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"JOIN OUR COMMUNITY": PODCASTER USE OF COMMUNAL APPEALS IN CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGNS

Patricia Shea
University of Rhode Island, patriciastromgren1995@gmail.com

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"JOIN OUR COMMUNITY": PODCASTER USE OF

COMMUNAL APPEALS IN CROWDFUNDING

CAMPAIGNS

BY

PATRICIA SHEA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

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PATRICIA SHEA

APPROVED:

Thesis Committee:

Major Professor   Scott Kushner

Ian Reyes

Mehdi Hossain

Nasser H. Zawia
DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
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ABSTRACT

This study uses the fan podcast, MuggleCast, to examine how podcasters use crowdfunding platforms to engage with listeners and encourage them to donate to the production of the program by appealing to their target audience as members of a communal group. Another goal of this study was to provide new evidence of the role that empathy and group connection play in appealing to the target audience.

A general inductive content analysis of selected Patreon messages within both episodes and social media posts of MuggleCast was conducted in order to explore podcaster use of communal appeals. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to condense data into a brief, summary format, and establish clear links between the research objectives and the findings (Thomas, 2006, p. 238).

The exploration of how podcasters fund the creation of their content, while also engaging with the fans of the media that they are creating, is beneficial in helping to find an optimal way for podcasters to fulfill both needs. The existing literature has not explored how media producers phrase these appeals, or how these methods are meant to influence the target audiences to contribute to these campaigns. The present study has explored these methods in order to provide an understanding of how podcasters appeal to their audience by advertising that, when listeners become a Patron, they are also joining a group.

In the end, the findings of the linear regression and general linear model tests suggest that appealing to followers and listeners to join a communal group is only one part of a larger story of how media content creators interact and gain support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the hosts of the podcast, MuggleCast, prepare to wrap up their landmark 400th

episode, one of the creators, Andrew Sims, breaks from the discussion that the hosts to

address the audience directly, saying:

> We would not be weekly or even twice monthly right now if it weren't for our
>
> Patrons, so thank you to everybody who supports us at patreon.com/mugglecast.
>
> We have lots of benefits there. If you pledge today, you will get access to many
>
> of them including a Bonus MuggleCast recorded during this week's episode. We
>
> also stream each recording live, we are sending out a physical gift every year, you
>
> have early access to show notes, we have an exclusive Facebook group, you can
>
> participate in the discussion topic, like this week we had questions for Laura.
>
> There's a lot going on there. We have a really great, very active community at
>
> patreon.com/mugglecast. (Sims, Tannenbaum, Scull, & Tee, 2019)

What does Sims mean by an "active community?" What is the purpose of the

podcasters even mentioning Patreon in the first place?

By referencing an "active community" Sims is indicating that fostering that type

of community among their listeners is something that is valued by the podcasters of

MuggleCast. According to Martin Spinelli and Lance Dann (2019), the pleas that

launch podcast fundraising campaigns involve inclusive language such as, "'We have

to do this,' 'This is our great show,' [and] 'Let's do this together,'" (p. 45), which can

relate to Park and Lee's (1991) assertion that "in-group relationship[s] [aid in] the experience of empathy and subsequent helping, as it increases the givers' attachment to the beneficiaries," (p. 1118). What is suggested here, then, is the value for content creators to focus on maintaining and establishing a relationship with their target audience through the use of language.

As the book *Podcasting: New Aural Culture and Digital Media* suggests, podcasting presents a new possibility for audio media, and more specifically "the possibility, in one 'space', to create a considered yet engaging conversation that merges criticality, scholarship, fandom and practice, not to mention the possibility of attracting an audience that [finds] value in [these] conversations" (Llinares, Fox, & Berry, 2018, p. 1). While Spinelli and Dann (2019) allude to this use of language for communal appeals, the goal of this study is to provide new evidence of the role that empathy and group connection play in appealing to the target audience to donate.

Regarding the notion of online communities, respondents to McGregor's (2019) study largely indicated interacting with the hosts than interacting with fellow listeners, thus producing something more like a relationship than an interactive community of listeners. While a small percentage of respondents discuss forming new communities and friendships through particular podcasts, that experience appears to be less common than listeners using the podcasts to further cement existing fandom-based communities (McGregor, 2019). The Harry Potter series was published just as the internet was beginning to develop on a broader scale, and provides an opportune case study, as the internet provided a new way for fans to discuss their favorite parts of the books and films (Dicieanu, 2018, p. 104). The emphasis on interaction with hosts

rather than with other listeners suggests the degree to which Harry Potter podcasts rely upon the personality of the hosts as well as their willingness to foster an active relationship with listeners (McGregor, 2019).

