we started to think about how, for instance, clothes are made in sweatshops and we

20  don't want that. The current industries are composed of these big, arrogant businesses telling

21  us that we don't want to know that, you don't need to know how those sausages or these

22  clothes are made. But that is not true. What we want is to be engaged with other human

23  beings and feel that these other people care about the same things that we care about. If we're

24  aligned with them, we will support them, and crowdfunding is probably the best way of doing

25  that. With crowdfunding, you know, a Kickstarter, you know that you are dealing with a

26  person who really, really cares about creating their game. Of course, some people may be

27  good at faking it, but genuinely, far most of these creators really care.

28  **Interviewer:** Okay.

29  **Respondent:** In the theatrical world, there is this concept of 'angels', who are essentially

30  backers, who back a theatrical production that would otherwise not have been. A production

31  costs a lot in time and money, so you need to have people backing, people who believe in it.

32  So the ideas behind crowdfunding already existed in the world, it was just about harnessing

33  and making them easier to deal with. More accessible. Back in the day, you didn't know the

34  people to talk to, and they didn't know you, but the Internet has allowed us all to

35  communicate with one another.

36  **Interviewer:** Okay. You are actually getting close to answering one of my other questions.

37  Do you think that the emergence of crowdfunding has changed the field of tabletop games?

38  **Respondent:** Uhm, yes and no. It has definitely changed the economics of how the tabletop

39  games industry works, but there has always been off the wall companies producing off the

40  wall stuff. And most of the stuff that has been a great success on Kickstarter has also become

41  a great success in retail. So this goes to prove that if you had created the product through a

42  traditional channel, it would also have been a success. There has always been this desire for

43  newness in the world of games, the nerds, the early adopters, have always embraced the new.

44  But crowdfunding has changed the way things are funded, enabling the people to create and

45  back stuff. It has changed the power. People who launch Kickstarter campaigns are people

46  who really love the industry, the world of games, and want to become part of it. There are of

47  course people who just want the money and see it as an easy cash-grab, but most creators are

48  truly passionate.

49  **Interviewer:** Could elaborate on what mean about changing the power?.

50  **Respondent:** Crowdfunding has definitely made publishing games more accessible. I mean,

51  you were always able to publish games, and though it may cost £10,000, you can borrow that

52  in the bank. So crowdfunding has lowered the risk, which probably encourages more people.

53  Definitely enables them. It used to be a lot harder as well. I mean, during this interview, I

54  could actually have gone online and launched a project, from nothing, with nothing.

55  Crowdfunding has reduced the barrier of entry, and it has brought around a lot of things

56  which probably wouldn't have funded without it.

57  **Interviewer:** Okay. How many projects have you backed?

58  **Respondent:** I lose track. It is well over 100. I probably back between three or five every

59  week. So it's actually a lot more than 100. You know, I am a backer because I bring these

60  products into my store, and these games are unique selling points.

61  **Interviewer:** You've mentioned Kickstarter a few times. Is that the platform you mainly use?

62  **Respondent:** Yes. A pro knows where to go. If you don't go to Kickstarter, you aren't a pro.

63  Maybe you want a better margin, or a different form of exposure. But by not using

64  Kickstarter, you are already making a statement, and that statement is, "I am not going to

65  make it easy for you to back me".

66  **Interviewer:** Okay. How do you decide if you want to back a new project?

67    **Respondent:** Sometimes, you can see that the creator has really put in a lot of effort, and if

68    they have already put in a lot of effort, you'll know that they'll probably put in a lot of effort

69    further down the line. I will look at how fast they are engaging. Campaigns that really have a

70    massive spike on day one which then tails off, that's a bad sign, because then you know that

71    the word of mouth was not that good. It only picked up what we call the cognoscenti, you

72    know, the one per cent of people who religiously follow Kickstarter and back every project

73    they can find. They picked those up on day one, but they don't pick up anyone new on day

74    ten, because it has run out of steam. You also look at what their funding goal is and how

75    much it has gone over. And then of course, you look at the idea itself, the game. It's not an

76    exact science. A lot of the time, you go for something unique and original. I tend not to back

77    zombie games, because all zombie games are essentially the same. Of course it also needs to

78    be something that I can sell in my store. I started off backing stuff personally before I backed

79    stuff for the store.

80    **Interviewer:** So you are a backer with the purpose of putting the games you back into retail.

81    Does that in any way differ from being a regular backer?

82    **Respondent:** There are many similarities. Many people back Kickstarters because they want

83    to be the cool guy who has the thing that no one else has. And I want to be the cool shop that

84    has what no one else has. But I differ in that I want to make the games available after the

85    campaign. Unfortunately, many of the individual backers who want to be this cool guy, they

86    don't really want campaigns to succeed too much, because it makes them less unique. These

87    guys just want the bragging rights. That is the dark heart that unfortunately also is part of

88    crowdfunding, the nerds who want to be the exclusive kids. Not wanting other people to

89    know or own something because it makes you less exclusive is to me a really poisonous way

90    of thinking. A lot of Kickstarter communities have luckily grown out of that. I call them the

91    cognoscenti, the people who know, and in every hobby, there will be those people who want

92    to be exclusive. These people probably don't even know that they are like this, because

93    psychologically, it's so deeply seeded.

94    **Interviewer:** Okay. As an experienced backer, what would you tell a new, unexperienced

95    backer who is about back his or her first project?

96    **Respondent:** I would tell them to back the thing they really care about. Don't pay attention

97    to what other people say. Don't follow the herd on a thing. Back the thing that speaks to you,

98    to your heart. That's what Kickstarter should be about, finding things that feel tailormade for

99    you. Back the game that makes you go "oh my god, I can't believe that someone has actually

100   made this game, it's the game I've always wanted to play!". I mean, more than 3,000 games

101  are released every year, and it has gone beyond what Kickstarter was initially envisioned as.

102  The danger of Kickstarter is that you relax your backing criteria and just listen what other

103  people say are great. Then you will end up spending a lot of money.

104  **Interviewer:** Okay. How does being a backer differ from being a regular, traditional

105  consumer?

106  **Respondent:** As a backer, you are giving money and getting the product a lot later than you

107  would normally. Sometimes, backers wait a year, and then they don't really want it anymore,

108  because cooler projects were launched in the meantime. That's sort of the sad part of

109  Kickstarter. Regular consumers don't pay for a thing and expect to get it a year later. This

110  wouldn't be allowed.

111  **Interviewer:** How can you as a backer influence a given product, compared to being a

112  consumer of a similar product in a store?

113  **Respondent:** As a backer, you are influential in two ways. The first way is the backing itself.

114  Backing is a metric which is measured. As a regular consumer, you don't get any choice in

115  which games are made. Games are made on the basis on what companies think the market

116  wants, what they've been pitched by a designer and what trends they are able to analyse. You

117  don't have a say in their catalogues, which are essentially made based on what they think the

118  public wants. As a backer, you have power. You don't have power as an individual, but you

119  have power as a mass. If 500 people back a particular game, then all of a sudden, they have

120  power. The number of backers, the speed of which it is backed and so are all metrics you can

121  track. The weird thing about Kickstarter is that a lot of people will back stuff because other

122  people are backing it, but I wouldn't, for instance, go see a movie just because many people

123  saw it. These metrics allow you as a backer to influence the project, because the more people

124  backing it, the more money the project gets, which leads to a greater chance that the project

125  will succeed and the creators will be able to make more projects. But the level of influence

126  here is more limited than the second way. The second way that you as a backer can be

127  influential is that you can comment on a project and encourage creators down a particular

128  line. So if you particularly like a thing, you can tell the creator, for instance, what you think

129  the next stretch goal should be. In most projects, creators will read all their comments, reply

130  to them and engage with their backers. And the more they engage with their backers, the

131  more likely you are to be able to influence the project.

132  **Interviewer:** Could you elaborate on that?

133  **Respondent:** It's kind of like having all your superfans in a room, and they are keen to

134  engage with you. Like, if you run a game demo at a convention, people come along and play

135   it, and afterwards, they'll give you feedback. That's kind of how Kickstarter works. These

136   people can give you feedback through the comment threads. I do this all the time. For

137   instance, you can tell them that their font is a bit too dark. But I never comment on the

138   gameplay, because I have to assume that if you got this far, you tested it. I mean, it's also

139   about the artistic freedom, and there is a reason that they want their game to work the way it

140   does. If these people are going to bare their souls to me, I want to see the game that the

141   creator wants me to see. If I don't like the gameplay, I just choose not to back it. Because

142   who says that my tastes represent the market taste? They often do, but I can't guarantee it.

143   Some backers do of course comment on the gameplay.

144   **Interviewer:** How do creators react when someone comments on gameplay?

145   **Respondent:** It depends. Take for example one of my friends, who is a really well-known

146   social justice warrior in the games industry. She does a number of crowdfunding projects and

147   they basically picks up two types of backers. They pick up backers who really care about the

148   material that this creator produces. But they also pick up backers who are men's rights

149   activists, who back it only to be able to enter the debate on the comments section for the

150   Kickstarter campaign, with the sole purpose of provoking and picking fights. So there is a

151   danger there, because you invite these people in to comment, and you might get the wrong

152   sort or people in, who will actively work against the project. This can affect a project really

153   negatively, and once they are in there, you can't really get them out again.

154   **Interviewer:** Is this something that is common to see in the communities?

155   **Respondent:** Well, there are trolls everywhere. Another person I know launched a

156   Kickstarter to open a board game café, and a number of backers came on board to back it.

157   Now this creator wanted to work with her local game store, but the people who came on to

158   back it hated the guy who ran the local game store. I mean, I didn't exactly like the guy

159   either, but he has a business and caters to his community. The bottom line is that she said that

160   she was going to work closely with this local game store, but these backers were like, "no

161   you're not, we hate that guy and we want you to crush him!". So according to them, the

162   stipulation of them backing her project was that she would not work with him. These backers

163   backed really heavily, and they encouraged their friends to back, and then they told her that if

164   she worked with that guy, they were going to pull out. "We're your backers, and we're

165   funding your board game café!". So she was caught in a position where she needed the

166   money, which is why she was crowdfunding it, but she was forced into this situation.

167   Sometimes backers will do this, and it's really a problem. If you invite people in and tell

168   them that they're special, some of them develop entitlement issues. It's a problem that the

169  games community has struggled with for many years. You see it everywhere. It's going back

170  to what I said earlier about these backers who back projects not because they want them to be

171  a success, but because they want to be they only ones owning it. It's typical for this nerd

172  culture, this clique mentality, wanting to be the special ones. Sometimes, these backers will

173  exert their weight in a campaign which is not to benefit for the campaign.

174  **Interviewer:** Can it be to the benefit?

175  **Respondent:** Yes, of course! But try to think about it like this. This interview is for your

176  dissertation, right?

177  **Interviewer:** Yes.

178  **Respondent:** Who is the most important person to read your dissertation?

179  **Interviewer:** That would be my supervisor and my censor.

180  **Respondent:** Exactly! So imagine that on the way to hand in your dissertation, you go to a

181  café and the barista asks to read your dissertation, but goes, "oh, I really didn't like it, there

182  should be more Kung Fu action in there!". So you tell him that it's about crowdfunding and

183  not Kung Fu, to which he replies that that's not what he wanted. Then you'll be like "it's not

184  designed for you, stop giving me comments!". Sometimes, people may even be invested in

185  the success of a given thing, like if you show your dissertation to your partner or parents.

186  They might give you advice, but the bottom line is that the advice of the people who are

187  going to mark it is more important. I feel the same about backers in crowdfunding. There are

188  some people who will give you good and relevant advice. People who are experienced and

189  happy to share their advice. You have experienced people who are able to give you good

190  advice, but then there's random backer number 68, who may indeed have a valid opinion, but

191  if you did a game about cowboys and this backer says, "I want to see zombies in there,

192  because I really love zombies!". They could have a valid point, but maybe they just say this

193  to everybody. So creators need to learn to pass the information they get in. If you're an

194  individual backer, you may influence the game, though it is less likely, but if 20 backers tell

195  you that they had expected the game to have zombies in it, then maybe you should start

196  thinking about putting zombies in it. But if one person does, it could paralyse you, because if

197  everyone is giving you feedback in different directions, you can very easily have a project

198  that gets paralysed with too much input.

199  **Interviewer:** So the number of backers voicing a given opinion makes the difference?

200  **Respondent:** I mean, it's sort of democratic, isn't it? Theoretically, it's democratic. But in

201  the same way that every form of entertainment is. Either you go see the new movie or not.

202  Nobody's going to be held at gunpoint and forced to watch the new movie you know. In

203    many ways, it's the democratisation of games retail. But in my view, games retails was fairly

204    democratic anyways, because companies that produce good stuff, their stuff sells, and they

205    don't force people to buy rubbish games.

206    **Interviewer:** Okay. Are you active in any communities related to tabletop games?

207    **Respondent:** I think it's safe to say that I'm active in all of the communities. I'm active in a

208    lot of different Facebook groups.

209    **Interviewer:** Why do you participate in these communities?

210    **Respondent:** I participate in the consumer groups, because I'm a retailer. But I'm also active

211    in the crowdfunding communities, Kickstarter communities, with backers and creators. To

212    me, Kickstarter is designed to kickstart your game. It's like lighting a fire with tinder, but

213    tinder burns really quickly, so you have to get more tinder. Kickstarter is like the tinder. If

214    you don't put the logs on, your fire goes out and you'll need more tinder. Unfortunately, a lot

215    of Kickstarters bounce from tinder fire to tinder fire. It's not my job, but it's my pleasure to

216    be able to give these creators the advice they need to bounce to the next tier. I want them all

217    to grow and be successful, and eventually, they will leave Kickstarter, because they get to a

218    stage where when they launch a new project, they'll fund in no time and have 100,000 orders,

219    so they don't need to chase the backers individually anymore. Also, Kickstarter takes a big

220    cut of the funds. Successful creators reach a point where they can just mass produce their

221    game, and people will buy it, because the name alone will sell it. It's quite normal that once

222    creators have successfully crowdfunded maybe four or five games, they leave Kickstarter and

223    start a business.

224    **Interviewer:** So they use crowdfunding as a sort of launch pad to start a business essentially?

225    **Respondent:** Exactly. So in the beginning these creators will come in and maybe not have

226    that much knowledge. So backers are more influential in the beginning, because creators will

227    learn in the early stages what to believe and what not to believe. They will start to get a

228    feeling for the industry, and by the time they've finished their second game, they should have

229    a good feeling for how it works.

230    **Interviewer:** Could you elaborate on that?

231    As you make more projects, you will start to build up your own picture of what is, and what

232    is not, truth. All truth is subjective. So the more experience you have, the greater you will be

233    able to judge when a backer is leading you astray from your vision into theirs. Backers can

234    give great input, and new creators are often unexperienced, but they learn over time.

235    **Interviewer:** Alright. If we talk about these communities again, which activities do you

236    typically engage in, in these?

237 **Respondent:** I comment on other people's posts, and I've later started writing leading

238 threads, so I will post a thread article. I used to blog, but I don't do that anymore, because I

239 think it's a bit arrogant to have a blog, because you assume that people want to read your

240 stuff. And I do realise that posting on Facebook is sort of assuming that people want to read

241 your stuff as well, but it's more like a group of people, who are there for a reason, so if I for

242 instance make a post about post-campaign advertising or how to produce a game that will

243 break through in retail, people can start learning the stuff they can't learn anywhere else. I

244 mean, there is no other place for them to learn it.

245 **Interviewer:** Okay. So the activities you mainly engage in are related to advising creators?

246 **Respondent:** Yes. That's essentially what I do.

247 **Interviewer:** As a backer, what do you gain from such activities?

248 **Respondent:** With my industry hat on, I have a vested interest in these creators succeeding.

249 Because as a retailer, what benefits the industry benefits me. I may come across as being this

250 super altruistic guy who wants to help everybody, which is sort of true, but I do have a vested

251 self-interest in this. In the end, if I sell more games, I make more profit, and that's ultimately

252 my bottom line. As much as I love helping creators, at the end of the day, helping them helps

253 me. Being in business like I am is like being in a constant state of war. We constantly need

254 new supplies, and games are our supplies.

255 **Interviewer:** Alright. Which communities and platforms do backers in the field of tabletop

256 games use most often?

257 **Respondent:** Most of them will be on Facebook. But there's also Reddit forums, which I

258 would actually advice everyone to stay out of. Reddit is full of anonymous trolls, and thus

259 you can't really trust anybody, whereas Facebook has forced us all to being ourselves sort of.

260 You can respect a person more when you can sort of hunt them down. I mean, you can see

261 that they've had other interactions with other people.

262 **Interviewer:** You've mentioned these trolls before. Could you elaborate on those?

263 **Respondent:** Well, they are these individuals who enter the communities to cause damage.

264 Especially on Reddit. And unfortunately they can be quite influential. They can take against a

265 crowdfunding campaign and cause creators damage. There's a part of the games community,

266 the troll community, which wants to cause damage, so it is best to avoid platforms with a lot

267 of members whose main purpose is to cause damage. So I tend to avoid Reddit.

268 BoardGameGeek is another longstanding forum in the community, where loads of things are

269 discussed. I also try to stay away from that. Things aren't just deleted again, and if you have

270 one person who doesn't like you for any particular reason, they can cause untold damage to

271   you and your brand. It can haunt you forever. That's the danger for the creators of going into

272   these forums, because it's crucial for creators to engage with backers and persuade them that

273   your project is real and exciting enough to make them back. But there is a danger involved in

274   that. I mean, we're lucky to have a smart community, and most of the people who want to

275   engage are smart people and aren't trolls. There's a lot of people who are just happy to back

276   your project.

277   **Interviewer:** Okay. So you have already touched upon this quite a lot, but do you do

278   anything active to help creators?

279   **Respondent:** Yes! I help them and give them advice on what to do. I also did that before

280   Kickstarter, you know, helped people with their games. But yes, I give advice on many

281   things, like box sizes, price points and so. I mean, you may have the best game ever, but there

282   are so many factors that may play a role and affect the game negatively. It's not really my

283   job, but it's a job I took upon myself to basically tell creators that their game could be a lot

284   better if it had a different price point, a different box size, different cover art, a different

285   name. Many of these things that may seem small can really make a significant difference, and

286   some creators often don't even think of these things, because Kickstarter allows them to do

287   no research. Basically, if they want to, they can start randomly from nothing, all from

288   nothing, and that project will basically be as valid as one that took five years to develop, in

289   the sense that Kickstarter doesn't really choose favourites. Sometimes you see a project and

290   think, "why are people backing that?!". And other times you see one and think, "why aren't

291   people backing that?!". But about helping creators… People like me and other experienced

292   backers and people who know the industry really well, we can shortcut their way to success,

293   because we can tell them about box design, why games are designed in particular ways to sit

294   on a shelf. Things that these creators may never have thought about. As a creator, you may

295   never have been in a games store, looking at other games, which I find odd, because if I was

296   making a blockbuster Hollywood movie, I would probably have seen some films before. All

297   the time on Kickstarter, you often get the feeling that these creators have not looked at how

298   the market looks.

299   **Interviewer:** Could you give some more examples of what you do to help creators?

300   **Respondent:** It can also be on fulfilment, you know, sometimes creators will ask, for

301   instance, which fulfilment companies backers recommend. If we take manufacturing, I'm

302   probably less likely to give my input, unless a creator says they will use a manufacturer that

303   has had problems in the past, then I will share it with them. But you know, manufacturing is

304   not my main field of expertise, but then there are others who will know a lot about exactly

305   this. As a backer who is a retailer, I also allow creators to come into my store a run demos on

306   their game during their campaign, which can get them more backers, and they can also get

307   feedback from those who come to the demo. This also builds up a relationship to the creator

308   which is beneficial to me. I also give creators advice on how to get their games into retail, for

309   instance by explaining them the benefits of adding retail pledge tiers in their campaigns. I can

310   use my experience and position as a store to guide the next generation of Kickstarter, and I

311   can provide a way for projects to think about how they can be bigger and better, how they can

312   grow, also beyond Kickstarter. Because it matters to me that creators know that there is a

313   difference between selling 100, 1,000 and 10,000 copies.

314   **Interviewer:** You do quite a few different things to help creators.

315   **Respondent:** Yes, you know, I made this analogy to being in the games industry as being in

316   a constant state of war. You're constantly seeing these new recruits, these new creators,

317   coming along who needs training, and it's frustrating, because they've never had to fight in

318   this particular war before. These people come in imagining that it's not a war, but that it's a

319   party. But you know that it's a war. So you are the sergeant, and your job is to get them to

320   understand what it is that they've gotten themselves into before they die. Kickstarter is like

321   that. Business is like that. You can't make mistakes in it. A mistake can finish you. My job is

322   to stop that from happening as much as possible. Well, it's not my job, but anyone would do

323   that. Imagine if you saw an old lady about to step into oncoming traffic and she hasn't seen

324   the lorry coming straight towards her. Anyone of us would run over and pull her off from the

325   curb so she wouldn't get crushed. That's kind of what I feel I do online. I stop people from

326   getting hit by trucks. Some people still step out, and some people dodge the truck, that will

327   happen.

328   **Interviewer:** Some people still step out?

329   **Respondent:** Yes, you know, sometimes I don't think creators are paying attention.

330   Sometimes, creators will ask what you think about their game, and then you'll give them

331   feedback, but then they ignore your feedback. And it's not an arrogant thing of me saying

332   that they didn't pay attention to what I said. It's me and other experienced backers, there's a

333   number of us who will give feedback and support on projects, and they may ignore all of us.

334   They say that they want advice on their projects, but they are not prepared to accept it.

335   Imagine if you went to your dissertation supervisor and asked for feedback, and they would

336   tell you to work a bit on the conclusion, and all you would do is yell, "hahaha, what do you

337   know?!". Then ultimately, you'll get a poor mark on your dissertation. I mean, we're not

338   always right about the advice we give, but it relates to what I said earlier. If 20 people are

339    saying that you should put zombies in your game, you should actually consider it. But there's

340    always this person saying, "no, I won't put zombies in!". Some of these people may still get

341    backed, but other times you block them and choose not to befriend them. I mean, if people

342    ask you to support their campaign and it's the third time they relaunch it, and for every

343    former campaign the backers ask, "have you done this, have you done that?", and every time

344    he comes back and says, "no, I'm right about my project, and this time it's definitely going to

345    work, because I renamed it and sacrificed a goat!". And it's so frustrating! Because we gave

346    him advise the first time, which he refused to take. We gave him a whole lot of advice on a

347    whole lot of stuff, and he just refused to take it. His campaign didn't fund, so for the second

348    one, we gave him the same advice, and again, his campaign didn't fund. Now he wants to

349    relaunch it again, and you already know that it won't fund. Unfortunately, his campaign will

350    never fund, no one is going to back his game. And if it does fund, then good luck, because I

351    won't back it. I mean, it's not like we have a duty of care to back everything. Some of us

352    backers are hammering on with advice, but you can't force creators to take your advice. But

353    if they want to make it work, they should at least understand that there is advice out there.