MuggleCast was created by Andrew Sims in 2005 in order to discuss and facilitate discussion of the Harry Potter series and other developments related to this brand. The podcast quickly gained an audience thanks to its presence on Mugglenet, one of the largest Harry Potter fan sites, and today Sims is joined by co-hosts Micah Tannenbaum, Eric Scull, and Laura Tee (MuggleCast, n.d.). The podcast's quick growth told the creators something about the listeners that subscribed to their podcast, which was that fans love hearing fellow fans talk about Harry Potter. The listenership now consists of over 50,000 listeners a week (MuggleCast, n.d.). With this in mind, how can a podcast, such as MuggleCast, engage and communicate with listeners, while also funding their program? Part of the success arguably has to do with the engagement through the crowdfunding site, Patreon.

Spinelli and Dann (2019) assert that podcasts have a heightened capacity to enhance engagement with an audience, and, without a gatekeeper, creators are often working with great freedom and little support (p. 8). The main purpose of this study, then, is to use the fan podcast, MuggleCast. to examine how podcast creators use crowdfunding platforms to engage with listeners, and in so doing, encourage them to donate to the production of the program by appealing to the individuals as members of the communal group.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to provide context for not only donation appeals, but ultimately how podcasters specifically can appeal to listeners to donate to the production of their program by appealing to their sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves, the review of existing literature will explore not only how podcasting has been viewed as a medium, but the uses of social media and the purpose and previously explored methods of crowdfunding as well. With this in mind, the overarching question that the review of the literature will attempt to answer is how podcasters have used social media to both interact with their audiences and for the purpose of crowdfunding.

What is a Podcast?

Podcasts are just one type of media that online content creators can choose to create and upload to the internet.

Despite podcasting being around for over a decade, there is still difficulty in defining it as a medium (Llinares, Fox, & Berry, 2018, p. 4). Not only have scholars proposed various definitions for the term, but there has also been debate over what to call the medium itself, notably when it first emerged (Linares, Fox, & Berry, 2018; Hammersley, 2004). On the surface, podcasting is a delivery mechanism for distributing mp3 audio files across the internet (Llinares, Fox, & Berry, 2018, p. 39). Similar to blogging, podcasting involves the podcaster publishing content to the Web

on a regular basis, only the content of a podcast is recorded sounds rather than written text (Rozema, 2007, p. 31).

In relation to this basic definition of the term, the origins of the medium come from the desire to circumvent the mediated practices of the radio station and to deliver independent content directly to listeners (Llinares, et al., 2018, p. 5). Regarding the intimacy of the podcast form, scholars argue that the ability to walk around and listen to these shows is in part how podcasts arguably emerge as a more intimate audio media form. Walking around with favorite podcasts in their headphones while daily tasks are completed, podcast listeners often experience a heightened sense of closeness to podcast hosts, even when they are complete strangers (McGregor, 2019). While the intimacy of this medium does not entirely distinguish the podcast from other audio media forms, such as portable radio applications (Morris & Patterson, 2015, p. 224), these, often weekly, programs do offer regular opportunities to engage with fans through the content that they release, both through the form of podcasts that they can listen to on the go, and through the platforms, like social media, that they advertise the episodes. This being said, with the methods of distribution, and the argued intimacy of the medium, in mind, the rise of stand-alone third-party apps have also reshaped definitions of what a podcast is (Morris & Patterson, 2015, p. 224).

In the way that the audience gains more of a voice in regards to the production of the media, the audio medium can be viewed as an apparatus that has helped produce a new kind of social space, which Loviglio (2005) calls the intimate public, in which the terms public and private overlap (p. xvi). As an example, podcasters, like the hosts of MuggleCast talk about their own lives and experiences in addition to the primary

content of the show. Part of the fascination with the audio medium, which has continued with the development of podcasting, is the preoccupation with the "voice of the people," which is shown through early 1940s talk programs (Loviglio, 2005, p. 45). Loviglio (2005) goes on to explain that listeners debated how the radio industry and society should be structured. This can be shown in the ways that podcasters reach out and get feedback from listeners and audiences, such as social media polls. Podcasting has arguably developed its own unique culture through which listeners have discovered what they may have found wanting in more commercial media content (Linares, et al., 2018, p. 39). It is due to the intimacy of the medium, in addition to the varied definitions of the term, that podcasts are discussed as part of the present exploration of communal appeals.

To focus only on the technical aspects of form of the podcast is to ignore both the cultural and otherwise relational implications of podcasting as a medium. It is for the purposes of the present study, therefore, that podcasting will not only be understood as audio delivered over the internet in serialized episodes (Rozema, 2007, p. 31), but also as a relationship invited through an audio text between the people involved in the making, listening, and creating the media (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 13).

Podcasts and Social Media Engagement

The sense of intimacy of podcasting is arguably increased by hosts' tendency to make themselves available on social media and to encourage listener feedback through interactive segments (McGregor, 2019).

Regarding the communal collaboration of podcasting, the medium itself is argued to be evidence of the reinvigoration of a collaborative dynamic between creators and the fans of their content, and thus fosters a relationship, built upon the exchange of ideas, beyond what is possible through the written medium (Linares, et al., p. 2). These debates developed from an assumption that listeners have the power to control broadcasting, leading to the expectation that network broadcasters are accountable to their audiences (Razlogova, 2011, p. 74). In regard to podcasts, however, the communication between collaborators and fans takes place primarily online, arguably allowing for the need for an established online group of fans.

Group interaction is not restricted to face-to-face contact, and the internet has become a major communication channel for fan communities (Obst, Zinkiewicz, & Smith, 2001, p. 93). The web publication of fan fiction, for example, has almost entirely displaced printed magazines, which served the purpose of circulating fan writing. Fan editors charged only the costs of reproduction, seeing zines as a vehicle for distributing stories and not as a source of income (Jenkins, 2002, p. 162). Fan-made media is shared among those with common passions, and fans ultimately understand their work as a contribution to the community as a whole (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2018, p. 203). It is the internet and social media that aids in the process of group connection by allowing individuals to communicate regardless of location.

The social web proliferated the social validation of web content by gradually allowing for different forms of user participation. While the informational Web 1.0 is characterized by linking practices of webmasters, the participatory features of Web 2.0 opened up new possibilities for more web users to participate in creating connections

between websites (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013, p. 1351). As such, the capabilities of what Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) describe as Web 2.0 allow for media content creators, like podcasters to only share their content with audiences, but also the fans to share the content with other. Furthermore, the influence of what Jenkins, Ford and Green call "spreadable media" is further amplified through the access to networked communications, ultimately exhibiting a strong presence in contemporary culture (2018, p. 166). It is in this act of being able to share fan-made media, in addition to engaging with followers on social media, that I argue fandoms act as communities rather than as individuals, despite being only one type of collectivity (Jenkins, et al., 2018, p. 166). It is the role of the followers, and the hope of those posting on social media, that these followers will not only "like" the post but share the content with others through different social media platforms as well.

Platforms, like Instagram and Twitter, have adapted similar actions, or affordances. The term "affordances" refers to the ways in which social media afford multiple means of communication, enabling interactions among users through self-presentation and exchanges that are concurrently mass and interpersonal messages. Communication within social media can include substantive and meaningful exchanges among close relational ties, such as messages within social support groups or private messages among close friends and family (Hayes, Carr, & Wohn, 2016, p. 172). Technical tools of social media that enable user activity have changed over time, but one tool that has remained relatively constant is the ability to engage in lightweight acts of communication such as the Like (Instagram, Facebook), Favorite (Twitter), +1 (Google+), or Upvote (Reddit and Imgur) (Hayes, et al., 2016, p. 172).

Passive consumption of content is the most common activity on social media, particularly on Facebook, and is followed by predefined communication activities, such as liking and sharing. The least common activity is making comments, which require active contribution (Veszeleski, 2018, p. 426).

In looking at specific social media platforms, while the action of liking may be the same, the purpose, depending on the platform, could be different. For instance, on Instagram, each viewer who does or does not like an image shapes its social biography. According to Ross, the social lives of images on Instagram are deeply entangled in processes of production and reception as well as economies of attention, consumption, and appreciation (2019, p. 362). As for Twitter, by changing the name and icon of a feature linked to a core platform activity to 'favoriting,' Twitter not only standardized a mode of engagement across its services (or 'liking'), but also affected the perceived range of possible actions linked to the features of the platform, or its affordances (Bucher & Helmond, 2017, p. 3). Individuals, groups, and organizations attempting to buck the ephemerality of Twitter engagement can use hashtags to "solidify long-standing communities of Twitter users" (Bruns & Moe, 2014, p. 18). Additionally, hashtags also allow users outside of the community to observe and potentially join the conversations (Myrick, Holton, & Love, 2016, p. 598).