354    **Interviewer:** Okay.

355    **Respondent:** But I should probably say that often, the advice you get from a regular

356    Kickstarter backer may not be the advice that will add to the success of your company. Say

357    for instance, a creator wants to know what price they should produce their game at. They

358    have all these pieces that go into their game, and they ask themselves how much they should

359    sell it for. And then your Kickstarter backer will say that it should be no more than £20,

360    because they want it to cost as little as possible. They are not necessarily thinking, "wow, I

361    really love this product and I want to back it!", because they are probably backing other

362    projects as well, so they want to get their spend as low as possible. So obviously, that might

363    not be the best advice for the creator. There was a case a few years back with this creator who

364    was one of the first really, really big successful board game Kickstarters. He created this

365    game which was a massive success, over 25,000 backers, but what he hadn't realised was that

366    there will you will have to ship the product out once it's produced. I think he was producing

367    in the UK, and most of his backers were not in the UK. This was before fulfilment companies

368    existed. He was like, "oh, right, I guess I will be sending these copies out to people all over

369    the world", and then of course, he went to send them out and he realised that had committed

370    people that they would get this product for maybe £20, including shipping, but the shipping

371    alone on most of them was more than that. He honoured it and lost his house. He had to sell

372    his house to fulfil a Kickstarter project. I mean, if you talk to certain superbackers on

373    Kickstarter, they would be like, "well, he promised me the game for £20!". And all I can

374    think is, "seriously?!", I mean, are they happy that the guy lost his house? If someone came

375    and told me that they've made a terrible mistake, I wouldn't say, "well, that's just a shame

376    for you!", that's not how I am. It's easy to make a mistake, and certain backers will take

377    advantage of it when they notice it. They will jump on it right away and see the fantastic

378    value they are now getting. Maybe if they knew the guy had lost his house on it, they would

379    care, they should care. The whole reason we back on Kickstarter is because we want that

380    relationship with the creator, and if it's purely a one-way relationship, where you use that

381    other person to get as much as possible... In nature, we call that a parasite, as opposed to a

382    symbiont, which also lives off another animal, but for their mutual benefit. It's not always the

383    creators' fault if things go wrong. You can have unforeseen things. If Donald Trump all of

384    sudden puts a tariff on imports, like board game imports, Kickstarter in its entirety would be

385    fucked. Since practically everything is manufactured in China, the manufacturing costs would

386    all of sudden go up, say, 200 per cent. Every single Kickstarter creator would be wiped out.

387    No one has a plan. They are working on such tight margins, and because they are just

388    creators, and as opposed to companies, they don't have the cash reserves to keep going. And

389    this could happen. Most goods that come from Kickstarter are made in China, and that's a

390    weakness, and there's no strategy for if this goes wrong.

391    **Interviewer:** Okay.

392    **Respondent:** But on the other hand, you also see creators who ran a successful campaign,

393    received the money and then spend it on nice property or staff, and then they also rent a stand

394    at all the huge game expos around the world. And as a backer or a person in the industry, you

395    look at them and think, "okay, they spend £5,000 there and £10,000 there…", and then pretty

396    soon they run out of money. And then, they will end up funding the actual production of their

397    first game by launching a second Kickstarter campaign, which they say is for a new game. So

398    they get caught in this vicious circle. And you know that these creators are eventually going

399    to go out of business. It may take time, but it will happen. As soon as your campaign

400    succeeds, you are in debt to these backers. And you can't just generate £50,000 out of

401    nowhere. Kickstarter success is a bit like winning the lottery. A sensible person would look at

402    the money and think about how they can spend X amount now, but they will need Y amount

403    for the campaign and Z amount for the production and fulfilment. A lot of creators don't have

404    that necessary business experience and thus, they are running blindly, like winning the lottery

405    and thinking, "wuhu, it's party time!", and then you see them spend the money. If no one

406    advices and helps them, then who is actually to blame? All of a sudden, they have all this

407     money, and they spend it thinking that it won't come back and bite them. But the point is that

408     it always does, and then it is too late. There was nobody there advising them.

409     **Interviewer:** So someone should advise them?

410     **Respondent:** Yes. Well, say you have a valuable Pokémon card. I know it's valuable, you

411     don't. I offer you £5 and you go, "wuhu!", but it's actually worth £500. If I knew the true

412     value of it, so I'm actually culpable. I think that backers want to be angels like in the theatre.

413     They want to be intimately familiar with the creator and their projects, and they want to have

414     inputs in that. And at that point they have to accept some degree of culpability for when

415     things go wrong. They should. There's no safeguard. I mean, if you have a company that's

416     going bankrupt, you would probably want to have a board meeting to have some inputs. So I

417     think that backers should get more involved in the projects. It should not just be about the

418     money, how good a deal it was to them, or how much they can resell it for. Crowdfunding is

419     supposed to be a way that people can get more control over how products are funded, and in

420     order to do that, you have to not only get more control, but also assert more control, of course

421     in a responsible way.

422     **Interviewer:** When you advice creators, do you do so by own incentive or invitation from

423     the creator?

424     **Respondent:** Both. I mean, I will post articles so they are out there and people can see what I

425     would advise. But people will also email me, where they say they that they are launching this

426     Kickstarter campaign and what I think about it. Often, I will tell them that it's good, because

427     if they've taken the time to contact me, that means they've thought about it before they

428     contacted me.

429     **Interviewer:** Why do you think that creators contact backers to get feedback?

430     **Respondent:** I think that there are benefits to both sides in the process. You can be the best

431     poet in the world, and either you keep it to yourself and someone may discover it when

432     you're dead, but it won't matter because you're dead, or you can take that poetry and read it

433     to people in a reading, and people will think it's amazing. Now, the last option gives you

434     validation, it makes you think that people love your poetry, it makes you want to write more.

435     With the first option, you may still write poetry, but you may be unsure of it. Sometimes

436     people are nervous, they want to do a thing and just need someone to say that it looks good.

437     Humans have this need for validation, and backers can satisfy this need for creators.

438     **Interviewer:** How do you feel about sharing your expertise for free?

439     **Respondent:** Well, I don't share it for free. I benefit from it. There's clear financial incentive

440     for me to help. The better the game, the better the industry. If people paid me, I would feel

441    like I needed to deliver more. It would feel weird. It's something I've always done. We're

442    stronger together, and the more we learn, the stronger we are. We can learn through having

443    opportunities to learn. I can tell them that if they change these things, I think their game

444    would be more likely to succeed or make it even better. And this also means the game sells

445    better in my store, so I will benefit, it's not pure altruism.

446    **Interviewer:** Have you ever felt reluctant to help a creator?

447    **Respondent:** Yes, there are a couple of cases. This guy I mentioned earlier, he hasn't been

448    paying attention to anything that anyone said to him. He has come back several times and

449    asked what he should do about his campaign, and the first couple of times, we all gave him

450    advice, but the third time it comes back and fails, you're done helping him, because you can

451    see that he didn't listen the first two times. If I ever meet him in person, I can sit him down

452    and tell him that he really didn't pay attention. You can't do that in an email or on Facebook.

453    There's a limit to what you can say to someone without making it a pointless slamming

454    match. But if they don't listen the first couple of times, I have to assume they won't listen

455    this time either, and then there's no point in me advising them. It would be a waste of time.

456    You also have these creators who will just come out of nowhere, maybe with their new adult

457    party game… Now, I don't believe in time serve or paying your dues in the industry, but

458    what I do believe is that creators should go into the groups, make themselves known,

459    comment, discuss about things, be helpful to other people, and maybe then you can pitch

460    your project. If you join the community purely to pitch your Kickstarter campaign… Also if

461    people write you out of nowhere, asking you to promote it, like and share. But I'm not just

462    going to stick my name to something that I don't absolutely believe in and just because you

463    told me to tell people to back your game. If I tell people to back a game which turns out

464    rubbish, I can no longer tell anyone to back anything. I have to be careful.

465    **Interviewer:** Do you think that creators are dependent on advice from backers?

466    **Respondent:** Yes. Yep.

467    **Interviewer:** How?

468    **Respondent:** Unless you pay a lot of attention, for instance to other people's blogs, posts or

469    comments, how do you know any of these things? How do you know what box size to go

470    with? How do you know which paper to print on so that it does not become too heavy to

471    ship? How would you know which price point to choose? You wouldn't know. You can have

472    a really good idea for a game, but there are a lot of other things that have to work as well. It's

473    important to think holistically about things. If you're looking at a patient at a hospital, a new

474    heart will not solve the problem, if the lungs, liver and kidneys are bad, it's pointless. You

475    have to look at the whole thing. I made my own game 15 years back, just at the dawn of the

476    Internet, and I made mistakes in relation to some of these things. You can really lose money.

477    I would have loved if someone would have given me advice, but no one had. And how would

478    I know? How would anyone new? People make mistakes, but it could be a $10,000 mistake,

479    and I wouldn't have known before it was too late. The person I talked about who lost his

480    house. I think if he had been operating now, it wouldn't have happened, because there would

481    be enough people to give good advice. Not everyone gives good advice, and there are other

482    factions out there that don't have the same agenda as my friends and I have.

483    **Interviewer:** Okay. You said that you created your own game 15 years back. Have you ever

484    created a game on Kickstarter?

485    **Respondent:** No, I haven't. I like my sanity. I'm only backing.

486    **Interviewer:** Alright. As a backer, do you expect to have an influence on the products you

487    back?

488    **Respondent:** Uhm… I don't expect to. It is nice when I do. I think most backers don't expect

489    to have an influence. A lot of people think of it as a pre-order scheme. But it's a hard

490    question. We expect to sort of have an influence with the feedback and all, but not as much

491    influence… I don't necessarily see that anything I do will be acted upon. I don't feel that I

492    absolutely should have an influence. I'm giving this person the best possible advice, and I

493    know other people who will give them the best possible advice, and then it's up to the creator

494    to take it or not take it. I would not necessarily withhold my backing of a project if they, for

495    instance, didn't take my advice on the box design. But I will think that it won't be as popular

496    and not sell as many copies as if they would have taken my advice. But of course I can also

497    be wrong.

498    **Interviewer:** Okay. Do you think that all community members are equally influential to

499    creators?

500    **Respondent:** Yes, dangerously. Community members definitely. The negative ones can be as

501    influential as the positive ones, and you won't even know. That's the danger. I mean, you

502    don't get to choose who gives you feedback, but you do get to choose whether you accept

503    their validation or not. Validation can be positive and negative. Negative validation makes

504    people unproductive. The trolls telling you that your game is shit… You can ignore it, but it

505    may also eat you up. When you're on Facebook, Reddit or BoardGameGeek, you can't

506    control whether they take against you, and one person alone can do a lot of damage. There

507    was this guy who made all characters in his game women, thinking that he was doing

508    something good for gender representation. Someone asked him when he would make an all-

509   men game, to which he replied, "never!". You can't do that without consequences. These

510   trolls will share it and make sure that consequences come your way. He got a lot of stick for

511   that.

512   **Interviewer:** Okay.

513   **Respondent:** But you know, you can never be fully sure of which decisions will lead to

514   1,000 backers and which will lead to 10,000. As an individual, you will have an opinion, and

515   the more forcefully you stress that opinion… I mean, who knows whether you're doing the

516   thing that will get you 1,000 or 10,000? The person who is loudest might be the one who only

517   wants it to be 1,000, because they will then have exclusivity. And you may not know who

518   you're talking to. They may be giving you really, really bad advice. But you do have

519   individuals who are more experienced and very well-respected than other in the community.

520   **Interviewer:** Why are they well-respected?

521   **Respondent:** Well, they've been around for a long time, some since the dawn of Kickstarter.

522   Someone who has done, say, 20 crowdfunding projects or someone who has backed a lot of

523   games. I mean, I can be replaced by relatively few backers, but I have experience, I can help

524   get your game into retail and I can bring other retailers on board. We might post something or

525   make a comment and get 100 likes, which makes it more valid. But we could easily be

526   drowned out by a random guy, who says he wants zombies in the game. Sometimes we may

527   not give the best advice, like if creators make a poll where the community can vote for what

528   their new games should called.

529   **Interviewer:** Do creators often make polls?

530   **Respondent:** Sometimes they do. An important thing about launching a Kickstarter project is

531   engagement with backers, and there are a lot of ways to engage, like polls. It's hard to do

532   traditional advertising. Engagement takes a lot of difficult work. Polls are often about

533   validation. You have an idea and you allow people to engage in it. You can, for instance,

534   have a closed poll where people can choose between four options. You'll often see these

535   polls on stuff like colourways, which I think is really good idea, I love it. Creators have a

536   cover and ask which colours they should use. This can also force creators to rethink their

537   ideas, which is good.

538   **Interviewer:** Alright. So what you are mentioning now sounds like what we talked about

539   earlier. If many backers want the same thing, you should maybe go for it. But you also said

540   that certain backers are more influential than others. So both can be influential?

541   **Respondent:** Yes. I mean, it's always going to be advisory. Maybe this person who hasn't

542   backed a game before, no likes, no friends in the community, makes a comment, and you

543    think, "that guy has got it!" or "wow, she really came up with the best tagline!". You know,

544    just as you can crowdsource money, you can crowdsource ideas. That's what I like about it.

545    And you'll never know which choice will make the difference between 1,000 and 10,000

546    backers. But yes, there are certain experienced backers in the community who are more

547    influential, given that they have been around for long, have a lot of experience, have a high

548    activity level. Stuff like that.

549    **Interviewer:** Is one of the two more influential than the other? I mean, the collective voice of

550    20 backers or the weighty voice of an experienced backer.

551    **Respondent:** The collective voice is strong. It's a mob. I mean, democracy is a mob. In

552    democracy, everyone gets to vote, which is good, everyone gets to back, which is good.

553    Some people get more of a voice, because they spend time and effort to get in a position

554    where they get a voice, which is good. But all of that can be torn down by the mob

555    instantaneously. So the mob is always more powerful. When a mob turns upon you, it's like

556    wildfire, it destroys everything. And there's nothing you can do. It may be entirely

557    unjustified, and the only thing you can do at that point is to leave Kickstarter, because it's no

558    longer beneficial to them to listen to these voices. It's like creators turn to a dictatorship,

559    where they do their own thing, and then people can buy their games if they want to. I mean, a

560    main reason for creators to use Kickstarter is for the publicity it enables. You know, for the

561    advertising, the word of mouth in the community, people going on Facebook to tell people

562    who haven't backed your game. If backers like your project, they will often share it. That's a

563    main reason to be there, free publicity. The problem is when the publicity is all bad, then why

564    would you be on Kickstarter? It's not like they have to be.

565    **Interviewer:** Okay. What happens if a creator does not listen to the community and its

566    inputs?

567    **Respondent:** They're dead. They're dead! Absolutely dead! I mean, it kills them! That's the

568    sad truth. In conventional manufacturing and distribution, you would produce the goods, and

569    then people buy it or they don't. But if you crowdsource ideas and ask people for their

570    feedback and advice, if you go to people and say "give me your ideas!", and then you turn

571    around and go, "actually, no, I'm doing this other thing", that's bad. You know, like the guy

572    with the game we don't help anymore. Then those people… You had them engaged, and

573    engagement is the most important thing of the 21$^{st}$ century retail and entertainment. If you

574    fail to engage your consumers, your backers, you're dead, you're finished. Unfortunately. It's

575    a brutal world. If you allow those people to disengage, you lost them, and if you lost them,

576    they won't back you. Creators make many mistakes, like messing up fulfilment, not listening

577  to backers, overcharging them, underdelivering, delays… These things cause you reputational

578  damage. Unfortunately, we live in a world where reputational damage will kill your business.

579  Reputation is hard to build and easy to destroy. And we live on reputation. My question is,

580  should you be allowed to make a mistake? If you murder someone, you are prosecuted and

581  convicted, and 20 years later, you can get out on parole, and by the end of the period, you

582  won't be flagged up as murderer anymore. Theoretically, when you've served your time,

583  you'll be absolved of your legal guilt for the crime. But now, you can do a thing online, mess

584  up a Kickstarter, like fail to include a stretch goal that you promised to include, and you will

585  be haunted until your death. That's the society we've created. There's always going to be

586  someone who will follow you until the end of time and tell everyone that this person does not

587  deserve to be part of our community, our industry, because the creator promised them this

588  thing and didn't deliver. "He's a liar and a fraud, who should not be allowed to be part of

589  this!". Suddenly, people who didn't use to have power have power. When you give a voice to

590  people who previously didn't have a voice, they say things you don't want them to. Most

591  people who backed it didn't care about this little thing missing and accepted the creator's

592  good excuse, which is never good enough for this one vigilante. And this is now what we

593  have to deal with. I know this guy, where the delivery of his game was messed up by the

594  fulfilment company. He suffered reputational damage, and when he launched his new project,

595  there was a howling chorus of discontent about how he had let everyone down. I mean, he did

596  the best he could, but that wasn't enough, and he had to pull back his new campaign. I don't

597  know what he'll do. As soon as he tries to relaunch, they will come back until he delivers

598  what he promises. And the problem is that if he delivers and absolves his debt, when he then

599  launches his new campaign, people will come and say, "well, he delivered eventually, but he

600  wasn't going to, and he's a loser!". You can suffer reputational damage, even when you do

601  the right thing. One strike and you're out, forever. It's the most draconian punishment system

602  ever. It's a difficult world for creators. Zero tolerance policies for any transgression of any

603  code. Unwritten codes that we didn't even know about. There are no written rules, and even

604  if creators make decisions from the best possible information they have available, having

605  taken advice from the community, there's still someone who will disagree and say that you

606  did something wrong. How is that fair? People need to respect the ability of others to mess

607  up.

608  **Interviewer:** Could you elaborate on these unwritten codes?

609  **Respondent:** Yes. There is an overall set of unwritten rules that exist in the community that

610  creators must learn and abide to if they want to succeed. Experienced people like myself are

611    around to help steer them. But the guy who doesn't listen, his projects will never fund,

612    because he refuses to learn the rules. And actually, the rules themselves have been

613    crowdsourced too. Most people can't actually tell you them, because they can change. One

614    year, every game has to be a Kickstarter exclusive, the next, Kickstarter exclusives fail to

615    fund. The rules changed overnight, because what the buying public were prepared to fund

616    changed overnight. But our role as experienced community members… It's like being an

617    oracle. We only interpret the will of the Kickstarter gods. We don't make it. We can't. That's

618    what makes the process scary.

619    **Interviewer:** Okay.

620    **Respondent:** So there is this overall set of unwritten rules, which the community has sort of

621    collectively decided on. The problem is sometimes that anyone could at any time decide that

622    someone has transgressed the unwritten rules of Kickstarter. You'll never satisfy everybody.

623    That's the danger of it, and it doesn't take a lot of people to devalidate you. I mean, not all

624    backers are like this. Backers are powerful, but you have to think of it as light backers and

625    dark backers. The light backers want to back you for good reasons, the dark backers want to

626    back you for negative reasons. You could call them positive and negative backers as well.

627    Positive backers are the people driven by all the positive emotions that crowdfunding brings

628    out, and the negative backers are driven by the more negative instincts, such as the desire to

629    be the only people owning the game or the desire to meddle in a thing. If the dark backers

630    want to be negative about your project, you can't have it not happen to you. It will have a

631    negative effect on you. You know, creators are not media trained, so they don't know how to

632    handle it. If you are not careful, all your backers turn. If they piss off the wrong people, those

633    people will make the creators' lives miserable. And if you are in any way hostile towards

634    those giving you a hard time, they sense blood in the water, like a shark. No matter what you

635    say, they will come back at you again and again and again. That's the thing with Internet

636    trolls. You feed them and more and more of them will come, and suddenly, you're swarmed.

637    And some creators will fall foul of them. As soon as a backer backs a project, they can

638    contact creators directly through Kickstarter, and they can make their lives a living hell.

639    There's no way of stopping it, and they can turn other backers on you. Kickstarter doesn't

640    police or moderate. You are left to handle it yourself, which few creators can.

641    **Interviewer:** Okay. Those were all the questions from me. Is there anything you would like

642    to add before we end this interview?

643    **Respondent:** Well, about backers… Years ago, I trained as a screenwriter, and we were told

644    a story about a screenwriter in Hollywood. He had written a script that got through to the

645   script editing stage. He went to a meeting with the production people, and they really loved it,

646   but Dances with the Wolves was really popular at that point, so they said they were looking

647   for something with a more Native American feel to it. So he went off and rewrote the entire

648   script, exactly what they wanted, and when he came back six months later, the studio went,

649   "why are there Native Americans in the film, we can't make this?!". Even though it was

650   exactly what they wanted. If he had come in with that exact script ready in the first place,

651   they would have optioned in, but in six months, the market has moved on. So my point is that

652   you always have to second guess what people want, because they won't know until they see

653   it. It's the same with backers. I can't tell you what game will be the most popular this year.

654   Suddenly, certain games just explode.

655   **Interviewer:** Alright. Is there anything else you would like to add or ask before we end this

656   interview?

657   **Respondent:** No, I think I've said what I had to say.

**9.4 Appendix D – Interview with Respondent 2 (R2)**

1   **Interviewer:** How did you get into crowdfunding?

2   **Respondent:** I didn't really start backing anything until early 2014. Before that, I think I

3   maybe backed a project or two, just randomly that I had seen. Around March, 2014, is when I

4   backed my first board game, and from that point, I was just totally hooked, I just started

5   backing, backing, backing. So now, I've backed a total of 319 projects on Kickstarter over

6   the last three years, give or take, and they are almost all board games. That's my big thing

7   that I do on there.

8   **Interviewer:** You've backed 319 crowdfunding projects?

9   **Respondent:** Yes. Well, those are all the full project backings, and none of them are like the

10  token pledges that you often see, like $1 or so. Usually, I don't do token pledges. If I see

11  something I like, I just back it fully.

12  **Interviewer:** And is this all on Kickstarter?

13  **Respondent:** Well, I've seen project campaigns on other platforms, but Kickstarter is my go-

14  to. I follow the releases regularly, and I have a feed set up for all of the new game releases,

15  you know, releases every day. I check out pretty much everything. I usually back six to ten

16  new games at their full game tier each month. It's like Christmas every week when I get to

17  unwrap the random UPS presents that arrive at my porch.

18  **Interviewer:** How do you decide if you want to back a new project?

19  **Respondent:** I have a weekly game group that I play with, and I go to a bunch of

20  conventions around the country. I look at my game group, and basically if I find it fit for the

21  game group and the style we like, I will usually back it. I'm a big part of the design

22  community as well, I'm an amateur game designer, and I moderate two big community

23  groups on Facebook with 10,000 and 6,000 members, respectively. I manage those two, like

24  moderate them, and so I get to communicate with a lot of the publishers and designers on

25  there, and sometimes I will see what they've got going and just throw them a pledge, even

26  though it may not be my game type, just to support them and the growth of their

27  independence. So those are the two ways. Supporting people I've seen working on their stuff,

28  trying to get them going, or seeing something that I think will fit in my game group, where I

29  will basically look at the cost and see how many plays I will get out of it on average. You

30  know, to justify the value, almost like value per hour of entertainment. I mean, $5 an hour is

31  cheaper than a movie. But in general, I'm backing a lot, and I also buy regular retail games.

32    **Interviewer:** Alright. So you mentioned that you're an amateur game designer. Have you

33    ever served as a creator on a crowdfunding project?

34    **Respondent:** Not yet, not yet. I have incorporated my publishing company, so I do have the

35    business started. My hope is to possibly do my first game this year. I've spent the last couple

36    of years studying it, and I go to a lot of the designer conventions, and again, I moderate the

37    forums related to it. I already own a software company, where I have 23 employees, so

38    basically, I'm studying the industry to make sure that when I launch my project, I have all my

39    ducks in a row, and make sure that I'm hopefully not going to make too many mistakes. But

40    this is different from the software business I'm used to, because this involves actual

41    production, goods, fulfilment and all of this stuff. So I'm trying to minimise my potential for

42    mistakes, and I guess you can count that as another reason that I back a lot of the

43    Kickstarters, to follow along the process, to see what works, what hasn't worked, when

44    people make mistakes. I try to learn my lessons about mistakes before I make them myself.

45    **Interviewer:** Okay. Do you think that the emergence of crowdfunding has changed the field

46    of tabletop games?

47    **Respondent:** Oh, absolutely! There are so many games that wouldn't have been produced

48    without it, as well as just enabling people to get their publishing companies off the ground to

49    where they can reach a point where they produce new games without crowdfunding, like you

50    see some of them do. And just the exposure to the industry in general that crowdfunding is

51    creating, which is creating a larger demand for what we call the cult of the new, you know,

52    everyone wants to know what is new, different and hot. This has created a hunger in the

53    industry for more and more stuff. Back in the day, you had to gather all the money, like

54    $20,000, have your 2,000 pieces produced, dump it on the market and then pray to God that

55    someone would buy it. Now you can gather an audience before producing, and the risk is

56    lower. I also think that if you went by the old, traditional way, where you pay upfront, put it

57    out, see what works and sells, you'll be limited in terms of the amount of titles you can afford

58    to front the money for, versus the crowdfunding, where you pre-sell it, and if it moves

59    enough to cover enough units to go to retail, you can keep making it happen. I think it has

60    helped to focus the money and allow people to do stuff that they maybe weren't able to do

61    before. There are many games that wouldn't have been made without crowdfunding, because

62    they would have too niche of a theme, and I think that Kickstarter has created a community

63    for that, and if they get enough people, it will make it out there. I've backed many projects I

64    know wouldn't have made it to retail. They won't do second runs, and maybe they did 1,500

65    copies in total, and once they're gone, they're gone, because it wasn't a hit. But then there are

66    other ones that make it to retail the same time you receive it as a backer.

67    **Interviewer:** Alright. As an experienced backer, what would you tell a new, unexperienced

68    backer who is about back his or her first project?

69    **Respondent:** To do their research. That's the big one. Having experienced all elements of the

70    spectrum of crowdfunding, such as delivery, reliability, whether people get their stuff

71    together or not… I mean, you're not buying a product when you back, and I think you have

72    to understand that you are making a bit of a gamble. You can hedge that by seeing whether

73    creators have delivered projects before or if they are first-timers, if it looks like their product

74    is finished and polished, if you can see that they've put their effort and soul into it. Stuff like

75    that. I mean, I will back first-time creators as well as experienced creators. For somebody

76    new to backing, they need to understand what they're getting into. At first, it may look like a

77    product catalogue, like Amazon, where you just pick a product, but then when delivery is

78    delayed half a year or a year and things don't work out as they should, they will panic and

79    freak out about being robbed. But that's not how it works. These things are just unforeseen

80    circumstances. These creators are typically starting a business, and they're typically relying

81    on overseas manufacturing, and quality and control, all these things that they don't expect

82    can go wrong. Somebody new can be turned off if they don't know what they're getting into.

83    **Interviewer:** Okay. You mentioned earlier that you also buy retail games. How does being a

84    backer differ from being a regular, traditional consumer?

85    **Respondent:** I will get a few retail games every quarter of a year. But in retail I don't do the

86    same volumes and I'm less inclined to gamble. On Kickstarter, I feel like I'm supporting

87    somebody doing their own thing, so I'm willing to take a bit more risk there. In retail, I do

88    more research, like watch more videos and so. But you know, being a regular consumer in

89    retail is really just seeing a finished product that's out there, what people have said about it

90    and then buying it to add it to the collection and have the experience. Being a backer, you get

91    to go along on the journey, sometimes you'll have creative input in it, sometimes creators

92    will listen to that. It depends on how polished they are. But with crowdfunding, you generally

93    get to become part of something new launching from the very start of it. And with the

94    Kickstarter games that eventually hit retail, you get to see these way before they do so. It's

95    the experience of being part of an initial creation. I probably have my name in 60 or 70 rule

96    books, because I've pledged at a certain level, where if you pledge at that level, the creators

97    will include your name in the back of the book.

98    **Interviewer:** So you say that as a backer, you can have creative input into the project?

99   **Respondent:** Yes.

100  **Interviewer:** Could you elaborate on that?

101  **Respondent:** Sometimes, I've done stuff like proofreading rulebooks, making sure that

102  everything is clear, where creators feel that they're done with the rulebooks, and they will put

103  them out there and ask for comments and feedback. Sometimes, creators will also have polls

104  that backers can vote in, and they'll have questions that they'll ask the backers, for instance if

105  they're considering including something new in the game. It could be a new race in a fantasy

106  game or something, where they want to know which one backers would vote for. So as a

107  backer, you can do that type of thing. Some projects also allow you pledge at higher tiers,

108  where, if you pledge to those, you'll get to put your personal stamp on the game. It's not that

109  often that I will back at those levels, but it's interesting to see how the creators will then, for

110  instance, sell off ten game character names or so, where the backer gets to decide its name,

111  look or so. In general, it's about being able to have an open communication, and a lot of the

112  projects are in a flexible state when they launch, where the creators are still willing to take in

113  some input. For instance, backers can tell creators that their iconography is way too hard to

114  see, and they may go back to the drawing board with their art, things like that which you can

115  contribute to.

116  **Interviewer:** So creators are open to take in backer input?

117  **Respondent:** Well, some of them are so married to their project that everything is perfect in

118  their eyes and they won't even reply to feedback. But others think it's great and very

119  welcoming to inputs and feedback. It's like hit or miss, you won't know until you see the

120  project. Often you can look at their history and to if they've done other projects and how

121  open they were there, and a lot of the times, they'll write in their campaign page whether

122  they're open to input. So some are like a journey, whereas others are like, "okay, this is all

123  done, and we don't really want to hear anything about how you would want to see it

124  different!". There's no way to guarantee that you'll have an input, but over time, you see the

125  same creators doing stuff, and you learn how they work.

126  **Interviewer:** Okay.

127  **Respondent:** Usually, the earlier the creators are, like if they're newer creators in their first

128  projects, they're typically more receptive to backer input, simply because they want to ensure

129  that they're crowd-pleasing, because they're usually scrambling to get as many backers as

130  possible at that point. They usually don't have an audience of their own already, so they

131  become crowd-pleasers, and they'll take in more input. That can be dangerous too. I've seen

132  projects where the creators get too much feedback and allow too much input, like for

133    instance, a game where they were going to do caricatures for the characters, where if backers

134    backed at a certain tier, they could get their face on these characters. But they mismanaged it,

135    the backers didn't reply in time with their photos, so it couldn't go to art, which ended up

136    delaying it. So it's typically early on. Once the creators have done several projects, they've

137    gone through a real development cycle, and they maybe start doing testing at cons, they may

138    generally become less inclined and open to backer feedback on their projects. But it comes

139    down to the creators personality, depending on whether they have a project they want to

140    come to life or simply a product they sell by pre-order.

141    **Interviewer:** You mentioned certain Facebook groups earlier. Are you active in any

142    communities related to tabletop games?

143    **Respondent:** Yes! So I moderate the two community forums that I mentioned earlier. I

144    joined them early, around the same time I really got into game design as a hobby, 2013 or

145    2014. An within six months of participating, I was asked to join the moderation team, there's

146    like four or five of us in each group. We're trying to regulate these forums and keep them

147    topically relevant. Like, super regulated… Like, no promotions, only question and answer

148    format. And a lot of banning, blocking, deleting and redirecting people to where they should

149    post, like if their post belongs in another forum. So I'm really active in that space. I also go to

150    a lot of conventions, pretty much anything I can drive to within six and eight hours. I've met

151    a lot of publishers, I'm friends with a lot of designers. We go to conferences together and

152    hangout, playing prototypes. So I'm really involved in that side of it, and people know my

153    name even though I haven't published any games myself yet.

154    **Interviewer:** Why do you participate in these communities?

155    **Respondent:** It's my hobby. People golf, play sports, collect movies or whatever they do.

156    Board games and board game design is a creative hobby for me. I grew up to become a

157    software developer, where I self-taught myself from my teens until now. Now I run my

158    company, and it's just that part of my brain enjoying the logic and problem-solving elements

159    of software that translate really well into analogue board games. So I get to flex that side of

160    my brain outside work as well.

161    **Interviewer:** Alright. In these communities, which activities do you typically engage in?

162    **Respondent:** Moderating these community groups and answering questions. You know, I've

163    been an entrepreneur since I was 19, and I'm 39 now, so I have a ton of business experience,

164    and in a lot of these scenarios, especially with Kickstarter creators, most of these game

165    designers are first-time creators. They don't realise that they are starting a business, which

166    comes with taxes, liability and all the logistics of running a business. All they wanted to do is

167  make their game. So I tend to be able to contribute a lot to these communities with business

168  experience and help people, who are really just creative people, to understand some of the

169  pitfalls of running a small business. I participate a lot there, and then, as said, I also go to

170  conventions, where I equally give feedback, participate, answer questions and so. Generally, I

171  try to point other people in the right direction.

172  **Interviewer:** What do you gain as a backer from such activities?

173  **Respondent:** Hopefully, there's some karma built up there. So eventually, I will launch the

174  crowdfunding campaign for my game, and then I can maybe call on the 300 guys whose

175  games I've backed to back mine. Especially if I've met them in person at conventions. So

176  building up karma. But it's like any business actually, like, who you know, networking and

177  showing support. I get a game out of it, and I'm also embedding myself in the space. In

178  relation to publishing my own game, I'm not delusional, like, I know I won't make the new

179  Monopoly. I would do it for the hobby aspect of making the game. And you can't learn too

180  much, and through participating, I learn so much and I meet new people. At the end of the

181  day, it's all about being part of that community. When you're backing so much as I do,

182  people tend to recognise that and they follow me on Kickstarter, and people will start backing

183  projects because I do.

184  **Interviewer:** Okay. Which communities and platforms do backers in the field of tabletop

185  games use most often?

186  **Respondent:** I primarily use Facebook. A lot of people use Twitter for a lot of

187  communication. Reddit has a really big tabletop games community with Kickstarter forums

188  and design forums. You obviously also have the classic forum of BoardGameGeek. But I

189  participate mostly on Facebook. It's tough to manage 14 different sources of information.

190  **Interviewer:** Is there a reason that you prefer Facebook?

191  **Respondent:** The way that the conversational thread is, the visual and social element of it.

192  You know, Reddit is typically more like the old classic text message forum, where Facebook

193  has more media interactivity, like videos embeds and pictures. I never really got into Twitter.

194  I'm sure it's good and so, but it's less threaded, and I just think that Facebook organises the

195  communications and multimedia capabilities in the best way to get the most out of it. I'll

196  occasionally use Reddit, but that's more once in a while. But Facebook is all day, every day.

197  I'm approving and declining members to the forums ten times a day, and we have to review

198  reports from members. And of course I participate in the forum itself, commenting, posting

199  and so. So it's a lot of work in that one space, and I don't want to add more.

200  **Interviewer:** Okay.

201    **Respondent:** You'll often find really good stuff in these communities on how to go about in

202    the industry. For instance, the other day, there was a conversation on prototyping, like, best

203    prototype materials. And once you enter the conversation, you keep reading and replying, so

204    it can be a rabbit hole.

205    **Interviewer:** Alright. So you've already touched upon this. Do you ever do anything actively

206    to help creators?

207    **Respondent:** I definitely give feedback. I've often written full, long private message to

208    creators. Like, if I see that they've made tons of mistakes on their page and I know that

209    there's no possibility that they're going to fund, I will typically write to them individually

210    and point them towards the forums where they really should go. Loads of creators don't

211    realise what it takes, so they pop up, put something together relatively quickly and launch

212    their crowdfunding campaign, without having ever participated in any of the Facebook

213    groups. I was the same way when I first started, thinking that I could simply make a game

214    and put it on Kickstarter. But it was only after six, eight months of just watching what was

215    going on in these forums and reading, and realising how dumb really was, I mean, wow, there

216    is way more to it than it appears to. I mean, you'll see creators launching a campaign with a

217    $300,000 goal, which is ridiculous, and you can just see that they have no idea of how it

218    works. It's their first project ever and they have a $300,000 goal, because they think it's

219    going to be a million dollar game, but they haven't done any of the legwork ahead of time. So

220    I'm trying to give creators advice, telling them to slow down and take a step back, like shelf

221    this for six months and just participate in these communities. It's just such a tightknit

222    community at the industry level that if you spend six or eight months participating, you can

223    really change your thing from a campaign that failed miserably to a great success, just by

224    getting connected, sharing and participating in the community.

225    **Interviewer:** Okay.

226    **Respondent:** I don't give feedback on things I don't know anything about. Like, I have never

227    produced and shipped from China, but I have talked to enough people who have, so then I

228    will share and connect them. But I'm not going to go in myself and tell them which

229    manufacturer to use and how to do this type of stuff. Stuff that I have directly experienced, I

230    share, and stuff that I have heard or learned from moderating, or know the right people, I will

231    tell those with the question who they can talk to. There are people who pretend to know what

232    they're talking about, though they don't, but I don't do that. I especially try to avoid legal and

233    financial advice, like taxes. I will share my experiences when it comes to contracts and so,

234    but I don't pretend to be an attorney or an accountant, I don't tell them what to pay in taxes.

235    If I give feedback on this, I make it very clear that I'm not a lawyer, and then I tell what I did.

236    **Interviewer:** Alright.

237    **Respondent:** But I will always give honest feedback. I mean, if you don't want honest

238    feedback upfront, what's that going to mean when your game is produced and there's no way

239    to change it? At that point, you're locked and can't change it, because you've produced 2,500

240    physical units, and they're out there. They've all been shipped out, and now you found a

241    fundamental thing that you never thought about. So I'm honest and direct, but I'm not

242    condescending or saying that creators are stupid if they don't do a certain thing. But I give

243    my honest opinion, having played 1,000 games and having backed one third of those. I offer

244    them my experiences. If somebody doesn't want to hear that and bury their head in the sand,

245    that's fine, but that's usually also the point where I will stop even attempting to give them

246    advice. Sometimes, you can just feel that a given creator is not receptive to your feedback

247    and try to defend every decision they've made, not wanting to hear my opinion. But that's

248    fine, then I'll just stop responding. But if you are sitting in a playtest session or if it's online,

249    the creators should at least accept the feedback, listen and take in these things. Because

250    there's always something. Because if you're not willing to accept any feedback and opinions,

251    you probably shouldn't be in a space like this.

252    **Interviewer:** Alright. When you give feedback to creators, do you do so by own incentive or

253    invitation from the creators?

254    **Respondent:** Both. You know, I'll get private messages on Facebook from creators all the

255    time, asking, "hey, I see you've done a ton of backing, what do you think about this?". Or I'll

256    just catch it and do it. I'll give feedback if it seems like they need it, like if I see that they're

257    making a critical mistake with their project that I might have seen a hundred times before,

258    letting them know that they might want to do something about that. So it's a mix of both.

259    **Interviewer:** We already talked a bit about this, but why do you offer creators feedback?

260    **Respondent:** As said, I've been an entrepreneur since 19, so I'm looking at that. This is a

261    business, and I see these guys trying to do their business, starting it. It's the same I do in my

262    actual software company. I lecture at colleges for business classes and start-ups. I get nothing

263    out of it. I don't know, I guess it's just in my nature to generally want people to be better at

264    stuff that I feel I have experience in and can contribute to. I know things they can relate to,

265    like pitching, speaking in public, presentation, digital marketing campaigns and website

266    development, and my company has 1,500 customers, so I've seen a lot of the pitfalls in how

267  you message and present yourself, so I can give a ton of feedback in that area. Helping people

268  succeed.

269  **Interviewer:** How do you feel about sharing your expertise for free?

270  **Respondent:** I'm a firm believer in a philosophy I found when I started this company 13

271  years ago, when I joined this networking group where business owners or representatives

272  went in to pitch referrals to each other. It's called givers gain, and it makes a lot of sense,

273  because basically when you offer advice, you tend to get a return that is tenfold. When

274  somebody is given something, they tend to be more likely to give something back. So by

275  planting seeds and giving, you don't go out with the expectation of getting anything back, but

276  it often just happens. You can call it karma or whatever you want, but the basic idea is that

277  you give stuff out freely and it returns to you, not always, but probably at least half of the

278  times. So I like to share the information that I have, and when I then when I need to rally and

279  call for help and support, there are enough people that will be there for me. I enjoy giving out

280  information, and I enjoy people learning something new that I can teach them.

281  **Interviewer:** Have you ever felt reluctant to help a creator?

282  **Respondent:** A couple of times. I mean, sometimes we have to block people in the forums,

283  because they just try to promote themselves. These forums are meant to get help and ask

284  questions, but sometimes, creators disguise promotion as a question. But also people who are

285  not honest, not open or just extremely rude to others. You'll have people joining the forums,

286  immediately asking other members to review their crowdfunding project and campaign. In

287  these forums, you'll have certain members who are really active and experienced, and these

288  new creators have no clue who they're actually talking to. These creators get advice from

289  someone who's extremely seasoned, both backers and creators, and these new creators then

290  start tearing them down in the comments and responses. I won't help people like that,

291  because they don't even know who they're dealing with. These seasoned members are giving

292  advice from experience, and some new guys just treat them like a 15-year-old high school

293  kid.

294  **Interviewer:** Okay. As a backer, do you expect to have an influence on the products that you

295  back?

296  **Respondent:** A bit like I said earlier, I don't expect to. I don't go into it expecting to, but it's

297  nice when I can. I back a lot, and Kickstarter's update system is horrible when it comes to

298  that, because I'm just flooded daily with continuous updates. That's because I back so much.

299  And it's not just from the active projects, as all the old ones are also sending out updates.

300  There are times where I'll get 30 or 40 emails from Kickstarter every day with updates from

301  projects, so sometimes you're just overwhelmed, and that makes me not want to participate.

302  Sometimes I'll be like, "oh, the game is what it is, and I'll get it". So I don't go in expecting

303  to have an influence, but it's nice when I can, and when the creators ask for it and allow you

304  to. Some backers do go into crowdfunding thinking that it's like retail, like buying a product,

305  whereas other people go the far other way, thinking that it's a 100 per cent collaborative

306  community and that everyone is supposed to mashup an idea together and make it come to

307  life. Those are the extreme ends of the crowdfunding spectrum. Retail, ready and done, on

308  one end and a completely crowdfunded and designed project, open to all inputs around

309  everything, on the other. A lot of projects fall somewhere in the middle. Doing so much

310  backing, I've come to accept that some do, some don't.

311  **Interviewer:** Okay. Do you think that all community members are equally influential to

312  creators?

313  **Respondent:** No. No. I would definitely say no. There's definitely a consumer-backer

314  mentality of people who are really just there to participate in the funding and getting the

315  particular game early. There's obviously also industry people who've been around for a long

316  time, had a lot of success or had multiple projects fund, and those are people you'll probably

317  want to listen more to than just somebody who's looking for a party game and who has only

318  backed four projects over the last four years. Not all backers are creative equally, even

319  though sometimes they want to feel that way. If you're a creator you should make them feel

320  that way.

321  **Interviewer:** Why is that?

322  **Respondent:** Making someone feel heard and considered is extremely valuable to creating

323  raving fans that positively mention or even proactively promote your brand. Bluntly

324  dismissing their feedback risks leaving a spiteful taste in their mouth. The next convention

325  they are at, or social media conversation, they may paint you in a negative light as rigid or

326  dismissive or worse. You catch more flies with honey than vinegar. If you are well

327  established and confident that you have the social credibility to dismiss folks, you can do so.

328  But it doesn't really get you anything better, and depending on who you dismissed, it could

329  become a loud negative force when you are in the middle of a campaign, and you never want

330  to hit a road bump of momentum. So you should make all backers feel that they are just as

331  equal as those experienced guys, but then when you're offline, you can weigh the actual input

332  as you want. So I wouldn't tell them in an open Kickstarter comment thread, "wow, that's a

333  great idea, we'll put that in the game!", but just tell them it's a good idea and that you'll bring

334 it back and add to the list of the team as we consider different options. I mean, then you're

335 not invalidating their feedback, but you also know that it's probably not legitimate.

336 **Interviewer:** So you think that creators listen more to what you referred to earlier as the

337 seasoned backers?

338 **Respondent:** I would definitely say so. If they themselves are participating in a learning

339 experience, if they're new and have never really done it before and amateur in the field, they

340 may take all feedback equally. But then you may end up with a disaster.

341 **Interviewer:** Why is that?

342 **Respondent:** Because you're going to have a lot of bad input, and if you don't know how to

343 filter it based on experience and where the input is coming from… One backer will come and

344 say, "we need to add more of this!", and the next backer will come and say, "we need to take

345 out more of that", and before you know it, it's not even the project that you had, it's not even

346 the game that you had. If you react to everything that is said equally, you can very easily be

347 steered into a corner, where you've promised everyone everything, but you can't do all of it,

348 and now you have half the people annoyed. It's like that with any business you start. You can

349 very easily become distracted by all the shiny objects all over the place and lose focus. You

350 ruin it before you even get going.

351 **Interviewer:** Okay. Do you think that the number of backers voicing a given opinion makes

352 a difference in whether creators are influenced?