Social media has become one of the ways in which podcasters can seek to communicate with their audience and measure their audience's engagement. The followers of these pages can engage with specific social media posts on various platforms by liking them. 'Liking' was put forward as a social activity that can be performed on most shared objects within Facebook, such as status updates, photos,

links or comments. Initially only available within the platform, the "Like" came with a counter showing the total number of likes as well as the names of friends who clicked it (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013, p. 1352). According to Gehl, Facebook's Like button, in particular, has been lauded as a radically democratic tool allowing users to finally make their opinions heard, but the marketing field has always regarded the sovereign consumer's opinions as to the most important element in the circuit of production (2013). He explains that what followers like, they are likely to buy (Gehl, 2013), which suggests that followers who like posts about Patreon, for example, would be more likely to become Patrons to a podcast. With this said, a 'like' should not be mistaken for a perfect proxy for measurement.

Ultimately, a like is not equal to the conclusion of a deal or the sale of a product (Veszeleski, 2018, p. 421). Even if users become active followers of a company's page where they find the content valuable or interesting, this is no guarantee that they will buy any product from the company (Veszelszki, 2018, p. 421). Instead, Veszeleski (2018) then argues that it is better to obtain and retain fewer active (participating, liking, sharing) followers than many likers who later disappear (p. 422). The value then lies not in what the like will lead to but what the act of liking means. For instance, those who are more strongly attached to social media are likely to have more activity on social media than those who are less attached (VanMeter, Grisaffe, & Chonko, 2015, p. 73). In the social media realm, this could involve more posting, tweeting, reading of others' posts, and other socially related behaviors than others. From a marketing perspective, those more strongly attached should be more likely to do things like use social media to talk to others about a brand, purchase something

because of what they read on social media, or engage in any number of other brand related behaviors via social media (VanMeter, Grisaffe, & Chonko, 2015, p. 73). It is by then treating the interplay of humans and technology as a single unit of analysis, rather than examining each separately, the affordance perspective provides a language with which to examine the broader impacts of social media, making these affordances a useful measuring tool (Cabiddu, Carlo, & Piccoli, 2014, p. 176).

With the semblance of creativity, the internet and social media are used by podcasters and other media content creators as part of a holistic strategy of fostering a community among their audiences (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 67), the purpose being to invite individuals to become part of the online community through the act of donation. While the affordability and ease of use of the equipment afford a certain amount of creativity, the power of more traditional hierarchies is arguably becoming increasingly prevalent (Linares, et al., 2018, p. 130). With this said, how is it that podcasters balance the want to interact with their listeners with the need for to fund the content?

Patreon and the Use of Communal Donation Appeals

Many podcasters, as with other forms of internet content creation, many independent podcasters are actively looking for ways to monetize their programs through such methods as advertising, membership, sponsorship, and patronage (Linares, et al., 2018, p. 130). Websites, like Patreon, serve as platforms for content creators to not only fund the projects they want to create, but also connect with the viewers and listeners of the projects as well.

Not only has crowdfunding has grown very quickly in a short period of time, in doing so it has produced its own distinctive monetary and financial ecologies (Langley & Leyshon, 2017, p. 1022). Creators set up their Patreon with a series of fundraising goals, and when they hit that level of monthly income, they begin to work on corresponding "perks" to give their ongoing supporters, or "patrons" (Drmay, 2019). Therefore, to appeal to potential donors of the podcast, Patreon is used by podcasters as a means of giving back to their listeners. The set-up of the website alone helps to suggest why creators choose to use Patreon to fund their creations in the first place.

Patreon users include multidisciplinary cartoonists like Rio Aubry Taylor, who uses the platform as the main page for her comic series and suggest that part of being an artist and content creator today is being able to brand, advertise, and network (Drmay, 2019). This is where social media and other mediums aid in the podcasters' quest to reach their targeted audience, as the independent creators must pour resources into promoting their own pages, and otherwise appeal to their intended audience (2019). Through social media, one of the ways in which Patreon users can appeal to potential patrons is to appeal to them as a member of a communal group.

Communal, relating to the term "communion," involves a focus on social bonding, connections with others, kindness, cooperation, care for others, and group harmony (Nam, Lee, Youn, & Kwon, 2016, p. 303). Existing literature has discussed the use of this in regard to organ donation. Specifically, the idea of helping others and thereby serving the common good through giving the gift of a loved one's organs should structure the organ procurement (Lauritzen, McClure, Smith, & Trew, 2001, p. 35). The term reciprocal interdependence involves the willingness and ability to feel

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and think about what others are feeling and thinking and suggests the benefit of appealing to the willingness of donors to help others satisfy their wishes and realize their goals. In short, maintaining connection requires inhibiting the perspective of oneself and focusing instead on the perspective of others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 229). Regarding the idea of appealing to donor's willingness to help others, Park and Lee (2015) suggest the importance of the donors' in-group and out-group perceptions, regardless of whether this shared group identity is based on cultural background, stereotypes, or arbitrary assignment (p. 1118).