353 **Respondent:** I would assume so. It depends on their reasoning and origination, like what

354 their reasoning is. Like, if you have a card game with all male characters, but it really should

355 have mix of genders in there, and you got your whole backer audience saying that they don't

356 understand why half of these characters aren't female, and you're then like, "nope, it's an all

357 guy character game!", the crowd can get rallied up behind that, and you really probably

358 should listen. Even though they don't have any industry advice for you, if all your backers

359 are saying that your game is too male dominated and it shouldn't be, there's no reason that

360 you shouldn't listen. I mean, if you have a business game with CEO cards, and all the CEOs

361 are men, and the majority of your backers voice that half of them should be female, there's

362 not really a reason why they can't be. You might have one person saying it, but if there's a

363 crowd behind it, you're probably going to want to please the crowd. I mean, you are

364 crowdfunding after all.

365 **Interviewer:** Would a crowd like that be more influential than the seasoned backers you

366 referred to earlier?

367   **Respondent:** I think it depends on what your goals are with your project in general. I mean,

368   are you trying to make something that sells a lot to a lot of people? If that's really the goal,

369   then you're probably going to be more influenced by the volume of the crowd. You can call

370   that quantity over quality. On the other hand, if you want to have a really polished product

371   that may not appeal to as many, I mean, you still have to have mass appeal, but sometimes

372   you have to be willing to sacrifice a loud, verbal, anonymous crowd, and instead listen to a

373   handful of really good advice from experienced, seasoned people. Some people are creating

374   their project out of passion and trying to start a publishing company with multiple titles and

375   mass appeal, so they may be more influenced by the crowd's opinions. But I think that over

376   time, after a couple of projects, you start to realise that the same anonymous people say the

377   same anonymous things every time, and that you shouldn't weigh them as heavily as the

378   more experienced people.

379   **Interviewer:** Alright.

380   **Respondent:** As I just said, you can speak about quantity over quality. So your seasoned

381   backers are probably going to give you more quality advice on your whole thing, like your

382   campaign itself, the product itself, the more technical things. The others are giving more of

383   just a public opinion, and a lot of times that mob mentality will kick in, so if the comment

384   threads start, they start playing off with each other. I also think that your more seasoned

385   backers are going to give you more objective feedback that isn't necessarily tied to a mob

386   emotion. Because you do see some campaign walls, like the comments section, go

387   completely off the rails. I've seen projects cancelled, because the comments section had just

388   gone wildly off, off topic, and then they get it going to the point where you start to see the

389   backer counts drops. Usually, they'll start with a hot-button thing, like character races or

390   genders or some sort of misogynistic attitudes, and you may not be able to recover without

391   refactoring your whole product line, and so, just letting the campaign run can create trolls.

392   But as said, early on, creators tend to be initially swayed more by how the crowd feedback is

393   going, and then hopefully they learn over time what is just emotional group think versus

394   quality.

395   **Interviewer:** Okay. What happens if a creator does not listen to the backer, you know, the

396   community and its inputs?

397   **Respondent:** Obviously, it's crowdfunding, so the worst case scenario is that you don't

398   crowdfund. You fail, your funding halts. If people are not going to buy it, they're not going to

399   buy it. I think that's part of being receptive to feedback and listening. At the end of the day,

400   your indicator is how many people are backing, and how many people are sharing and getting

401   more backers to join in, how many people are talking about it on social media. That type of

402   thing. And if you're either negatively responding to your crowd, or worse, not

403   communicating at all… One of the worst things you can do as a creator is not communicate. I

404   mean, I'm on Kickstarter all the time, and if you're a creator, you have a project, maybe two,

405   though I'd never recommend running two at once… But you have one project running and

406   maybe a history of a couple of projects. It takes two seconds to go to your comments wall and

407   let your backers know that you are here and listening. Not communicating with your backers

408   is the number one killer. Because all it does is let the crowd rally and become really vocal,

409   you know, start threatening with lawsuits and so. I see it all the time, when campaigns run

410   three, six, nine months overdue, it happens, and you can solve 95 per cent of their problems

411   by just talking to them and just saying something about it. If you don't listen, you can lose

412   your whole idea, you can lose your whole campaign, you won't fund to begin with, and if

413   you've already funded, you're risking lawsuits and refunds.

414   **Interviewer:** Okay.

415   **Respondent:** Backers are powerful. You know, most of the time, they're not really getting a

416   sweet deal on the product. You can pitch it like it is, but I've backed enough now to know

417   that nine out of ten times, if you want the game, you can probably get it cheaper in retail after

418   a year. You may not get the special promos or add-ons from the campaign. What I'm saying

419   is that backers don't get a special price, and if you're participating in crowdfunding as a

420   backer, it's usually because you want to be the first to get it, you want to participate in the

421   process and generally be heard, because you're throwing money after something, most

422   probably more than you'd pay in retail later. So if creators don't listen and understand why

423   backers are backing, they can get sunk, because more and more people will jump off and wait

424   for retail. You need to keep your backers happy, otherwise your project will never succeed.

425   **Interviewer:** Alright. I actually think that that was all I had. Is there anything you would like

426   to add or ask before we end this interview?

427   **Respondent:** At the end of the day, if you would start a traditional business or run any kind

428   of company, all of the customers you're selling to… I mean, try to swap out backers for

429   customers, because that's really what they are, but they're buying your product before it's

430   really a product. But if you don't listen to your customers in business, you're going to fail.

431   You can say that you have the best idea in the world, but if none of your customers want it

432   and they're vocal about it and you don't listen and either somehow quell their fears or try to

433   satisfy them, it's dangerous. I mean, they may be saying things, where they don't really know

434   what they want. I see that all of the time with my own company, where my customers don't

435   know what they want until they see what they're getting. We're half way through the process

436   of developing their website before they even know what they want on their website. So

437   backers can be the same way. The difference is that versus a traditional business where

438   you're selling this and able to hear from individual customers and get feedback, and change

439   your products, Kickstarter and crowdfunding is an open book, and it's all done in public, it's

440   all done on social media, it's all done on comment threats among everybody. So you're

441   actually running a traditional business, but then naked, I mean, everything is out there. So if

442   you're hesitant or afraid of that, you probably haven't run a business before. If you're afraid

443   of that, perhaps crowdfunding isn't for you. If my customers are getting loud and rowdy, I

444   mean, you have all these places like Yelp, Google Reviews, where traditional customers can

445   voice their opinions, and they tend to be more negative. Happy customers tend to not put up

446   reviews as much as people who have a bad experience. But in crowdfunding, you haven't

447   really started your business yet, and you're still in the early phases of it, so if you're going to

448   be worried that your product is going to raise that kind of problems for you, I don't really

449   know if you should do it. In tabletop games, if you can't handle it, you may want to talk to a

450   publisher, take a percentage and let them handle it, because they understand how to manage

451   customers and so. So I think of crowdfunding as a naked start-up. You're putting yourself out

452   there, and if you're not ready to hear what people think of your idea or product, your

453   business, should you really be doing it? Because if you're trying to do it with your door

454   closed, people will be saying the same thing, but they don't say it on a comment thread in

455   front of 1,500 other customers, who can then rally off. In a traditional business, you'll have a

456   conversation with that individual customer, and then you can change your process, policy or

457   project quietly. But in crowdfunding, backers communicate more with each other and are

458   able to get behind each other and start rallying together. In crowdfunding, one comment or

459   idea may spur 20 offshoots that are not good, and you have to be ready for that.

460   **Interviewer:** Okay.

461   **Respondent:** You really need to listen to your backers. They're your customers. They're

462   your earliest customers. They're your beta customers. They're going to validate your idea to

463   the masses. In typical business, you've got your early adopters, your late adopters. Backers

464   are your early people, who are willing to put money down with no guarantee, with no

465   products, sight unseen, I mean, these are the earliest guys. They're like the people who queue

466   at the Apple store for two weeks to get the new iPhone, just so they can say that they had it

467   first. And if you're not willing to listen to them, then when it comes to the masses, you're

468   probably going to have a much worse time, because it's probably going to get way louder.

469    Once it gets out to retail and you find out that no one wants to buy your product… If the early

470    adopters are shooting it down, there's probably a problem.

471    **Interviewer:** Okay.

472    **Respondent:** And as for what we talked about earlier, the influence of the crowd versus

473    seasoned backers, you can also think of it terms of classic business. I mean, here you also

474    have consultants that you typically hire or bring in that are very experienced in their area, like

475    sales, HR or marketing, and those are people that you're going to bring in and really listen to

476    in relation to those particular areas. And then you have your customers who will also have an

477    opinion, and they may counter what the experts say, and you will have to balance it. In

478    crowdfunding, you're doing it in the wide open, so you have to have thick skin, and you have

479    to be generally ready to understand that people are going to be very easy to voice their

480    opinion. It's all online. They're voting with their money, but again like in classic business, it

481    the same thing a customer does. The difference is that you usually already have something to

482    sell them in a regular business. So if you can't get backers to buy a product sight unseen, you

483    might be in a tough place. But I think it works really well for filtering, I mean, if something is

484    not going to crowdfund, it probably shouldn't exist.

485    **Interviewer:** Okay. Anything else you would like to add or ask?

486    **Respondent:** No, I think that's all.

## 9.5 Appendix E – Interview with Respondent 3 (R3)

1  **Interviewer:** How did you get into crowdfunding?

2  **Respondent:** Basically, I'm a playing cards collector, and I had heard about crowdfunding

3  before, but never in the world of playing cards. So when I discovered it, I started helping

4  people fund their decks, and that's how it all started.

5  **Interviewer:** When did you start collecting?

6  **Respondent:** In 2012.

7  **Interviewer:** And is that the same time you started using crowdfunding?

8  **Respondent:** No, that was a little bit later, in 2014.

9  **Interviewer:** Alright. How many crowdfunding projects have you backed in total?

10  **Respondent:** Around 270. And I would say that 99 per cent of those have been on

11  Kickstarter. I mainly know Kickstarter. Of other platforms, I only know two or three by

12  name. I was only a small collector before I discovered crowdfunding, and Kickstarter really

13  helped me to grow my collection.

14  **Interviewer:** Okay. Do you think that the emergence of crowdfunding has changed the field

15  of custom playing cards?

16  **Respondent:** Oh, for sure! For sure!

17  **Interviewer:** How?

18  **Respondent:** I think the collectors of playing cards started to see that crowdfunding would

19  help them to create more, new projects. You know, projects that would otherwise only exist

20  in their mind. Only big companies could produce decks of playing cards, like four or five

21  manufacturers, and Kickstarter has enabled more people to make the ideas they had in their

22  minds come to life. Before crowdfunding, people couldn't just go out and produce a deck of

23  playing cards, because they simply didn't have the money it took to print them. So their

24  dreams as a designer or collector to create became possible with crowdfunding. It has

25  changed the life for both those wanting to create and those who collect. Those who are

26  designers and creators in the community are often collectors as well, so I can really relate to

27  them and understand what they are trying to do. Crowdfunding is an amazing way to help

28  them, and, at the same time, by helping them, I obtain more decks to my collection, so it's a

29  win-win situation.

30  **Interviewer:** Alright. So you say that many creators are also collectors. Have you ever been

31  a creator of a project?

32   **Respondent:** No. I don't have enough time to do that. I have the same dream as they have,

33   but I don't have enough time.

34   **Interviewer:** Okay. As an experienced backer, what would you tell a new, unexperienced

35   backer who is about back his or her first project?

36   **Respondent:** That's a good question… Uhm… The big majority of projects are good

37   projects, but what I would tell someone starting to back is that they should start by pledging

38   to projects by creators who are already known in the community. If it's a new creator's first

39   project, and it's the first time you're backing, you have to be a bit more aware. Because we

40   have seen projects that were frauds with the only goal of taking money from backers, so we

41   do have to be a bit careful with new creators or someone who is not known in the community.

42   **Interviewer:** Have you ever experienced this yourself?

43   **Respondent:** Yes, maybe four or five times. But that was mainly in the beginning. When

44   time passes by, you learn. And as said, most projects are good. Most creators have good

45   intentions. But as a new backer, you have to be careful, because you don't necessarily see

46   these things. Kickstarter is a good platform, but they don't protect the backer from fraud, so it

47   can be risky.

48   **Interviewer:** Alright. How does being a backer differ from being a regular, traditional

49   consumer?

50   **Respondent:** Well, I do go to the store and buy regular Bicycle Playing Cards as well. But

51   the traditional consumer, who wants to go to the store and touch the deck of playing cards,

52   they know what they are going to find in that store. In crowdfunding, you'll find all-new

53   projects, things that don't exist yet. So I think that the main difference is that in

54   crowdfunding, we as backers, as consumers, are part of the projects. Our pledges will help to

55   fund that project. So that project exists and is successful thanks to us. I like to be involved, I

56   like to feel that I was involved in creating something. That's the big difference. If you buy

57   something in the store, it's already made and already there. You just buy it.

58   **Interviewer:** Okay. So you say that you like to be involved. Could you elaborate on that?

59   **Respondent:** Basically, I help to fund the project. If there were no backers, the project

60   wouldn't be funded. That's the first thing. The second thing is that when someone creates a

61   project, usually they are very open to suggestions and opinions, so they respect the people,

62   the backers, who are trying to help them. In far most cases, we can exchange ideas during the

63   campaign of the project. I think those are the two main reasons. We can help the creators with

64   ideas, suggestions, opinions and so, and we can also help them with money, helping them to

65   fund the project. And those two things are also things that you don't see in a regular store.

66    The products found in a regular store are not pre-funded by consumers, but already exist, and

67    consumers here are not at all influencing and involved in the product in the same way.

68    **Interviewer:** Okay. Are you active in any communities related to custom playing cards?

69    **Respondent:** Yes. The main forum that I go to is UnitedCardists. It's a forum that I go to

70    many times per week. I have a lot of friends in the community. I'm also active in lots of

71    pages and groups on Facebook.

72    **Interviewer:** Why do you participate in these communities?

73    **Respondent:** That's a good question… Collecting cards can be strange to most people. When

74    I tell people that I collect decks of playing cards, they're like, "what?!" or "they're just card

75    to play with!", so it's strange to them. Outside the community, people don't have awareness

76    of the sheer quantity of projects and the art that some decks have in the cards themselves or

77    the tuckbox. They don't understand why I don't open my decks and keep them closed, why I

78    want them when I don't play with them. But it's a piece of art. So I think that we all need the

79    support of the community to understand that we are not crazy, or at least not the only crazy

80    people, and that there are other people like ourselves. Other likeminded people who

81    appreciate the art of a simple deck of cards. I think that's the main reason for all communities

82    of people who collect something or are interested in something niche and specific. Like,

83    people who collect Hot Wheels, violins, any one thing in particular… I think they need the

84    support of other people who understand them. It's a lifestyle, a hobby.

85    **Interviewer:** Okay. In these communities that you are part of, which activities do you mainly

86    engage in there?

87    **Respondent:** A lot of trade, buying and selling. I also exchange opinions and ideas on

88    UnitedCardists or in Facebook group with creators of crowdfunding projects and other

89    backers. We can help creators in relation to, for instance, colours, numbers of decks, the back

90    of the cards, all these things. We exchange ideas and opinions about projects. We also help

91    newcomers start their collection, advising them on what to buy first and what they should

92    have in their collections.

93    **Interviewer:** What do you gain as a backer from these activities?

94    **Respondent:** Nothing. Well, when trading, buying and selling, it's quite clear what I gain,

95    you know, new decks. But in helping creators, I don't really get anything as such, at least not

96    in the same way as when trading, buying or selling. But it feels good to help them. In relation

97    to helping newcomers, I'm trying to give them what I didn't get in the beginning myself. I

98    didn't have anyone who told me those things, like, buy these decks, these brands, from this

99      and this creator or the best ways to start my collection. So that's what I try to do. I give them

100     what I would have liked to have myself. It's in the interest of the community.

101     **Interviewer:** Okay. You already went a bit into this, but which communities and platforms

102     do backers in the field of custom playing cards use most often?

103     **Respondent:** That would be UnitedCardists, which is a dedicated forum on a website.

104     There's also a site called PlayingCardForum, but I don't go there that often. I use Facebook a

105     lot, because there are so many groups there. Here, I think the groups called The Card Club

106     and The Playing Card are the most important ones.

107     **Interviewer:** Alright. This next question you also already answered a bit, but I would like to

108     dive a bit deeper into it. Do you ever do anything active to help creators?

109     **Respondent:** Yes. If creators ask the community for help about their projects or campaigns, I

110     can help them. I try to help them. I'll give them feedback on the colour of the cards, the

111     product itself, both the cards and the tuckbox. I can even give advice on the crowdfunding

112     itself, like the division of pledges, you know, if they should offer uncut sheets or special

113     decks as extra rewards for instance. Sometimes you also just have creators crying for help in

114     general, and then I give them my opinion. Often, before they launch their campaign, they

115     might upload their projects and campaign content and just ask what people think in general. I

116     try to help them based on my experience as a backer and collector. And then my personal

117     taste of course also affects what I think.

118     **Interviewer:** Do you feel that the creators are open to listen to you?

119     **Respondent:** Most people in the community are open to feedback. Some listen. The more

120     experienced creators, no. The experienced creators are not very open to listen, because

121     they've already funded, say, 20 projects in the past, so they know what they're doing, they're

122     not just starting, and they don't need to get the community on their side, because it already is.

123     So they are less open. And whereas many creators ask for feedback, quite a few of the

124     experienced creators don't really ask, because they just know it will fund. They've built a

125     reputation and an audience already. I mean, you see their project reaching its goal in two

126     hours, even though the campaign will run for a month. New creators are far more open listen,

127     and they're looking for it far more. These newcomers, the new creators, who want to start

128     here, like their career as a designer or as hobby, it's very different with them. They want to

129     listen to the opinions, because they want to have backers, so their project will be funded.

130     **Interviewer:** Okay. So you say that you help creators who ask for help. Do you ever them by

131     your own incentive, without them asking?

132    **Respondent:** No. I think that when someone wants to listen to the community, they must say

133    that they want to listen. If I give advice because I think a given creator needs it, that creator

134    probably won't be very pleased by that. It can feel provocative in a sense. But I might be

135    different from other backers, because you also have the backers that say something in every

136    project, also when they're not asked. And sometimes, I think they exaggerate so much that

137    they don't respect the project itself. They don't try to understand what the creator wants to

138    do, the taste of the creator and the idea of the creator. I feel that they're sometimes

139    disrespecting the idea. There are backers who don't care and just say everything they think. I

140    try to understand the project, the idea, and respect the creator. I mean, I would never try to

141    fundamentally change the creators project, like, the entire theme for instance.

142    **Interviewer:** Okay. When you help creators, how do you feel about sharing your expertise

143    for free?

144    **Respondent:** I feel good about it. I'm not a collector to make money, I don't have a store, I

145    don't buy decks with the sole purpose of reselling. I'm a private collector, and I try to get

146    decks for me. So I don't care if I give my opinion for free. I just want to help them to realise

147    their dreams and me to get another deck. I get something out of it myself. If I'm helping the

148    community, I'm helping to build the community and increase its quality. So I'm also gaining

149    something because I'm there, I'm in that community, I'm part of that community.

150    **Interviewer:** Have you ever felt reluctant to help a creator?

151    **Respondent:** No, I don't think so. I don't remember at least.

152    **Interviewer:** Alright. As a backer, do you expect to have an influence on the products you

153    back?

154    **Respondent:** No. I know that my part is to give them some money so they can realise the

155    project. If they want anything else, I'm here to help them and the community. If not, I'm

156    okay with that. I give them money, they give me the result of the project, so it's a win-win.

157    And if I don't like a certain project or creator, I just simply choose not to back. In the

158    beginning, when I started crowdfunding, I would back anything, I would pledge to any deck

159    of playing cards. But not anymore. I've grown as a collector to be more critical, so I'm more

160    selective with my backing now.

161    **Interviewer:** Okay. Do you think that all community members are equally influential to

162    creators?

163    **Respondent:** No, no, no. There are certain voices in the community that have more power

164    than others. They have a lot of followers, they've been around for a long time, they know the

165    other older members, so they have that advantage. And creators really listen to them. They

166   are involved in a different way, like, they make reviews, they talk to creators. So there are

167   voices inside the community that are heard more and in a different way. My voice is like any

168   other backer's, like, a small one, even though I back a lot. I mean, I may be heard more than

169   an all-new backer, but these members are on a different level than me. But that's okay with

170   me. As I said, I don't have that much time. It's a hobby to me, but if you want to be in those

171   levels, you have to dedicate a lot of time to it.

172   **Interviewer:** Okay. Do you think that the number of backers voicing a given opinion makes

173   a difference in whether creators are influenced?

174   **Respondent:** Yes. I mean, if a creator hears, say, ten people are saying the same thing, I

175   think the creator will listen to them as a group. But if one person comes out to say, like, "I

176   don't like that red colour, make it blue!", the creator won't hear them. If 20 or 100 backers

177   say the same thing, the creator will probably listen, because it's them who are going to fund

178   the project. The backers can withdraw their pledges, so the creator wants to keep them in the

179   project, so they'll listen to the backers. But only one or two backers saying something, I don't

180   believe the creator will listen, because they can't make a project that everyone likes. There

181   will always be people who like a project a lot and some who don't. So one voice is not that

182   influential. Well, it depends of course, because it's different if it's one of those experienced

183   community members we talked about just before. Then it's a bit different. They have more

184   power, and then what they can actually do is to influence the other backers. So in a sense,

185   even though they are just one person, if this is a person with a bigger influence in the

186   community, they can become 20 voices, 100 voices, because a big part of the community will

187   follow them and agree with them, starting to voice the same opinion. And then it will

188   influence the project, and the creator has to listen to them.

189   **Interviewer:** Okay.

190   **Respondent:** So it's two ways to be influential. You can have one very influential voice, or

191   you can have 20 people who have an influential voice together. That's how you can be heard

192   in the community. And even though the very influential members don't need more people to

193   be heard, you'll see that many members join them and their opinions. It can also just be the

194   community together, without that one influential voice. But when you're in a community, it's

195   sometimes easier to follow the members who have power than to think and have other

196   opinions. It's easier to go with them. So when these powerful voices say something, a big

197   part of the community will go, "yes, that's good, you're very right!", because people have

198   fear of having other opinions and going against big voices or the majority of the community.

199   So most members listen to the powerful voices, because they don't want to be different from

200  a big part of the community. They just agree. So in a sense, the opinion of these powerful

201  members, I don't think it always represents what the community thinks. This is not only in

202  crowdfunding. You have influencers, like singers, actors or comedians, on Instagram for all

203  products. Like if a popular person posts a picture of themselves wearing the newest Nike

204  sneakers, that sneaker will go off the shelves immediately. But I don't think that a great part

205  of the community necessarily likes the sneaker, maybe not even the influencer, but they're

206  afraid to be excluded, because all their friends also like them. So it's cool to like them. Even

207  though I may have a different taste or opinion in my head, I like that singer, and it would be

208  stupid not to like them. You just conform. I know it from myself, like, sometimes, I'd rather

209  stay quiet than open my mouth if I know it goes against the popular voice. I mean, I don't get

210  anything out of going against it and it takes too much energy. And you might even get

211  negative reactions. And I think that this is happening too much these days in the community,

212  but also society in general.

213  **Interviewer:** Okay.

214  **Respondent:** So I just said that the more experienced creators will listen less to backers, but

215  they may still listen to certain influential voices in the community, because they know that

216  this voice will bring the rest of the community. So they don't have to worry about 100

217  people, but essentially only two or three. But actually, it may not matter what these voices

218  say, because experienced creators have most often already built a firm and steady fan base. I

219  mean, I think they should listen to the community in general, but I understand that when they

220  get that success formula, it's difficult to let someone say something outside that formula and

221  try to change it and improve it, because you don't have to risk it. So you have the formula,

222  everyone knows you, everyone buys your products, so why change it? There will always be

223  people who say bad things about everything. I mean, if you know it works and you know you

224  have the community with you, then you can just go with it. But I do think that many of these

225  successful creators still listen to the influential community members, maybe not in public, but

226  in private.

227  **Interviewer:** Alright. What happens if a creator does not listen to the community and its

228  inputs?

229  **Respondent:** If it's a big part of the community that the creator doesn't listen to, the project

230  will probably not be funded, and the name of the creator will also stay in the community as a

231  failed one. So it can affect their reputation and future projects. Backers are powerful, because

232  the creator knows that without backers, the project won't be funded, so they want the

233  community to stay with them and help to create and fund the project. The backer is a big part

234    of making it happen. The creators respect the backers. They can of course not do everything

235    that the backers ask for, but I think they respect them and understand the impact that the

236    backers have on the project.

237    **Interviewer:** Okay. I'm all done with my questions. Is there anything you would like to add

238    or ask before we end this interview?

239    **Respondent:** Not really. I think you had some good questions, and I think that this is a really

240    interesting topic. I like this kind of work, like trying to understand the people and the

241    communities in crowdfunding, it's very interesting. But no, I don't have anything else to add.

### 9.6 Appendix F – Interview with Respondent 4 (R4)

1   **Interviewer:** How did you get into crowdfunding?

2   **Respondent:** The answer is quite straight forward. I used to blog, which I still do regularly,

3   about board games, specifically in crowdfunding and on Kickstarter. Before that, I started

4   working as a community organiser and marketing person in a shared co-working space for

5   entrepreneurs, where I threw events, like board game nights every Thursday, which were

6   open to anyone in the area. Eventually, 50 people would show up some weeks. At that point,

7   I started getting well-versed in Kickstarter games, because we would play them at the events.

8   So I get exposed to 20 to 30 new games per week at that point. I then started blogging about

9   the intersection of board games and crowdfunding, and I wanted to show creators that there

10  were a set of best practices to implement in their campaigns. Back then, the bar for

11  campaigns and what could fund was much lower. If you compare now to just two years ago

12  on Kickstarter, it's like night and day in relation to what could fund. Backers used to have

13  lower expectations. Creators have drastically improved their pitch, which has caused backers'

14  expectations to go up for new projects. Back then, you didn't need to have a lot of

15  information or the final artwork, you didn't need to have a video showing how to play, if you

16  were able to just explain it in text. So I created a rubric which I would give campaigns points

17  on each week, when new projects launched. The creators then started to look at that and

18  model their campaigns after it. Then, some really respected people in the community took me

19  under their wings to develop this rubric of what is important in a Kickstarter campaign. I was

20  eventually hired by a games publisher for a marketing position based on my name in the

21  community. Later, I got a job offer from a large Chinese games manufacturer, which I took.

22  At this point, I'm serving as an admin in over 20 different Facebook groups related to

23  crowdfunding and board games, and I still do that. It's one of my favourite things to do,

24  being part of these Facebook communities that are built for various, but quite specific, goals.

25  One day, a person from Kickstarter post in one of the groups that they're starting up this

26  experts programme, asking people to nominate who they would think are a good fit. A lot of

27  people tagged me, knowing that I was doing the thought leadership on the blog. So I became

28  part of Kickstarter's expert programme, and you can now find me on their list on their

29  website. So that launched into the consultation work I also do now.

30  **Interviewer:** Alright. How many projects have you created?

31  **Respondent:** I have collaborated on multiple Kickstarter projects. I'm up to at least 20

32  projects, or even more than that, of campaigns that I have directly collaborated in as a creator.

33  And then if you want to extent that to including the campaigns where I've just gone through

34  campaigns and corrected things for other creators, where I was not collaborating, but helping

35  them as part of my job, then we're around 50 projects in total.

36  **Interviewer:** Alright.

37  **Respondent:** Creators don't always stay on Kickstarter forever. Creators who have five or so

38  successful campaigns, you'll often see that these creators distance themselves from

39  Kickstarter, because they don't depend on it anymore. They've made a name, and they are

40  sure to sell without Kickstarter. But it's also because it gets exponentially harder to manage a

41  project as the number of backers grow, like, when you have 10,000 backers, then you have to

42  fulfil 10,000 rewards individually. Fulfilling 300 is way easier. But you also have a lot of big

43  creators who could publish their games in the traditional way, but they choose to continue

44  doing crowdfunding campaigns, because they get more engagement with their customers and

45  are able to add stretch goals, and because they are able to produce something that wouldn't

46  necessarily do well on its own in retail. And Kickstarter is the best marketing push for a

47  product that you can ever do. Period.

48  **Interviewer:** Why is that?

49  **Respondent:** It's just the biggest marketing splash you can do right now in the board game

50  industry. It proves the concept, because you have enough people who are excited about the

51  project and willing to back the campaign, and they will share it with their friends because

52  they want it to fund. And they're going to continue to be excited and talk about the project as

53  you're manufacturing it. You get this constant recycling of interest on social media and

54  BoardGameGeek, like backers will share in the communities when they get an update on the

55  projects they back. And then they also do it when the game is released, for instance through

56  reviews. So you get this constant marketing of your project. Before, during and after

57  production. You can't achieve the same elsewhere. It's way more than you will get if you just

58  focus of retail.

59  **Interviewer:** Okay. Have you ever backed any projects yourself?

60  **Respondent:** Yes, I've backed roughly 100 projects.

61  **Interviewer:** Alright. Do you think that the emergence of crowdfunding has changed the

62  field of tabletop games?

63  **Respondent:** Yes! The tabletop industry owes a lot of its growth to crowdfunding, it owes a

64  lot to the explosion of Kickstarter. You also see that the big companies are joining in, like

65  Hasbro has recently established its own crowdfunding platform called HasLab, so basically

66  their own version of Kickstarter, because they don't want to pay Kickstarter a fee. But in

67   general, there are like 7,000 game releases, new products, each year, entering the market, and

68   all of them have customers, because otherwise they wouldn't exist. Because the first 300

69   customers were spoken for and able to provide the funds to enable someone to produce the

70   first 1,000 copies of their game. You know, the minimum order quantity is like 1,000 units,

71   so that leaves the creators with 700 units to sell after the campaign. Most campaigns will hit

72   300 backers, I mean, when they are successful, especially first-time creators. The way that

73   board games and the board game market have changed is in the sense that you get a lot of

74   siloing of audiences, and on Kickstarter, you are able to attract different customer-bases, like

75   the niches within the board game community. For instance people who like games with a lot

76   of miniatures. And these people will then expect you to include a lot more miniatures than

77   you've announced. There are backers that, if you have a campaign and start surpassing your

78   funding goal, expect as collectors that creators start to give them more stuff, stretch goals. So

79   these are the exclusives. They don't want them to affect gameplay, but just be flavour pieces.

80   In crowdfunding, this is fine and it can add value to your game. But in traditional publishing,

81   there is no such thing as stretch goals or crowdfunding exclusives. It's just one project that is

82   pre-thought of and made already.

83   **Interviewer:** Okay.

84   **Respondent:** There's a lot of fear of missing out among backers and in the board game

85   community in general. Backers are these completionists, like these early adopter, alpha

86   consumers who want everything associated with this game. You often see deluxe editions on

87   Kickstarter which make the basic edition pale in comparison, so most backers will actually

88   back the deluxe edition. And creators know this. So if the deluxe edition is $75 and the basic

89   is $50, backers don't see it as a $75 expenditure, but as $25 extra to what they were already

90   willing to pay.

91   **Interviewer:** Alright.

92   **Respondent:** Crowdfunding has also changed the field in the sense that for a traditional

93   board games company, consumers don't care that much about the company behind, and they

94   will make their purchase decision based on what they read on the box. Kickstarter has

95   changed that in that backers are looking at the company behind and think, "they've done this

96   before, and I trust them to do well again". So you are following creators, and you are more

97   engaged in the project and its success. And creators grow their own audience, snowballing it,

98   who will follow their journey and keep backing them, helping them fund and grow. In

99   traditional retail, you just put a game on a shelf, and people won't think about who made it

100  and whether they do it well.

101 **Interviewer:** In a sense, it sounds like you think that backers are more critical than regular

102 consumers?

103 **Respondent:** Yes. Absolutely. 100 per cent. They are very critical. These are the people who

104 buy the products early, like beta-testers. These people are always the more savvy consumers.

105 They're going to look at all the reviews and ratings, all the commentary surrounding a project

106 before they give them any money. And crowdfunding is normalising that behaviour, the

107 gamer, alpha consumer behaviour. And I honestly don't know if this is good or bad, because

108 it puts so much emphasis on the creators not to mess up, because if they do, they'll hear about

109 it forever. In traditional publishing, the game publishers could deal with all these things, like

110 messed up fulfilment or print runs, behind the scenes. Now, backers are the first people to

111 receive and quality inspect and control the product, and creators don't know what's wrong

112 until the backers have it in their hands. So the emphasis on creators is very rough right now,

113 and it's hard to do everything right. They can't mess up, and when they do, they have to

114 make it right very publicly. They have to ensure that they get life-long customers that they

115 take care of, and the good thing is that when you do it right, you have a fan base of people

116 who will back you no matter what you do or say. They will protect you. So it's a double-

117 edged sword. If you do it right, you get these very, very diehard fans, but if you mess it up,

118 you're crucified forever.

119 **Interviewer:** Okay. As an experienced creator, what would you tell to a new unexperienced

120 creator, who is about to launch his or her first project?

121 **Respondent:** Start small. You often see that new creators, who have never published a game

122 before, will actually be overconfident in what type of game they think they can fund as a new

123 creator. So you have some creators who will make a giant game, bloated out so much. They

124 didn't need to make it this big at all, but that's what designers sometimes tend to do. They'll

125 just keep designing and overdesign their game. First of all, it makes the game hard to

126 manufacture, but also, you suddenly have a $100 game, which is a lot harder to get backers to

127 back, especially if they have never heard of you before. So what I usually stress to new

128 creators would be that if they're going to make a larger project, they need to spend equal

129 amounts of resources on pre-marketing it. Temper your expectations for what you can

130 actually achieve on the platform as a first-time creator.

131 **Interviewer:** Alright.

132 **Respondent:** First-time creators typically get 300 backers if they are successful. What you

133 actually see often is that creators set a lower funding goal than what they need to cover their

134 costs. For instance, a $15,000 dollar project may be set at a goal of $7,000. The reason for

135    this is that it would take longer to reach $15,000 and make it a proven concept. It's easier to

136    reach $7,000 and then let the bandwagon effect take over. The perception to backers is, "oh,

137    now this project has reached its goal, and therefore, it's a sure thing", so they will start to

138    bandwagon, piling in. Backers are more likely to back a project that has already reached its

139    goal. Because if it hasn't, it's not sure it will, and even if it does, it may only be to a marginal

140    success, meaning that the stretch goals aren't sure either. It's very much a perception game.

141    It's not necessarily healthy for the industry, but I do understand the dynamics of a backer

142    having certain expectations seeing a campaign for the first time.

143    **Interviewer:** Could you tell me about your relationship with your backers?

144    **Respondent:** Generally speaking, they are your number one fans, but also the people who

145    expect the most of you. They think that having given you $100 makes you beholden to them

146    forever, which is true on a reputational standpoint. They actually do have the power over you

147    as a collective entity. You, having gone to Kickstarter in the first place, should understand

148    this dynamic, or you will at least learn it quickly. Because of this dynamic, you have a lot of

149    creators who are doing their best to remain genuine, like, "hey, I'm a person, you are people,

150    and we're all going to go through this together, and at the end of it, there's going to be this

151    cool thing". When people don't have this personable connection to their backers, where you

152    start to get this more corporate feeling, it can become dangerous. Because if the backers start

153    to look at the creator, not as a person who is trying to make this cool thing, but as a large

154    company that has made a lot of money, they expect them to fix everything that is wrong.

155    Like, if a backers pledges $20 to a new game from a smaller, maybe new, creator, they know

156    that the game might have certain things they didn't expect, it might have hiccups, but they do

157    like the game, so they'll back it anyway. But if they back a game from a large, established

158    publishing company, and make a larger pledge, the backers perceive the company as having a

159    lot of money to blow, and they expect that they have an entire staff dedicated to their every

160    whim. And the person they talk to will not be the owner of the company. So if the creator is

161    seen by backers as the person who works on this day in and day out, the owner of the

162    company, then you are more likely to have a healthy relationship with your backers. You

163    need to appear small and keep yourself small as long as possible.

164    **Interviewer:** Which channels do you use to communicate with your backers?

165    **Respondent:** Facebook has a ton of communities. I'm in more than 100 groups at this point.

166    Every single project can have a Facebook group. Every single creator or publishing company.

167    Every single thing that you can think of in board game production, from marketing, reviews

168    and crowdfunding to design and testing. There are Facebook groups for everything. And in

169   all these, you communicate with your future backers, and once they've actually backed your

170   campaign, they exist in these Facebook groups, and they're part of the hype machine. Anyone

171   who is part of this hype machine, anyone who is talking about your game in these Facebook

172   groups, you want to interact with them directly. You have to stay connected and engaged

173   with your backers. It's hard to stay connected with everything, which is also why it's difficult

174   for creators to stay small and deal with everything by themselves. You communicate with

175   backers on many levels, like, the comments section for the project on Kickstarter, Twitter,

176   Facebook… As a creator, you want to see if anyone has said anything anywhere about your

177   project. And if they have said something, you can respond and in that way strengthen your

178   relationship with this backer, who may turn out to be a lifelong customer. And when you

179   interact with these backers, they might share your projects and eventually, if another backer

180   asks the same question, the first backer will respond in your place. They will start answering

181   questions for me, and I won't have to do it every time. It's like a networking feeling. A

182   network of the people who are supporting you financially. Even if you get critical comments

183   from backers, you can correct it by engaging and talking to them. Engagement is so

184   important.

185   **Interviewer:** Okay. Do your backers in any way influence your crowdfunding projects?

186   **Respondent:** Oh, surely! Stretch goals are obviously a thing. You can make a map of stretch

187   goals, where the route would split and re-join at different points. So each split would

188   represent two possible stretch goals, and then the backers get to pick which stretch goal

189   would become reality. They get to vote in the communities, like Facebook or

190   BoardGameGeek, where you can make polls. So this is actually doing two things. It makes

191   people talk about your game, which can for instance make you a hot topic on

192   BoardGameGeek, but it also enables you to interact with backers, who vote for these various

193   upgrades. At the end of the day, it's all just a perception thing, because the thing that wasn't

194   voted for at this level may reappear later on the map of stretch goals. And the base product

195   remains the same. But yes, backers absolutely affect what product you are going to be

196   making. 100 per cent.

197   **Interviewer:** Do the backers get to decide the content of the poll, or is that set by the creator?

198   **Respondent:** What you are talking about there is backer-created content, and that does

199   happen, but not in the format of a poll. Usually, if you back at a high pledge level, if you're a

200   premium backer, you can for instance become a card in a game, that's a very common

201   example. Or you can add a joke to a party game.

202   **Interviewer:** Okay. Would you say that all backers are equally influential?

203    **Respondent:** All backers are as influential as they want to be involved in the campaign.

204    There's plenty of backers who will just back a campaign as if they're buying something, like

205    abandon the campaign, be charged 30 days later and then have their product delivered six

206    months later in the mail. There is a majority of these silent backers, or simply backers who

207    communicate in their immediate network and you don't hear from them, good or bad. On the

208    polar opposite, we find the backers who comment on everything, ask all the questions

209    repeatedly, who talk to you and about you on social media, both good and bad, who will

210    always be present, and who you know by name and even become friends with. Creators who

211    do well become friends with their backers. Kickstarter is an open forum for backers so you

212    get all sorts of people.

213    **Interviewer:** Okay.

214    **Respondent:** You'll actually often see that creators are also backers, backing campaigns of

215    other creators. These backing creators often back because of their friendships in the

216    community. The board game industry is very community-driven and it's really tightknit,

217    compared to video games as an example, which feels more corporate and distant. In the board

218    games industry, I know so many small publishing company owners personally. I just feel that

219    it's a very tightknit community and a very welcoming community to newcomers, which also

220    separates it from other industries. It's very welcoming in the sense that as long as you made

221    the effort to interact with all these people, who are available for conversation in these

222    Facebook groups, obviously without spamming or overselling, then they are likely to support

223    and back you on Kickstarter. The support can be as little as $1, but the benefit is that when

224    these community members back you, who are well-renowned in the groups and have a great

225    sphere of influence, all of the people following them on Kickstarter will get a notification that

226    these people backed you, which can really set the pace for your campaign. When backers see

227    that these more significant backers are backing you, they are more likely to back you as well.

228    You know, popular figures in the community who have participated for long, posted and

229    commented a lot and generally participated greatly. In the same way, these figures can give

230    you valid criticism, like in the Facebook groups. For instance, if creators ask questions in the

231    these groups, they might ask about what the best fulfilment service is right now, because this

232    changes all the time, and then this experiences person recommends someone, and the creators

233    will go there. Also, if you are a regular creator and you have an experienced creator backing

234    you, and they then see that something is seriously wrong with your campaign and tell you,

235    you will probably listen more. It can also just be other creators in the community that are not

236    necessarily backing you. There are so many industry groups on Facebook for people creating

237    games. What must be kept in mind is that most of these creators, who also back campaigns,

238    are not going to try to have a heavy influence on your campaign. Because they understand the

239    way projects work, and if they see a problem, they will only message you privately, without

240    making the problem public. In the same way, if I see problems with other people's

241    campaigns, I will message them privately and tell them what they should fix. It's a really

242    tightknit community between the creators as well. So other creators influence you, especially

243    some of the well-known figures. Backers say things more publicly, in more public forums.

244    **Interviewer:** Okay. So you mention two types of backers. Those backers who are also

245    creators and those who are not creators. Are they equally influential to you?

246    **Respondent:** I would argue that the backers who are also creators are more influential on the

247    big stuff, the big things. Especially if they are in these communities, where they can interact

248    with creators. But that is mainly before the campaign is launched. During the campaign, that

249    goes away a lot, because you can only focus on so much stuff, so you choose to focus on the

250    people who are giving you money at that time. So the backers start to have an influence then.

251    While you're setting up the campaign, the product, all the pre-marketing stuff, former

252    creators have a really big influence on what shape the product will take. Once the campaign

253    launches, the backers are going to start becoming a more dominant influence. They're giving

254    you money, and money talks. So whatever, they were told before, if backers want the

255    opposite, a creator might be able to flip that and give them what they want, simply because

256    the people giving the creator money are now demanding these specific things.

257    **Interviewer:** Alright. Does the number of backers voicing a given opinion make a difference

258    in whether you are influenced?

259    **Respondent:** Yes. I know of this other creator who made game, where one of the stretch

260    goals was to add female characters, but the community generally voiced the opinion that

261    inclusion should not be a stretch goal. The community thought that they shouldn't have to

262    give the creator more money to make the game inclusive, especially because they could see

263    that the artwork for the female characters was already done, so it would not be extra work. It

264    started blowing up on Twitter as well. And eventually, they chose to include the female

265    characters in the game. If more people voice something, it's more influential. I mean, there's

266    still someone at the top, the creator, who has to make the decision, but if 1,000 backers are

267    calling for the same thing and it makes sense for you as a creator to make 1,000 people

268    happy, there is no reason not to do it.

269    **Interviewer:** Okay.

270 **Respondent:** There are situations where backers will tell the creator that this rule should be

271 explained in a certain way. Everyone else may have told you differently, even someone you

272 paid to go over the rulebook, but if you have enough backers in the communities saying, "no,

273 no, explain it this way", then it will flip, because those are the people who are going to use it.

274 A lot of new creators will have a rule book for their game, which is not 100 per cent accurate

275 or complete. So you will see a lot of them make a Google Doc, where they have the majority

276 of the rulebook layout done with the diagrams and text all set up, and they'll then ask their

277 backers to go in and double-check things, leave comments, give feedback and suggest

278 improvements, just to ensure that everything is clear. And you will get a lot of backers who

279 actually participate in that, and you can improve your product based on their input, and it has

280 nothing to do with how much money they have pledged to the project. It could be a backer

281 for $1, and they can still have an impact on the rulebook they want to see completed.

282 **Interviewer:** Alright. What I hear you say is that you can both have certain individual

283 community members, who are influential due to their experiences and so, but you also say

284 that if many backers voice the same opinion, that can also be influential. Is one of these

285 entities more influential than the other?

286 **Respondent:** A name carries weight in the community. If someone tells you something, and

287 that person has been around for long, all you need to hear is this one person's opinion. If 100

288 people say the same thing, they're probably right too. But at the end of the day, the voice of

289 the many is always going to trump the best practice that was taught to you by someone who

290 has done it before. First of all, things change very quickly in crowdfunding, and the only ones

291 keeping up with this is this body of backers. Their expectations are changing and growing,

292 and it's influencing the platform to progress. You might also have a single person saying that

293 they tried many different ways and that this way was the best, and if you go out and everyone

294 is okay with it, then that single person was influential, but in a sense it's approved by the

295 many. But there's a limit to how much creators will change their projects, because what one

296 backer wants, or even what 100 backers want isn't necessarily what you would want to do,

297 because it might alienate the other backers, who are also giving you money. With that in

298 mind, creators kind of have a set variance of what can be in this project. It can end up

299 deviating so far from the core audience who supported you in the first place. What can be

300 changed is fixed. You can add content or update content, but don't change what the content

301 is. If you swap something mid-campaign, you stand to lose a lot of backers, because that's

302 not what they backed in the first place.

303 **Interviewer:** Okay.

304  **Respondent:** You asked about influence by community members. You can also have vocal

305  minorities. Vocal minorities happen all the time in the world of games. You'll often get ten to

306  20 people who are very, very vocal in a campaign, like in the comments and social media,

307  especially if you have a community for your project build into Facebook. If you have ten

308  people in that community providing 90 per cent of the content in that community, then you

309  may experience vocal minority issues, where you have these few people, who care a lot about

310  the game, but they are not necessarily indicative of who your audience is. So that does

311  happen, and creators need to make a decision on whether the time spend on these vocal

312  backers matches the economic return gained from those ten backers. One of my fellow

313  creators talks about firing customers, firing backers. He became really big on Kickstarter and

314  started experimenting more, which he got a lot of critique for from certain backers, and he

315  had to essentially fire them, where he told them that the labour costs of dealing with them

316  were not worth making the game and sending it to them. You sometimes get these toxic

317  backers, who take more time sometimes than their pledge is worth. After a campaign ends,

318  you can cancel backers' pledges, and then they can't comment on Kickstarter anymore, so

319  you can refund their money and hope they leave you alone, or you deal with those people as

320  you need to. You can also remove them from social media communities. You may not want

321  to block them, because then you will not see the things they say in public communities, and

322  they may actually be spreading negative words about you. But you can fire them and rid

323  yourself of their influence and tell them that they can buy the game when it's all done and

324  maybe goes into retail. You won't keep conversing with them. But if they are a positive

325  backers, you deal with them, because they are essentially evangelists for your project, and

326  they will bring in more people. These are a positive influence, and they are worthwhile your

327  extra time, because they will say all these great things and convince others to jump on board.

328  You need to maintain the contact with these. If you can get 20 of these diehard fans who each

329  have 15 or 20 friends, then your project will fund in no time, and they will essentially do a lot

330  of the work for you in terms of marketing. Vocal minorities can be powerful, influential,

331  helpful and annoying at the same time, because they don't necessarily know what they're

332  talking about. I mean, some superfans do have a small working knowledge of how games are

333  made, but you also get superfans who make unrealistic demands, and they have a great sphere

334  of influence, so if they convince the people they bring in, then you end up with a lot of people

335  demanding that unrealistic thing you can't afford or deliver. If you compare it to traditional

336  business, imagine me trying to convince Hasbro not to make this certain type of Monopoly, I

337  mean, it just wouldn't happen. But backers feel more entitled to make such requests. You

338  have to tell them that you would love to do it, maybe later on, but that it is not possible within

339  this campaign. You need to be polite, but also upfront and honest to them, telling these

340  backers that you hope they will understand that you can't afford the add-on they want. And

341  usually that's enough to satisfy them.

342  **Interviewer:** Are backers trying to influence your projects?

343  **Respondent:** Yes they are. Backers, who aren't necessarily industry people, but just backing

344  the project as a product, definitely want to be involved in the project. Sometimes it's helpful,

345  sometimes it's not. They have direct access to the person making the game, and they want to

346  have a say. They just want to be heard I think, but they also want to get more for their money.

347  So that is definitely an influencer on what they'll request. Like, if they want a certain

348  miniature or character in the game, that would entail a lot of extra costs internally for a

349  creator. They want to enjoy the game themselves, and they think they'll enjoy it more with

350  extra things. Especially Kickstarter exclusives, where they got in and their friends did not. So

351  the friends have to go by regular retail. But there's also the aspect of them actually trying to

352  make the game better, thinking that they will actually make the game better. So it's both a bit

353  selfish and a bit selfless. They want the best experience for themselves, but also others.

354  **Interviewer:** Just before, you said that you have to be polite. Why is that?

355  **Respondent:** You need to verify that an idea a backer has is out of scope of the project for

356  whatever reason and tell them specifically why something won't work. You don't need to

357  provide a ton of details, but simply saying, "I don't want to do that!" will give backers the

358  wrong impression in the open forum.

359  **Interviewer:** Alright. When backers become involved in your projects, is that by their own

360  incentive, or do you invite them?

361  **Respondent:** I mean, you invite them to, for instance, participate in a poll, and then those

362  who are interested can voice their opinion through voting. But you also have backers giving

363  their opinion by own incentive. They want to control as much as they can of how the product

364  shapes up. So as much as the creator is willing to let them, the backer pool wants to have an

365  influence over what the final product will be. This can be through a comments section, where

366  backers write, "we want this, we want this, we want this…". Some of these things, the creator

367  didn't even think of, but they may be able to include it in the campaign, for instance as a

368  future stretch goal. If a single backer has an idea that the creator finds cool, they might add it

369  if it works. It will never be some drastic change though.

370  **Interviewer:** Do you perceive backer input as valuable and useful?

371 **Respondent:** Yes, always. Even the negative stuff. Always. It's useful for the industry to get

372 criticism and then use that in a proactive and creative way to solve problems. If you never

373 hear any feedback, you're likely to spend thousands of dollars that ends up being bad.

374 **Interviewer:** Do you feel obligated to listen to backers and take in their input?

375 **Respondent:** Yes. Well, maybe not do everything they say, but definitely listen to them. The

376 funny thing that happens when you have a lot of feedback, the person who is suggesting a

377 specific thing to change is usually wrong, but the person who feels a certain way about a

378 thing is usually right. Like, if a person feels that something could be better, they're usually

379 right, but if they write exactly how I should fix it, they're usually wrong. Just because they

380 don't understand the intent of the project, the scope of manufacturing, various things. But if

381 you can get them to express themselves in a way, where they say that they feel that

382 something could be better, but they don't know exactly how, they're usually right. Because

383 there is usually a way in which you can improve their experience and flip it into something

384 positive. But if they offer specific suggestions on how they should do it, they are usually

385 wrong and don't understand it. But it's all important, and I want to hear everything, good and

386 bad, because it's all useful. Not just to fix things in the moment, but also to become a better

387 creator in general. Just to absorb all that input from people.

388 **Interviewer:** How do you assess whether input is good or bad?

389 **Respondent:** Some of it is common sense, like I know how manufacturing and product

390 design work, and I've gone through these things with other creators already. So I know what

391 is and isn't possible to a much larger degree than even a superbacker. So I will know if

392 something is possible usually just by hearing it. If I don't know the answer, I might ask my

393 manufacturing partner to hear if something is realistic. But it all depends on the creator. How

394 well-read and knowledgeable is this new creator? Because repeat-creators have done this

395 enough times to know what can and can't be done. If new creators have followed the

396 communities, read all the posts and even hired consultants, they will know the answer to the

397 backers' questions and suggestions.

398 **Interviewer:** Alright. Are you ever met with any resistance from backers?

399 **Respondent:** Yes, all the time. Especially when you tell them no. Backers will also talk a lot

400 amongst themselves. I told you about the creator earlier, who added female characters as a

401 stretch goal, and then many backers came out to say that inclusion shouldn't be a stretch goal.

402 But in that case, there were these diehard fans, who will support you no matter what you do,

403 and they took the creator's side and came to his defence. I mean, these diehard fans were

404 wrong, but essentially this relates to what I said about how backers can be your friends who

405    do your work for you, but they can also hinder you and give you more work. And in this case,

406    these diehard fans tried dealing with the other backers, while the creator was also dealing

407    with it internally.

408    **Interviewer:** How do you react if your backers are resistant?

409    **Respondent:** When you make a change, it's not necessarily what everyone would have

410    wanted. People who want change have seen the roadmap of what will happen in the

411    campaign, but when you get these dramatic changes that were not in the plan, you probably

412    shouldn't make that change, or you should have had the change integrated from the very

413    beginning. But when you are met with resistance, you really just have to be diplomatic and

414    accept that someone is not going to be happy. You have to tell them that you're still doing

415    your best, and that is will still be a fun game. You still have to be the cheerleader, even if you

416    meet resistance from backers. But you also need to stick to your guns, and not make

417    fundamental changes even though a backer wants something else. In the comments, you'll

418    see backers pulling back their pledges from campaigns, because the project is not going the

419    way they want it to, and then you just have to accept that and be positive about it. So be as

420    diplomatic and positive as possible.

421    **Interviewer:** What happens if you do not listen to backers or go against their input?

422    **Respondent:** You don't listen to your backers at the risk of losing them. Everyone is voting

423    with their dollar, so if you do something to a certain point where enough backers pull back

424    their financial support, your project won't fund. But this rarely happens, because most of the

425    things that backers suggest are realistic, and if it's not the right solution, at least they'll

426    understand that you can't do this right now, because it's not in the scope of this project, but

427    maybe in a later project. However, if you completely refuse to listen to backers or treat them

428    unfriendly, you will lose them, you will never get their support again, and they'll write

429    negative threads about you in the communities. They're very vindictive. They will demerge

430    your name every time they see you comment or post a new project, anything like that. I know

431    one creator who funded a campaign but didn't fulfil it to the backers' expectations, they

432    didn't get everything they were promised, and because of that, there are various threads

433    online stating that no one should ever support this creator again, ever. I mean, everyone can

434    get a negative comment, but with this creator, there's enough people being negative to

435    actually give it credence. Now, every time he launches a new project, some backers will go

436    into the comments section and warn others against him. This might really affect new backers.

437    But the reputation of this creator has started to turn a bit again.

438    **Interviewer:** Okay.

439  **Respondent:** Backers are generally influential. Crowdfunding democratises production. It
440  sets the bar for publishing games way, way lower than it used to be, and because of that,
441  anyone can be a creator. Everyone can throw something on Kickstarter. Whether they will be
442  successful depends on how much time and effort, and sometimes money, they invest into
443  their project. But everyone can be a creator, which means that the backers themselves are
444  usually more demanding than a typical consumer would be. Because they perceive how easy
445  it is to become a creator. The consumers are now deciding what gets made. They are
446  contributing to the democratisation of production, and if they don't think this thing should
447  exist, they don't back it. So because of that, they feel that they have an influence over what
448  gets made, how it gets made and the various aspects of the game, which is to be operating a
449  certain way. And the backers make their voices heard about those things. For better and for
450  worse, they will voice their opinion.
451  **Interviewer:** Just to get it all clear, do you mean that because backers hold the power over
452  funding, they expect to be influential in other areas?
453  **Respondent:** Yes. The role of backers is to make the life of creators a living nightmare. No,
454  I'm just kidding. But I mean, you do see that backers can have unrealistic expectations, but
455  it's not so much of a problem if you can control it early. I mean, some things are warranted,
456  like clarifications and things like that, but then at times, you also have backers wanting you
457  to, for instance, make a component that is not going to benefit the creator. The creator still
458  needs to make money at the end, and sometimes, you get certain situations where you get
459  what we in the community call a toxic backer pool, and you do get that. If you don't set up
460  the expectations for your backers early on, then that can turn into an even bigger problem
461  than any other things you're doing in the campaign. One of the really obvious examples is
462  that after a campaign funds and is in production, most new creators are in production for
463  eight to 12 months before the fulfilment starts. Within that timeframe, the backers need to
464  feel that they are being updated on a regular basis and are kept in the loop on the production
465  timelines and everything that goes on about the project. Now, right after the campaign funds,
466  if you don't update the backers and tell them specifically that they should expect to hear from
467  you once per month, then what they'll do is expect you to comment regularly in the campaign
468  and almost maintain that campaign for 12 months, which is not realistic. Another thing is, on
469  the flipside of the coin, that if you overshare as a creator, then the backers are likely to mute
470  you, and if they mute you on Kickstarter, they don't just mute you for the project at hand, but
471  also as a creator in general, so for any other future project, they won't get any notifications or
472  see any comments you post. So it's a very tight line to walk.

473    **Interviewer:** Okay.

474    **Respondent:** But here's another thing. As crowdfunding matures, nine out of ten times, it's

475    going to be a positive experience. Backers saying that they're really excited about this game,

476    that they want to be part of it and the process, that it's super awesome, and that they're happy

477    the creator is making it. You will always have a few naysayers or questioners. Usually, the

478    negativity comes when someone asks a question and they don't get the answer they wanted,

479    but then you just have to deal with that. Backers will request all sorts of things, usually

480    clarifications in the campaign or rulebook, and if you have to clarify something, it is because

481    you didn't explain it well enough. You may also get that someone comes to say that they're

482    colour blind, and that they can't differ between your cards. Something that you didn't think

483    about. It's a very good example of how backers will influence the actual product.

484    **Interviewer:** Alright. I think that was all the questions I had. Is there anything you would

485    like to add or ask before we end this interview?

486    **Respondent:** No, not really. I can't think of anything at least.

## 9.7 Appendix G – Interview with Respondent 5 (R5)

1 **Interviewer:** How did you get into crowdfunding?

2 **Respondent:** I became interested in crowdfunding generally, because it seemed like it was

3 going to be very important for game publishers especially, and the best way to start learning

4 about it seemed to be just starting being involved in it as someone who backed projects. So I

5 just started backing things to get the sense of what the experience is like. The things that a

6 person backing hopes to get out of it, the best ways as a crowdfunding publisher. I wanted to

7 understand and experience it. As crowdfunding was starting to become a new platform for

8 game publishing, I was actually outside the game industry. I had taken a different job in

9 marketing communications, so I didn't have a specific agenda for it at the time, only a few

10 ideas, so I was really looking into crowdfunding very speculatively, from a general sense that

11 it would be important. It's not like I wanted to do anything specific with it. It's quite

12 interesting, game publishing, role playing game publishing specifically, is also an areas that

13 drove very early electronic, digital publishing, before it was mainstream to be able to buy

14 digital books on Kindle and Amazon. Role playing publishers were doing PDF publishing for

15 commercial uses years in advance, and it's interesting how tabletop games have been on the

16 cutting edge of new commercial technology in a way that's not obvious from the outside, and

17 I think that the success from the tabletop game publishers in Kickstarter, like the fact that

18 Kickstarter has such a huge tabletop games category and that the success rates for that are

19 high, suggests that this is another place where game publishers are leading the way.

20 Crowdfunding is a great way for creators to expose what they believe and thereby to find

21 other people who also believe those things, and then maybe make a connection in terms of

22 those shared believes.

23 **Interviewer:** Do you think that the emergence of crowdfunding has changed the field of

24 tabletop games?

25 **Respondent:** I think it really has, very much! Part of the way it has changed the field of

26 tabletop games is that it has changed the way that gamers interact with games in commerce.

27 To make an analogy, the rise of Netflix has absolutely changed peoples' experience of feature

28 films and television, even though at the end of the day, it all amounts to a box showing light.

29 But the fact that you experience it in your home, that you have a gigantic menu of options to

30 choose from on demand. Back to tabletop games, the fact that a Kickstarter campaign, or a

31 crowdfunding campaign on any platform, lets you interact directly with the creators of that

32 project changes the way you relate to that game, even if at the end of the day, a game that you

33  get and buy through Kickstarter is a game that you set up on your table, and it has cards,

34  punchboards, miniatures and a rulebook. That is all exactly the same as a game that you

35  bought 15 years ago, but the experience by which you got it and the relationship that you feel

36  that you have with its creator, that changes your experience of it very much.

37  **Interviewer:** How many projects have you created?

38  **Respondent:** In crowdfunding, I have been directly involved in four projects. Two

39  roleplaying games, a game design workshop in a box, which allows you to make your own

40  board game, and a smaller social game. And I'm going to be part of a new Kickstarter that

41  will launch soon. Besides that, I also do some consultant work for a game publisher, which is

42  in the middle of a campaign right now. In total, not just crowdfunding, I've been involved in

43  over 100 games throughout my career.

44  **Interviewer:** You mentioned that you started out as a backer. How many projects have you

45  backed?

46  **Respondent:** Personally, I've backed 61 projects on Kickstarter, and then I think I've done

47  maybe three on Indiegogo and maybe one project on some platform even weirder than that.

48  **Interviewer:** Are you still active as a backer?

49  **Respondent:** Oh, absolutely. I think I only have one project open right now, but I do still

50  back, yes.

51  **Interviewer:** Okay. As an experienced creator, what would you tell a new, unexperienced

52  creator who is about launch his or her first project?

53  **Respondent:** The thing that has become most obvious, especially as the crowdfunding

54  platform matures, is that Kickstarter is not a magic platform that delivers you money in

55  exchange of engaging with it. All of the traditional rules of making someone interested in

56  what you're creating still apply. So as a project creator, it is still your responsibility to go out

57  and find people who might be interested in your game and explain to them why it's

58  compelling and interesting. Listing it on Kickstarter does not necessarily do all that much to

59  make people interested in your game, and I think that that is really not obvious in the

60  beginning. I mean, new creators can just see if other campaigns have done well, and in fact,

61  they can see exactly how much money they've raised, and think that this promotes an idea of

62  this place as magical, like, that someone will come with a wheelbarrow full of money just for

63  the labour of having the idea. But connecting to fans who might like your project is still

64  almost entirely up to the creator, and crowdfunding doesn't change that all that much.

65  **Interviewer:** How many backers do you typically have for each of your projects?

66    **Respondent:** That will vary extremely wildly. My first project had fewer than 500 backers,

67    in the low hundreds. The two roleplaying games had up around 5,000 backers. The game

68    design toolkit had like 2,950 backers or so. The number of backers arises from a combination

69    of how broadly compelling your idea is and how effectively were you able to get the word

70    out about it.

71    **Interviewer:** Alright. Could you tell me about your relationship with your backers?

72    **Respondent:** Yes. They are different in each of those four cases. In the case of the

73    roleplaying game projects, the traditional distribution market for roleplaying games has

74    basically fallen apart, both in the US and globally, because it's no longer profitable for a

75    games store to stock them on the speculative proposition that someone is going to walk in

76    who is interested in those games. There are so many different roleplaying games, and it's

77    niches of people playing them, so it's essentially possible to make money in retail for those

78    games. But at the same time, we know for certain that there are thousands of fans of any

79    given game. Obviously, there are millions and millions of role players in the world.

80    Dungeons & Dragons sells millions of copies. So we know that there are people who like

81    playing roleplaying games, but we see that it's impossible to sell the smaller roleplaying

82    games in stores. So crowdfunding really comes along and is the ideal tool for reaching out to

83    the people we know love these games, but can't buy them in their local stores because it's

84    impractical. Those fans come to the game publishing company that I'm part of, because they

85    are already fans of what we have previously done. We've crowdfunded the third and second

86    editions, respectively, of these two beloved roleplaying games that grew their fan bases

87    before crowdfunding, when the games were sold in stores, 15 to 20 years ago. Those games

88    were already popular in the communities, so of course they'll be popular on Kickstarter. All it

89    takes is to reach out on Kickstarter to the people who liked it before, who are likely to like it

90    again. In case of the social game I did, it was probably more fans of my previous designs or

91    people who know me through the professional publishing community, as well as the fans of

92    my fellow creator on that project. Often, you will get that people who have liked your

93    historical work as a creator are willing to look at the new things you are doing. In the case of

94    the game design workshop in a box, I think that we stumbled into a demand that was not met

95    by any other products in the marketplace. I think it turns out that many people are interested

96    in game design at this point in history, and they didn't know they needed a toolkit. Or maybe

97    they knew, but it didn't exist. So the success of that campaign is about being lucky and

98    finding an unmet need. I've talked to other people saying they had the same idea, but I think

99    what's making our project so attractive is that it also contains a detailed book. It's not just a

100   collection of non-sense you can buy at a crafts store.

101   **Interviewer:** Alright. Which channels do you typically use to communicate with you

102   backers?

103   **Respondent:** The direct channels that Kickstarter provides are crucial, like, sending updates

104   to backers through that tool and the comments section for the project. We've also put up

105   forms on a website, where people can give us their emails if they were interested in hearing

106   more about the project that we were planning on launching in the future, and that is an

107   extremely good way to get immediate velocity for the campaign from the people who are

108   most interested in it. We've also previously used a Google form. We would also use the

109   monthly newsletter from the publishing company that I'm part of. We've also used Twitter,

110   both personal and professional, and also personal Facebook profiles, just over the months

111   leading up over the thing. It's good to gather these people who may be potentially interested

112   in backing the future project in one place, using the forms, because you can't count on them

113   to remember that a certain project is going to launch in two or three months, and then have

114   them magically go to Kickstarter and search for it.

115   **Interviewer:** Were backers able to interact with you or each other through these channels?

116   **Respondent:** Except for the comments section on Kickstarter, not very well probably. Some

117   people might get in touch via Twitter, asking for supplements for the new project, and then

118   we can drive them towards signing up on the form. Sometimes you get these discussions on

119   social media, where we can then harvest their information by having them sign up via a URL.

120   But we don't maintain, for example, Facebook groups for fans of our particular game lines,

121   which is a place where you might see more organic discussions. And I know that other

122   publishers have been extremely successful in generating interest in their projects by doing

123   exactly that kind of thing, and we probably ought to, but we just don't and haven't for no

124   particular reason. The reasons are the same that we don't take advantage of any other smart

125   opportunities. It's just the limited amount of time and staff and attention and money.

126   **Interviewer:** Alright. Do your backers in any way influence your crowdfunding projects?

127   **Respondent:** They can. Stretch goals are an obvious way that backers sort of influence

128   projects, I mean, we say that we want to do X, Y and Z additional things, if we achieve A, B

129   and C levels of funding, and that's a way they influence us, by helping us reach those levels

130   of funding. I have not been a big proponent of things like getting all the backers to vote for

131   whether they want to see a supplement for this game about subject X or Y, and then we'll do

132   whichever one most of the backers want, and the reason that I haven't been a big proponent

133    of that is that I feel that the backers who would vote for the other option would become upset.

134    I don't want to offer backers the choice, mostly for the reason of alienating the backers who

135    don't get the thing they prefer. So I'm not a fan of offering choices like that in a formal way,

136    where people can vote. Certainly, our interactions with backers in comments threads, in

137    emails that they send us or on social media are absolutely influencing the way we think of

138    what is possible and the way we think of what is wise, and what is popular. But that's a much

139    more organic thing that arises out of the conversation rather than a formal sort of voting or

140    polling.

141    **Interviewer:** Could you tell me more about these interactions and the way they influence

142    you?

143    **Respondent:** Uhm, I mean, anecdotal evidence is very bad, generally. So we try to be

144    sceptical about someone writing us, saying that there should be a supplement in this game

145    about dinosaurs, you know, "everyone loves dinosaurs, and I'm backer number 73, and I love

146    dinosaurs, and all my friends love dinosaurs, so there should clearly be a thing about

147    dinosaurs!". That could mean that everyone likes dinosaurs, but it could also very well mean

148    that this one person is just very enthusiastic about dinosaurs and will not shut up about them.

149    So I think that you have to be sceptical towards anyone who tells you anything like that, you

150    know, what everyone likes. But if we get that email from six or seven people, then it starts to

151    become clear for us that this could actually be a real thing. But it could also be that just one

152    person writes us, which causes us to have a discussion in the office at the coffee machine

153    about whether we know someone who'd be extremely enthusiastic about writing a piece

154    about dinosaurs. I mean, we might include it, just because it's a good idea that we didn't

155    think of ourselves. But a lot of the time, backers are less knowledgeable than they think about

156    good ways to do creative processes or good ways to run a Kickstarter, and so they'll say

157    things like, "obviously, you'll need to print this card game on 310 GSM stock". The

158    implication there is that they understand the differences between playing card stocks, which

159    turns out to be not true in many cases. You'll get fans who'll tell you about how different

160    card games you've published feel different from each other, and that one feels better than the

161    other, because it was printed on a different stock, when in fact they were printed on the same

162    stock. These things happen all the time, where it becomes clear through what backers say that

163    they have no idea what they're talking about. You'll see a lot of that in crowdfunding, where

164    you get people who have just enough knowledge to have vocabulary they can use, but not any

165    detailed understanding of what it actually is that they're talking about. So it becomes a skill

166    to just pass these suggestions and figure out if they have any merit at all. And this further

167   leads to the complication that you can't just say, "backer number 73, you have absolutely no

168   idea what you're talking about, please leave me alone!", because these are people who are

169   enthusiastic about your product and who are buying it from you, so it's kind of on you to

170   reward their enthusiasm. That's presumably part of what you wanted by crowdfunding this

171   thing in the first place. So you can listen to the spirit of their enthusiasm more than listening

172   to the letter of their suggestion, which they don't understand doesn't make that much sense.

173   **Interviewer:** It sounds like you're saying that you need to be polite in refusing their ideas?

174   **Respondent:** Yes. I end up making, like, two or three draft emails in response, where the

175   first pass is something like, "obviously, we can't do that because of fact A, B and C", and

176   then the second one adds to the front of that, "thank you so much for backing, we're very

177   grateful for your comments!", and then I add something to the end that says "thanks very

178   much again!". And then you change the middle part into, "based on our experience that

179   suggestion is impractical because of reasons A, B and C, but we'll think some more about it,

180   thanks for that suggestion!", or something like that. I'll revise it three times, and then the

181   third revision is what I'll post or send. I want to get the correct tone and put it in a way that

182   represents how I want to come across. You know, sometimes it helps to just write that first,

183   very blunt version so that you can understand where you need to soften it or make it more

184   compassionate. So it's an iterative process of moving past your immediate scepticism to

185   something that is more of a positive communication, because you would like them to have a

186   good experience of communicating with you. That will preserve their enthusiasm. Those

187   tactics aren't any different from any traditional customer service communication, you know,

188   it's like, talking to humans 101. It's a lot about being compassionate to their suggestion,

189   because they're offering you something they think is a valuable suggestion. They're not

190   offering it to you out of thinking that you're stupid, but because they're so enthusiastic about

191   your thing. And that's the best thing that someone can give you, their enthusiasm for your

192   project, and you absolutely want to honour that, preserve it and be compassionate about that

193   that's what they've given you.

194   **Interviewer:** Why can't you just be brutally honest to them with the initial short, blunt

195   answer?

196   **Respondent:** In that case, I think they will often then unback your project, so that will

197   absolutely cost you dollars. And I think that, oftentimes, if it's a public comment on the main

198   Kickstarter page, and you're engaging in a discussion with someone, and you brutally shut

199   them down, other backers or potential backers will come by and read that conversation, and

200   they will think that you're an asshole, and then they will not want to back your project. So

201  especially when it's a public discussion, it can really turn off backers and potential backers a

202  lot. Conversely, if you send responses in a public forum that are compassionate and illustrate

203  that you are very thoughtful about the way that you've set up your campaign, and that the

204  decisions you've already made are rooted in your expertise, then other people will come by

205  later, thinking, "wow, look how well this Kickstarter creator understands the marketplace and

206  has made good decisions", that will increase their comfort level of backing my projects.

207  "This creator has obviously thought about all these things, and here's the evidence that he has

208  thought about these things!". So making those kinds of responses is marketing for your

209  campaign for future backers who come to see those interactions. It can even turn people who

210  are agitated with you or your project into enthusiastic evangelists for your thing. On the game

211  design workshop project, I had this one guy who kept coming back to the comments section,

212  telling us how wrong we were about various things. He kept providing us with ways in which

213  we were wrong. Writing lengthy responses to him converted him into an enthusiastic backer.

214  And on top of that, I think that loads of other backers saw that correspondence in the

215  comments section, and it was clear from their comments that they were taking our side and

216  thought that our correspondence was reasonable and smart, and demonstrated our expertise.

217  We even saw that backers started responding for us, supporting us and taking our sides. So

218  I'm absolutely certain that that correspondence increased the financial rewards for that

219  particular project. So responding negatively will have a negative impact on your project,

220  whereas responding positively will have a positive effect. It's like a domino effect.

221  **Interviewer:** Okay. So you said earlier that if you get six or seven emails with a certain

222  suggestion, they may actually be on to something. Does that mean that the number of backers

223  voicing a given opinion makes a difference in whether you are influenced?

224  **Respondent:** Yes. I think that about half a dozen of people or so is about the point where I

225  would start taking an idea seriously. But I actually think that most people who have an idea

226  don't get in touch with you. So to a certain extent, one person's opinion may stand for a

227  dozen, even 100 people, who have that opinion, but did not invest the time in telling you. But

228  on the other hand, one person could also just have a stupid idea or opinion that doesn't

229  represent 99 per cent of people. But if six or so people start to contact you, that suggest that

230  maybe there are six dozen or 600 people who hold that opinion. But, you know, if one person

231  emails that the Earth is flat, it just isn't, but people do think that, and you just can't tell them

232  otherwise.

233  **Interviewer:** Are all backers equally influential?

234    **Respondent:** No. Some backers are absolutely more influential than others, and I think that

235    they are more influential in all of the ways that some people are just, in life, more influential

236    than others, and crowdfunding is not different from other realms of human interactions in

237    terms of who can be influential. So if I'm running a crowdfunding campaign, and I get an

238    email from someone who is articulate and whose discussions and arguments reflect that they

239    have obviously put some thought into this, then that is something that I will take more

240    seriously. If I get an email from a backer who is not eloquently expressed and does not put

241    forth any indication at all that they have thought deeply about this, or express that they can

242    barely construct a sentence and spell the words inside of it correctly, then it's more difficult

243    for me to take their opinion serious. So in all of the ways that communication can be good, in

244    Kickstarter, such good communications are more likely to influence me as a creator.

245    **Interviewer:** Okay.

246    **Respondent:** You also get people in the communities who are very experienced, and I think

247    that you are more likely to listen to such people. But the people who are influential because

248    of their expertise are not typically running around, offering opinions, without being

249    prompted. So those opinions are ones I would go to get. If there's someone's opinion I would

250    want to have about a Kickstarter project or the campaign, I would ask them at some point

251    prior to launching. Kickstarter actually has a software functionality that allows you to expose

252    the Kickstarter page to arbitrary people you choose before it launches. You can send them an

253    email and tell them that this is how the Kickstarter page looks now, and then ask them for

254    their opinion, and then they can actually type in their responses to me directly on the page,

255    which is an extremely useful function. I can think of a dozen people I might ask before

256    launching to give me their opinions, but I don't think that any of these people at the top of my

257    mind would be running around looking for creators to offer their opinions about their projects

258    and campaigns. Most of these people, who are community leaders and voices of particular

259    expertise, wouldn't run around and just offer it. I think I would have to ask directly for it.

260    And I should add that most of the people who I would ask are creators, publishers, who have

261    done the process that I'm doing, who are experienced and know what they're talking about.

262    **Interviewer:** So you would ask experienced creators, but you wouldn't ask backers?

263    **Respondent:** No. But that might be an oversight on my part, actually. I would actually be

264    interested to hear whether there are other Kickstarter creators who go specifically to, like,

265    superbackers for evaluations and what they think the offering looks like.

266    **Interviewer:** Alright. Do you in any way involve backers in your projects?

267    **Respondent:** Yes. That's the short answer. One of the things that have been pretty successful

268    in the roleplaying game projects is offering the current draft of the rules immediately to

269    people who back it. I tend to think that for any game product is that people will play your

270    game, because that's a way that words can spread about them. Games have an advance over

271    other things, in that the method of interacting with them spreads knowledge of them. If you

272    go see a movie, you have seen the movie, but that has not, in itself, exposed that movie to

273    other people. Unless you're playing a solo game or a computer game, by virtue of the very

274    fact of playing the game, it has been exposed to someone else, who might or might not have

275    known about it before. And even if they knew about it before, playing it again has brought it

276    to the front of their mind, which probably makes you substantially more likely to want to buy

277    more or talk about it to someone else. In a Kickstarter campaign, anything that you can do to

278    cause people who have already backed it, or are thinking about backing it, or are not even

279    aware of it, to play the game is good. So if I can convince a backer to play it, that backer is

280    going to have to play it with someone else, which exposes two, three, four or five other

281    people to the idea that this Kickstarter exists, and they too can back it if they want. So that's

282    one thing that we're very explicitly trying to do. Get them to play the game in whichever

283    state it currently exists. Of course you also get their feedback on the gameplay, ensuring that

284    everything is clear and so, though sharing the rulebook with backers isn't a strong enough

285    guarantee that everything will be clear. But my main motivation for sharing rulebooks with

286    backers is that the word gets spread and that I get engagement from it.

287    **Interviewer:** So this is very much you inviting the backers to get involved or engaged. Do

288    they ever get involved by their own incentive?

289    **Respondent:** I think that the unwritten rules of crowdfunding essentially are that backers are

290    invited to offer their opinions. That just seems to be how crowdfunding works. I think that on

291    all crowdfunding platforms a comments thread exists, or there is some way for backers to

292    comment. So that's just something that is baked into what crowdfunding is. This is very

293    much in contrast to, say, a bookstore. In a bookstore, you can pick up the books and browse

294    through and buy them or not, but there's no explicit method by which a bookstore enables the

295    reader to say something to the author. That's just not at all an expectation of how a bookstore

296    or any retail front works. So I think that the community expectation just supports that. So

297    often, we will explicitly encourage people to tell us what they think, but most of it arises on

298    the basis of community expectations rather than what we say. And I do not particularly go out

299    of my way to get people to offer me their random observations, because that's just going to

300    create me a lot of customer service work. And a lot of the times, what they are saying will not

301  be super well-informed, and so I will end up having to talk people out of a lot of things. It

302  will just be unsatisfying for everyone. I mean, I tell everyone to come by the Kickstarter page

303  and tell us what they think, and then they will tell me that I should print on 310 GSM paper

304  stock, and I'll have to tell them that it already is, or that it makes no sense, because no one

305  manufactures it or whichever reason. So what we will encourage a lot is for people to go on

306  social media and tell their friends about our project, because it helps spread the word, but I

307  don't spend a lot of time encouraging people to tell me what think. This is because I have

308  already spent a whole lot of time thinking about these things already, and if I have already

309  been thinking about this for nine months, I don't need someone else's feedback based on 20

310  seconds of thinking about it. Unless I really value their expertise, and in that case, I ask them

311  privately before the campaign.

312  **Interviewer:** Could you elaborate on what you said about backers sharing projects on social

313  media?

314  **Respondent:** Backers are really influential in spreading the word about projects. So there's a

315  Kickstarter campaign going right now for a roleplaying game that a publisher who I don't

316  know personally is doing, and it is exactly the kind of game that I personally want to see in

317  the marketplace, so anybody who has been following me on Twitter for the last two or three

318  weeks know that I won't shut up about it, and that's in part because I know that a Kickstarter

319  campaign can really benefit from testimonials from someone like me, and I think that a lot of

320  other backers know this as well. That it's valuable to a campaign if they spread the word.

321  Also because they want the game to fund obviously.

322  **Interviewer:** When you say someone like me, do you mean a person who is well-renowned

323  in the community?

324  **Respondent:** Yes. Well, I don't have that big of platform. Most of my professional career

325  has been behind the scenes and behind the curtains. My platform is not meaningless, but it's

326  not giant. I think that there are lots and lots of people who speak compellingly and have

327  coherent opinions, who others will listen to because they speak compellingly and have

328  coherent opinions. There are people with lots of followers who are idiots, and they don't have

329  much traction when they promote something, because all their followers know that they'll

330  promote things for no particularly good reason. I don't like the idea that these influencers

331  exist, whose sole claim to fame is that they can influence. I don't find that interesting or

332  valuable to society, even though it is true that some people can cause thousands of backers to

333  show up and back things. I'm not like that. But all backers have a voice when it comes to

334  spreading the word, for sure, but some are more influential than others.

335    **Interviewer:** Alright. Returning to the opinions and feedback from backers, do you perceive

336    backer input as valuable and useful?

337    **Respondent:** I think that individually, it is often not extremely useful, just because if you as

338    a creator have thought about your project long enough, then you have thought about all these

339    things. Maybe, the very most useful piece of input that backers can provide for you is

340    whether this idea that you have put out is something that marketplace is actually interested in.

341    I might have an idea for a particular style of game, like, imagine that I would want to create a

342    collectible Twister game. That's obviously a really terrible idea that no one will ever want to

343    buy, but if I'm obsessed with the idea of creating this, I can surely make a mock-up and put it

344    on Kickstarter. And then if I do a good job to make people aware of that, and no one backs it,

345    except my mum, the Kickstarter community of backers is sending me an extremely clear

346    signal that no one wants it. So by not backing you, Kickstarter has all gotten together and

347    rejected your idea, telling you that the idea is bad. Conversely, for instance in the case of the

348    game design workshop in box I was part of creating, the Kickstarter backers of the world, as

349    one giant mass, were telling us that they absolutely needed this thing in their lives to create

350    games. And they needed it 15 times more than they thought we needed it, because that's

351    actually how many times we surpassed our crowdfunding goal. So on Kickstarter, the

352    marketplace is absolutely sending a message of whether your idea is good or bad, and the

353    number of backers and the amount of money they are willing to put into it, that's a

354    communication from backers that is very suggestive. Individually, it's not that significant, but

355    voting to back your Kickstarter, or not to, is a very clear message that is sent in a very clear

356    way in little bits and pieces all around, but they all add up to the message that you should

357    absolutely not release your collectable Twister game, or you absolutely should release a game

358    design workshop in a box. This is simply in the choice of backers backing your project or not.

359    Even though no one says anything to you, the fact that no one backs you sends the message

360    that thousands of people have gotten together to tell you that this is a terrible idea.

361    **Interviewer:** Alright. Do you feel obligated to listen to backers and take in their inputs?

362    **Respondent:** I feel obligated to treat them with compassion and respect, because they are

363    essentially customers who are willing to give me money for the thing that I want to create. I

364    think that it's very easy for publishers to fall into a sense of contempt for their customers,

365    because the publishers feel that they are much more expert. So I try extremely hard to not fall

366    into that trap, and I think that mostly I succeed in not doing so. So yes, I absolutely feel

367    obligated to interact with them to the extent that they want to interact with me. I think that

368    that's important and part of the community expectation. I do not feel obligated to do what

369    they want me to do. In part that's because I feel that I'm deploying my expertise as a

370    publisher, designer and writer to create the best thing for them, and they might actually not

371    know what the best thing for them is. People ask for all kinds of things that are not actually

372    good for them. I think that Apple is a good example of a company that provides the product

373    that they think people want, and if Apple listened to its customers, a product like the iPhone

374    would be wildly different or even not exist at all. If you asked one million cell phone users

375    what they like and then produced it, I have no doubt that it would be terrible and not fulfil

376    anyone's needs. People can get so obsessed with the specifications, but they have not spent

377    years thinking about these things, and sometimes it just doesn't make sense. It often takes one

378    person or a smaller group of people to think very hard about the thing they want to make in

379    order to meet the needs of the market place. And I think that that thing is often not properly

380    understood by the marketplace until that thing has been presented to them. So if a backer

381    comes to me and says that my product needs to be printed on this kind of card stock, I don't

382    feel obliged to do that, because I think that they may not understand what they actually want,

383    or they may be making a request that makes no financial sense. If their request would destroy

384    me financially, that's not good for them by the end of the day, because they might like to get

385    the future things that I'll make. You just can't satisfy everyone, and if you tried to, you would

386    end up with a project that is all over the place. It just wouldn't work. You can't design a

387    magnificent thing through a democratic process. So it's kind of my responsibility to not do

388    everything they would like. So an example of a request that we often get… As a US

389    publisher, it's very expensive to ship things outside of the US, and it's certainly not cheaper

390    for me to get on the plane and bring games to all over Europe. It's expensive to ship to

391    backers in Europe, Southeast Asia, Brazil or South Africa. So backers write me, telling that

392    I'm asking a ridiculous amount of money, like $50, to ship a $30 box to them, and that I

393    should make the shipping free. But I just can't. That's just not a kind of request that can

394    work. So for that particular kind of request, we have a stark but compassionate answer to

395    them, telling that we also don't like the price of how much it costs to ship out these boxes,

396    and that we're not aware of any other options for this. Sometimes, people will then get back

397    to tell us that this other creator or publisher made it more inexpensive, and when we then

398    look into these creators, we'll see that they are doing so by evading customs laws or other

399    things that are either blatantly illegal or sort of illegal, which we are just not willing to do.

400    Like marking packages as gifts rather than merchandise. And that's what I meant earlier

401    when I said that anecdotal evidence is not good. So we can explain that we don't like the high

402     shipping prices either, and that we've worked hard to reduce the prices as much as possible,

403     and as long as that is not a lie then it's good.

404     **Interviewer:** Okay.

405     **Respondent:** It's about compassion and respect, you know, empathy. That's essentially what

406     all customer service and correspondence, and human interaction is all about. Empathy,

407     absolutely. So I do feel obligated to listen to backers and interact with them, but I don't feel

408     obligated to integrate their inputs into my projects.

409     **Interviewer:** Alright. Are you ever met with resistance from backers?

410     **Respondent:** Sometimes. In the case of the game design workshop for example, as originally

411     launched, it was going to have four colours of components, and we had two stretch goals to

412     add a fifth and sixth colour of components. Everybody wanted to have all six colours of

413     components, and especially as the end of the campaign was getting closer, we got a lot of

414     pressure to make that stretch goal easier to reach, which I felt very strongly that we should

415     not do. This was not because I was trying to avoid spending the extra money to add extra

416     components in that colour, but because I think that it diminishes my credibility to say that I

417     expect one thing and don't do it. Like telling your kids that they can't have dessert, unless

418     they finish their vegetables. If they don't finish them and you give them dessert anyway,

419     you're going have a problem tomorrow at dinner. You've essentially agreed that what you

420     said does not have any force of your convictions, and so I think that over the course of a

421     career, if I want to Kickstart 20 more games before I retire, if all of these backers, who I hope

422     will back my future campaigns, are all trained to not take the things I say seriously, that's a

423     big problem for me. The way we got around it in that specific case… We did not agree to

424     change that stretch goal, even though people told us it was unreasonable and to lower the

425     goal. Frankly, we actually got closer to reaching the stretch goal than anyone expected us to,

426     and part of the reason we got so close was because we didn't change the goal. I told them that

427     it was a challenge to them all to go out and get more backers on board. Just because it's hard,

428     I'm not going to change it. Instead, I will challenge them to do it, and I think it was good for

429     them. At the end of the day, we got close enough to the goal to actually say that we really

430     appreciate how successful the project was and how hard they tried, so as a thank you to the

431     community, we added the extra colour anyway. I think that was a good way to get around,

432     because it allowed us to express our attitude without changing our expectations.

433     **Interviewer:** And the community reacted well to this?

434     **Respondent:** Yes! Because they got the stuff they really wanted, but in a way that was not us

435     giving in.

436    **Interviewer:** Alright. What happens if you do not listen to backers or go against their inputs?

437    **Respondent:** I can't think of a campaign that I would launch, where a bunch of people would

438    show up and demand something completely different. I don't know why they would show up

439    and talk about it, if what they wanted was so completely different from what was on offer.

440    Like, if we launch a Kickstarter for a roleplaying game, I just can't imagine how it would

441    arise that we would have dozens of people showing up, saying "why on Earth does this

442    roleplaying game not have a board?!". Roleplaying games just don't have boards, so I find it

443    hard to imagine finding myself in a position, where I would just have an overwhelming wave

444    of response that was against what was actually on offer. You can have suggestions to minor

445    changes, but I can't imagine why any backer would show up and try to fundamentally change

446    something. If they don't like the idea, then they shouldn't back it. I mean, when I have

447    backed things myself, I don't recall that I've ever tried saying, "I'm backing your thing, but I

448    might take that back if you don't change your project in this specific way!". Personally, I

449    don't expect to have a say in the stuff I back. At the most, I've written a creator to

450    compliment their work, and as said, I've shared projects on Twitter.

451    **Interviewer:** As a backer, would you ever give feedback to a creator who didn't ask for it?

452    **Respondent:** No. Well, with the exception of I know someone personally who is a creator

453    and I think that I have an idea that is so insightful about their project that I think they haven't

454    thought of. Then I might reach out and ask, "have you considered X?", but I would probably

455    rather say, "you have probably considered X and rejected it because of some factor that is not

456    obvious to me, but if you haven't considered X, think about it". But I would only do that for

457    somebody who I have a personal relationship with, and whose success I felt invested in.

458    **Interviewer:** Okay. You talked about these unwritten rules or community expectations

459    earlier. Could you tell me more about those?

460    **Respondent:** I think they have arisen pretty organically, just through the operation of those

461    platforms. I'm trying to think about some other unwritten rules in crowdfunding… Well, I

462    feel like there is probably a number of months late that your Kickstarter project can be before

463    your backers feel entitled to get abusive about it. And I think that that number is probably six

464    months or a year. As you have funded a project and continue to not deliver it on the timeline

465    that you said you would, your backers will start showing up in the comments threads, asking,

466    "what's your problem?!" or "you're incompetent and a bad person!". But I think that there's

467    a community expectation that delivering your project one, two or three months late does not

468    entitle backers to get their torches and pitchforks out and come after you. So that's a

469    community expectation that has arisen around crowdfunding. Another example is that I think

470    it's a reasonable expectation of backers that the money you've raised from backers are

471    earmarked specifically for what the campaign is for. I think that most backers will say that

472    it's not okay for you to take the money they contributed towards your campaign and buy car

473    with it. Even if you know that you'll get money from somewhere else in time to fulfil the

474    campaign, like you know that you'll soon inherit money from your great aunt or something, I

475    think that most backers will not think that it's okay for you to take the Kickstarter proceeds

476    and buy a car, even if I know that I will get money elsewhere in time, enabling me to do the

477    exact same thing. I think that this is an expectation, even though most backers may not even

478    have thought about it. But this is not a rule that is written or exists anywhere. Unwritten rules

479    certainly exist.

480    **Interviewer:** So as a creator, are you influenced by these community expectations or

481    unwritten rules?

482    **Respondent:** Yes. I mean, we spend, and have spent, a lot of time when putting together

483    campaigns ensuring, for instance, that we properly present all the costs that might arise in

484    relation to shipping and handling. So something that we're very careful to do is to project as

485    accurately as possible what the amount for shipping and handling will be, because as a

486    backer, you'll want to have that information when deciding whether you want to back a given

487    project. I mean, as creators, we can easily charge you $50 for the game now, and then conceal

488    that we will charge you another $100 dollars later for shipping and handling, but we don't. So

489    that is a backer expectation that we have observed that we proactively take into account.

490    These backer expectations are mainly things that exist in a broader sense. Things that are not

491    related directly to your specific project or the content thereof. I mean, there are expectations

492    to projects in general, and I do think that I as a creator understand those because I understand

493    the market place.

494    **Interviewer:** Okay.

495    **Respondent:** My first concern when envisioning the Kickstarter project and campaign is the

496    community standards and rules, because those are relatively well established, and because

497    everyone who comes to the community seem to accept and abide to them. Like, if I'm a car

498    dealer, it's sort of an unwritten rule that all of my cars have to be in the same parking lot. So

499    if I create a car dealership where I park all my cars on the street across an entire

500    neighbourhood, that's just not going to work. You would just never do that, and you don't

501    need to ask the potential buyers if they would like you to put your cars in a lot or spread them

502    around the neighbourhood. It's not necessary to ask, because it is so obvious from the way

503    that people buy cars. So it's very embedded into the community and developed over many

504    years. But if you're all new to society with no clue of how things work, it's probably less

505    obvious. No matter what we're talking about, newcomers need to learn the unwritten rules.

506    The norms may be so obvious to creators that have been around for a long time, but new

507    creators who have no experience in this field, they need to learn these unwritten rules by

508    participating in the communities, backing and observing.

509    **Interviewer:** Like you said you did yourself in the beginning?

510    **Respondent:** Exactly. But sometimes I think you should break from the orthodoxy, at least

511    challenge it. Breaking with the unwritten rules can be a successful strategy, so the ideal

512    circumstance is for someone to know those rules, but to still critically and proactively

513    examine their biases to see if something novel is being overlooked. Because there certainly

514    exist novel ideas, approaches and innovations.

515    **Interviewer:** Okay. I have asked all the questions I had. Is there anything you would like to

516    add or ask?

517    **Respondent:** We've talked a lot about backer influence. I think that where backers have the

518    most influence is in how later campaigns are conducted by creators.

519    **Interviewer:** Could you elaborate on that?

520    **Respondent:** Backers may address things and present ideas or objections that creators are not

521    prepared to accept or change in the moment, but they may have a profound influence on the

522    succeeding campaigns.

523    **Interviewer:** As a creator, is that something you feel yourself? I mean, you said that you are

524    about to run a new campaign soon.

525    **Respondent:** Yes, we're about to do a new campaign for a new roleplaying game, and I think

526    that our experiences in the former campaigns absolutely influence how we will operate this

527    one.

528    **Interviewer:** Including the responses and inputs you've had from backers in previous

529    campaigns?

530    **Respondent:** Yes.

531    **Interviewer:** Alright. Is there anything else you would like to add or ask?

532    **Respondent:** No, not that I can think of.

## 9.8 Appendix H – Interview with Respondent 6 (R6)

1   **Interviewer:** How did you get into crowdfunding?

2   **Respondent:** It was a necessity, because I wanted to produce my own deck of playing cards,

3   and I tried contacting all the manufacturers, like, Cartamundi, USPCC and a Swedish one.

4   The idea was to sell the project. But it didn't work out, so after a while, I decided to try

5   Kickstarter and give it a shot there, basically. I mean, I thought that if the manufacturers

6   didn't want to do it, I would try it myself. See if I could raise the money to produce the

7   minimum amount that manufacturers have. And I succeeded really well, so I just carried on

8   doing it. I learned how to use Kickstarter and that it's not a sterile platform, but more about

9   community and people, and there is a lot of interaction, and you can build your base of

10  followers and friends. You know, it levels everybody. Creators, backers, we're on the same

11  level when we talk. It's not like a company writing, "dear, blah blah blah, best regards…",

12  but more like, "yo, what's up?!", so it's way more informal. The backers are talking to real

13  people, and they feel that the people they talk to are on their level. I think this is an important

14  key feature of crowdfunding. They feel more comfortable and they get the reply from me as

15  soon as possible, because I have notifications switched on on my phone, so I treat them more

16  or less as friends in terms of the time it takes to reply. I don't postpose it. It's not like

17  customer service, being open from 17:00 to 20:00. If it's morning, I reply, if it's evening or

18  night, I reply. I reply when I can.

19  **Interviewer:** Do you think that the emergence of crowdfunding has changed the field of

20  custom playing cards?

21  **Respondent:** Yes, definitely. The access for everybody has increased. Of course there is this

22  automatic filter, which is skills. The better you are with design, the higher are your chances

23  of succeeding. As said before, trying to work through companies doesn't work, because there

24  are too many people deciding, they have their own pipeline, their own roadmap, things like

25  these. Also, they have the resources, so if they want to hire an artist, they find one. So I

26  thought, "screw it, I'll do it myself!". Maybe later, I can actually sell a project to them, if it's

27  doable, but now, I work on my own things. Now, I have learned how Kickstarter works, and I

28  have built my base of followers, and that's why my curve on Kickstarter is skyrocketing on

29  day one and two. So my campaigns fund in no time. The community is very important. And

30  for me, when I now launch a project, I don't just throw it into the crowd and see what

31  happens. I already know them, the backers in the community. After day one and two, it goes

32  into autopilot for the first week, but I have extra releases throughout the campaign, so new

33  things are added throughout it. It's an evolution. So it's not about just launching the project,

34  parking it and then coming back one month later. It's an evolution, and it's good to involve

35  people as well, like when you ask for feedback or opinions. You can ask them, and they

36  reply. Not everybody replies, I mean, there are people who don't even care and who, for

37  example, don't read the updates.

38  **Interviewer:** Alright. How many projects have you created?

39  **Respondent:** The one I have running right now is my eighth project. And all on Kickstarter.

40  **Interviewer:** Okay. As an experienced creator, what would you tell a new, unexperienced

41  creator who is about launch his or her first project?

42  **Respondent:** I think they have to learn about Kickstarter by backing and by following the

43  successful creators. They have to understand why it's going well and why they like a given

44  project. They have to observe and analyse, and break down all the positive things into pieces

45  and analyse it. New creators need to be smart and understand how to analyse these things. I

46  recently saw someone launching a project, where they had the shipping costs for one deck of

47  playing cards higher than the price for one deck in itself. I'm a creator, but I'm also a backer,

48  a consumer, so I know what the consumers don't like. So if a deck costs €10, I don't want to

49  pay €10 more, just for the shipping. Psychologically, that's not good, I mean, it just doesn't

50  work. That's the thing that new creators need to understand. They can't just say that shipping

51  prices are not their business, because it is. It is. Because they are the ones selling.

52  **Interviewer:** Okay.

53  **Respondent:** It's like these unwritten rules. I mean, of course there are written rules on

54  Kickstarter, like formal ones, and you have to read all of them. But there are also unwritten

55  rules that you have to understand, it's really important. These things are quite obvious to me

56  by now. I think it's quite common sense, like, everybody likes and accepts it, because it's

57  fair. It's not written anywhere, but I apply these rules, because I think it's fair. I mean, if I

58  was a backer, I would appreciate it. Now, you also see that when other creators do

59  somethings that the community generally doesn't like, you take that into account in your own

60  projects. You learn from it. Another unwritten rule can relate to response time. It's not

61  written anywhere on Kickstarter when you have to reply your backers. It's an unwritten rule

62  that you should reply as fast as possible. I mean, if you write any customer service, you don't

63  want to wait three days for a reply, do you? No. You want to wait as little as possible for an

64  answer. You also have unwritten rules in the community that are more creator-related, like

65  giving mutual shout outs. So I will give another creator a shout out in my campaign, and they

66  will give me one in theirs. It's mostly with other creators you know well, and of course it has

67    to be relevant, like, if I'm doing a project for a deck of playing cards, I'm not going to do a

68    shout out for a toothbrush project.

69    **Interviewer:** Okay. You said that new creators should back in the beginning and look at

70    what the successful creators are doing. Is that something you did yourself in the beginning?

71    **Respondent:** Yes, yes. Of course. Because you get to know the mechanics of the platform.

72    You also get to know the timing, and you learn how the platform works.

73    **Interviewer:** How many projects have you backed in total?

74    **Respondent:** In total, around 120 projects. And mainly custom playing cards projects.

75    **Interviewer:** Alright. How many backers do you typically have for each of your projects?

76    **Respondent:** It depends on the project, but between around 475 and then up to 1,400. The

77    biggest one is 1,400.

78    **Interviewer:** Could you tell me about your relationship with your backers?

79    **Respondent:** I can actually split them into groups. Group one is the casual backers, which

80    are the backers that have absolutely no contact or communication, and they just jump in.

81    They usually back at the lowest tiers, like pledging for one or two decks. They don't say

82    anything, they know how it works and they don't really follow. The second group is with the

83    more interactive backers, you know, the people following me on Facebook and Instagram,

84    who ask questions and give answers, and they give suggestions as well. I have a bit of a

85    closer relationship with them, informal as always. Then you have the complainers or trolls or

86    rage quitters, who want me to change their projects completely for their needs. Making

87    demands. Like, "I strongly suggest that you do this!" or "you should change that!", and I'm

88    like, "no, this is my project, and you can just leave, there's the door!". I have my quotations,

89    my prices based on my costs, and they try to change everything. But I can't change it. I mean,

90    one backer wants me to change the design of a certain card, but what about the rest, the other

91    900 backers who actually like it? I can't change it then. I can give you a funny example. I

92    once had a design that included a woman, whose nipple you could see, but really barely, like

93    one pixel. And then this one guy wrote me, saying that I had to change it, because it would be

94    embarrassing for him and his family playing with those cards. And then I checked his pledge

95    to me, like, how many decks he ordered or pledged for. It was one. One deck. So I told him to

96    buy a sharpie and cover it with a dot if it was that embarrassing for him. Seriously. But yes,

97    they try. The trolls are a very small percentage, but they do make a lot of noise. The fourth

98    group consists of the followers, the people who always back and are always there. The

99    hardcore followers who back everything I do, and we talk a lot. We have a close relationship.

100   You can call them the VIP backers.

101   **Interviewer:** How would you say that the division between these groups are?

102   **Respondent:** I would say that 70 per cent of backers are casual and silent. Five per cent for

103   the VIP backer group. Then 24.5 per cent of the interactive backers. And then only 0.5 per

104   cent for the noisy complainers, the trolls. There are not too many of these complainers, but

105   they are loud. For example, for the campaign I have running right now, there was the one

106   person who slammed me for changing my project so much away from what it looked like at

107   prototype level, and that it was now beyond recognition. First of all, that's not true at all, but

108   also, he never backed me before or followed me, so he should shut the fuck up. But these

109   people just always have something to say, and it feels like this one per cent is louder than the

110   rest of the 99.

111   **Interviewer:** How do these complainers affect you?

112   **Respondent:** You know, when backers give me feedback, and it's a nice idea or good

113   suggestion, of course I consider it, because it's nice. When it's doesn't fit with my concept or

114   if I already made my decision, I thank them, but tell them that I'm going to stick to my

115   decisions. But these complainers they demand things, and sometimes there are not even any

116   suggestions in their comments. Like the guy I just mentioned, he's just complaining and

117   being negative. He does not present any ideas or suggestions or anything constructive. He's

118   just criticising. When it's just insulting, I kick them out.

119   **Interviewer:** Okay. Which channels do you use to communicate with your backers?

120   **Respondent:** I use Kickstarter, private messaging on the Kickstarter platform. I use

121   Facebook and Instagram, and sometimes, we also communicate via email. The problem is

122   that I don't know who is who, because they have different names in these different mediums.

123   I also follow a forum called UnitedCardists. But I'm really active in some of these Facebook

124   groups that I check daily. Communities on social networks.

125   **Interviewer:** Okay. You already spoke a little bit about this. Do your backers in any way

126   influence your crowdfunding projects?

127   **Respondent:** They influence them, yes. If they share them on their social media profiles. It's

128   like an emotional reaction, where they like something and share it with their friends. And in

129   that way, they can positively influence me and my project, because they extent the exposure

130   and visibility, and it might attract more people. I will launch a competition soon where if

131   people share the project on social media, they enter the chance to win something. That can

132   also really help spread the word.

133   **Interviewer:** Are all backers equally influential?

134 **Respondent:** No, because I have certain backers who are collectors, and they know much

135 more than me about cards, also historically speaking. I'm really open all the feedback,

136 suggestions and inputs, and when I see something that I like, I make the changes. Later today,

137 I'm going to post an update concerning the design of my deck. Right now, part of the design

138 is one-way, because I thought it would be more coherent, but now when I see the prototype, I

139 realise that this one-way design is a bit annoying, and I might change it. So today, I'm going

140 to ask for feedback and input on this change. So to keep it as it is or make the change. The

141 option that gets most support is the one I will go with.

142 **Interviewer:** So you are actively asking backers to give their inputs?

143 **Respondent:** Yes, absolutely! The backers really love to get involved. So now, I will give

144 them this A or B choice, and then I can get their opinions. And when you ask them for their

145 opinions, they get really active, like, the amount of comments is 20 times the usual. And if 99

146 per cent of people tell me to absolutely not change anything, alright then, the people has

147 spoken. They are the ones who are buying it.

148 **Interviewer:** So the number of backers voicing a certain opinion can influence you and your

149 project?

150 **Respondent:** Yes. For example, if I get a lot of requests for making a certain reward or

151 opening up a new tier, then I often do so. It doesn't take a lot for me, so I open the rewards

152 people want.

153 **Interviewer:** Could you elaborate on the involvement of backers?

154 **Respondent:** Yes. They write in the comments section, and I read everything. So if notice

155 that three of them asked me to open a certain reward, so I did. They also give suggestions to

156 the project itself, but it has to be something doable. I'm not going to make fundamental

157 changes in the project. I always evaluate their requests and suggestions. If they ask me to do

158 ten more illustrations, for example, then it's a no, because I have enough.

159 **Interviewer:** Alright. You gave me the example of this one backer who was unhappy about

160 your design choices, and then you said you looked into how much he had pledged for your

161 campaign. Does the size of the pledge decide how influential backers are?

162 **Respondent:** Well, in that particular case, I thought it was bullshit. I mean, if we can't

163 handle a drawn nipple that literally takes up one pixel on one out of 56 cards, then we need to

164 close all museums and art galleries all over the world. But my answer to backers' suggestions

165 and requests is calibrated based on the size of their pledge. Like, if a backer pledges €500, I

166 would try to accommodate his wishes more. I want to show him that I'm listening at least.

167     But if it's something fundamental, like, "change this thing from black to blue!", then sorry,

168     no, I can't do that. So it depends on the request.

169     **Interviewer:** Okay.

170     **Respondent:** You know, the VIP backers I spoke about earlier, they have more of my

171     attention of course. These people are following me, they are typically collectors and they

172     really know what they're talking about. They get priority in a way. I mean, I reply to

173     everybody, but they get priority.

174     **Interviewer:** Alright. You also said that the number of backing voicing a given opinion is

175     influential. Are the VIPs more influential?

176     **Respondent:** It really depends on the request. I will evaluate everything. Because there are

177     requests that I'm open to, like the reward tiers, structure of the campaign, reward-prices

178     release dates and so. For example, I accommodate the American backers, because they

179     constitute 85 per cent of my backers. If one person from Japan then asks me to change the

180     release time to for his time zone, I have to tell him no, because there are only three Japanese

181     backers in total. My top backing countries are US, UK, Canada, Australia, Germany, Spain,

182     Sweden, Italy, France, Singapore, in that order.

183     **Interviewer:** Alright. So you said that later today, you will post an updating, asking your

184     backers for feedback?

185     **Respondent:** Yes.

186     **Interviewer:** That means that you're directly inviting them to give their opinion. Do they

187     ever just give you their opinion without you asking?

188     **Respondent:** Yes. I mean, they will always make comments, like in the Kickstarter

189     comments section. But I mean, if you don't like it, then don't back it. I'm not forcing you.

190     There's a limit to how much I can accommodate backers. It's important that I'm consistent

191     with the project, because if I listen to everybody, my project turns into Frankenstein. If their

192     feedback is good and relevant, and it points to something I didn't notice, of course I will

193     listen to them and take it in. Like, if they told me that the fingers of this character in my

194     artwork are too small, then of course I will take a look. And if it's true, I will fix it.

195     **Interviewer:** Okay. Do you perceive backer input and feedback as valuable and useful?

196     **Respondent:** Yes, absolutely! It's always great to get feedback. It makes the project better.

197     There are things that I don't see, of course. It's like a cooperation.

198     **Interviewer:** Do you feel obligated to listen to your backers and take in their inputs?

199     **Respondent:** Listen, absolutely. I like listening, and I want to hear what they have to say.

200     Input is always nice. But I don't feel obligated to accommodate everyone. I need to stick to

201   my plan. If it's a nice idea they have, I accept it. But you can't accommodate all backers.

202   Then your project turns into Frankenstein, as said. You sometimes see this with new creators,

203   trying to accommodate all backers. But I think you learn to take control over your projects in

204   a sense. I mean, I will still listen to backers, but whether I take in their input really depends

205   on the input. I won't change anything fundamental about the design of my project, but for

206   example opening up rewards, that I will do, or if the backers spot something in the design that

207   I didn't see. But some backers do get more attention now, like the group of VIP backers I was

208   talking about.

209   **Interviewer:** Are you ever met with resistance from backers?

210   **Respondent:** There are trolls in the community. I'm thinking of especially one person here.

211   He's an angry person. He has a big channel on YouTube, and I really don't know why. But I

212   never have a war with anyone. And if someone tries to be negative about me or my projects, I

213   can call for back-up from other people, like my friends in the community, backers and other

214   creators. And they will help me sink that troll. If it's worth it, of course.

215   **Interviewer:** When you get reactions that are purely negative without any suggestions or

216   anything constructive, how do you react to that?

217   **Respondent:** I reply to them, explaining things to them in a constructive way. It's important

218   that you reply them in a constructive way, because it's a way to defend myself. And if you go

219   down to their level, it only gets worse. I tell them no when their request is not possible, but I

220   understand that sometimes they need to understand and be explained why it is not possible.

221   Otherwise, they continue nagging.

222   **Interviewer:** Okay. What happens if you do not listen to backers or go against their inputs?

223   **Respondent:** I might lose some of the backers. There will always be someone who dislikes

224   what you do, and that's okay. If they don't like it, they don't back it. You can't accommodate

225   everyone. But if 100 people say the same thing and you go against it, that would be quite

226   stupid, because that's like 25 per cent of all the backers. And if they all say the same thing, it

227   has to be something that's worth looking into. Backers are powerful as a group, but not so

228   much individually, only in certain cases, like with the VIP backers.

229   **Interviewer:** Okay.

230   **Respondent:** There are sometimes things I might have missed, so it is good to be open and

231   listen. But custom playing cards are a lot about the design, and there are things I won't

232   change, because this is what I'm selling. I can't deliver an altered product, like changing the

233   gold foil on my cards into silver foil, because now I've spammed the backers with gold,

234   telling them I will use that. It's important to keep the product consistent with what you show.

235 Imagine ordering a blue shirt online and they send you a red one. They can't just tell me that

236 they changed the colour. So of course, if many people say something or some of the VIP

237 backers make suggestions, I might make a change, but out of respect for all the other people

238 backing, I can't just change my product because one person said I should and that it would

239 look better. Because many backers actually like it as it is and want to keep it that way. I tell

240 them from the beginning that there might be minor tweaks, but not drastic, radical stuff. With

241 today's update, I want to see how it goes. I haven't decided yet. I want to ask the backers,

242 because it would be a bit more of a significant change.

243 **Interviewer:** What if it's a less significant change?

244 **Respondent:** Whenever you make any changes, you have to notify the backers, always. And

245 if it's for instance certain VIP backers who suggested the change in private messages, it's

246 good to mention that it was someone else's suggestion. But I always notify backers about

247 changes. If you don't tell them, they might react negatively.

248 **Interviewer:** Okay. I think that was all I wanted to ask you. Is there anything you would like

249 to add or ask?

250 **Interviewer:** Uhm… To me, a key feature in my projects and to me as a creator is really this

251 direct contact and communication. Project creator and backer, there is no middleman or

252 customer service. It's just you and this person on the other side of the world. This

253 engagement is really important, and it's a key feature of my projects. I reply as soon as

254 possible, and they know that. My backers really appreciate this. I mean, imagine yourself

255 writing customer service, waiting three days for a reply, you'll probably find another product

256 to buy. I'm a consumer myself, and I know what I like and don't like.

257 **Respondent:** Alright. Is there anything else you would like to add or ask?

258 **Interviewer:** No, that's all.

**9.9 Appendix I – Final Coding Scheme**

Below is the final list of codes/themes and sub-codes/-themes employed in the analysis. The codes are organised into five main groups, similar to the manner in which they – and the findings concerning them – are organised in the analysis (section 4.0). Within each group, the codes are organised alphabetically.

**List of Codes/Themes:**

**1.**

- Community
    - o Backer reasons for community participation
    - o Backer types and characteristics
    - o Community activities (posting, commenting, sharing, etc.)
    - o Community platforms, mediums and channels
    - o Crowdfunding platforms
- The result of the emergence of crowdfunding

**2.**

- Agency expectations of backers
- Backer contributions and influence
    - o Immaterial (input – ideas, opinions, feedback, etc. – and promotion)
    - o Intersection between material and immaterial
    - o Material (financial)
- Backer feelings about offering input for free
- Backers only give input within their fields of expertise
- Degree of agency
    - o Backer involvement by backer incentive
    - o Backer involvement by creator invitation
    - o Creators being open to listen
    - o Inability and unwillingness of creators to integrate all backer input
    - o Limitations in backers' capabilities and qualifications to give beneficial input

**3.**

- Ways for backers to exercise power
    - o Any one individual backer can be influential
    - o Change of influence over time (first-time creators vs. experienced creators)
    - o Influence of number of backers voicing a given input (power as a crowd)
    - o Influence of status (power of individual high-status backers)
        - ▪ Herd mentality (high-status backers influencing the crowd opinions and backers generally following majority views)

**4.**

- Creators need to learn and need input
    - o Backer reluctance to offer input
    - o Creators being dependent on backers and their input
    - o Requirements of new creators to participate (before launching projects and asking for input)
- Norms and unwritten rules

**5.**

- Boycott
- Creator reputation
- Creator control of backers
- Engagement of backers
    - o Creator responses to backer input
    - o Consequences of creators engaging and communicating with backers
- Negative experiences with and perceptions of backers
- Positive experiences with and perceptions of backers