Emotional message appeals can use guilt to motivate purchasing behavior as well as prosocial behavior (Renner, Lindenmeier, & Tscheulin, 2013, p. 238). The ability of nonprofit organizations to motivate people to behave in a prosocial way can also constitutes a prerequisite to achieving the organizations' missions, thus relating to the norms and values of potential members of the group (Renner, et al., 2013, p. 239). Regarding the quantity of the donation, the study, Desmet and Feinher (2003) suggest, so long as the request is not out of line with expectations, choosing the appropriate amount and scales for donations will increase donation quantity. Overall, it is Desmet and Feinher's study that suggests avenues for improving the practice of soliciting donations (p. 374). For the purposes of this study, empathy will be connected to the concept of prosocial behavior, which can be defined as individual actions intended to benefit one or more persons other than oneself, and includes voluntary behaviors such as helping others, sharing, cooperating and donating can be subsumed under the category of prosocial behavior (Renner, Lindenmeier, & Tscheulin, 2013, p. 239).

While appeal techniques are used by content creators to campaign for donations, and persuade people to become patrons, existing perceptions of what types of appeals are most effective in garnering donor support may be oversimplified. While some research argues for the effectiveness of other benefit appeals in certain situations, other research argues for the effectiveness of self-benefit appeals (White & Peloza, 2009, p. 120). Regarding how the appeals themselves affect the donations received, according to Renner, Lindenmeier, and Tscheulin (2013), it is generally recognized in marketing research that high involvement in the cause increases recipients' motivation to process information because the central route of persuasion is active when people are involved with a specific topic. In cases when the content of the message is used to persuade, presenting negative information is considered to be effective because the focus is on the quality of the argument (p. 246).

Paul Booth (2014) suggests that crowdfunding campaigns are the most successful when they engage their fans in a more participatory manner, not only acknowledging previous fan work, not only noting the fan activities in the past, but appealing to fan attention in the future as well (p. 151). In the end, it is fans, engaged in crowdfunding endeavors, that not only personify the campaign, but also personify the production process of the campaign (Booth, 2014, p. 156). It is then arguably vital for both for-profit and not-for-profit producers to build bonds with their listeners (Llinares, et al., 2018, p. 179). It is with this in mind that we can begin to understand why podcasters, like the creators of the fan podcast, Mugglecast, choose to make crowdfunding a significant part of how they communicate with those who listen to their podcast.

Notably, it is generally recognized in marketing research that high involvement in the cause increases recipients' motivation to process information because the central route of persuasion is active when people are involved with a specific topic. In cases when the content of the message is used to persuade, for instance, presenting negative information is considered to be effective because the focus is on the quality of the argument (Renner, et al., 2013, p. 246). This, however, has been studied in relation to the use of guilt appeals, which fall in the category of negative emotional appeals (Renner, et al., 2013, p. 246), rather than positive emotional appeals. Communal appeals, on the other hand, focus on the more positive and emotional benefits of social bonding, connections with others, kindness, cooperation, care for others, and group harmony (Nam, Lee, Youn, & Kwon, 2016, p. 303).

It is through the use of communal appeals that we can begin to understand how podcasters may use language to balance the need to fund their program with the want to interact with their target audience. The use of communal appeals, and the perceptions of an individual's identity in relation to a communal group, have been discussed by scholars such as Markus and Kitayama (1991), Park and Lee (2015), and Lauritzen, et al. (2001), however, these studies neither address the role of media in crowdfunding donation, nor communal group perceptions. According to Spinelli and Dann (2019), the idea is not that "You," the audience, are supporting "Us," the producers, but that "We" are creating something together (p. 45). With this in mind, this suggests that using words like "we," "us," and "our," as opposed to "you" and "I" will, therefore, serve to establish listeners as part of the podcast in-group and encourage them to engage further with the creators and fellow listeners of the podcast.

Ultimately, while some authors have discussed physical communal spaces, such as theaters, which are meant to transform audiences into a collective identity (Weldon, 2018), for the purposes of this study, the term communal will be tied to the experience of shared space, practice, and support (Phillips, 2011, p. 488), including digital spaces. The podcast, MuggleCast, makes use of digital space through the use of multiple social media platforms, and through Patreon, is able to receive support from listeners who choose to donate to the production of the program.

MuggleCast and Podcasting Communities

MuggleCast serves as an example of a type of podcast that not only serves to discuss another and specific media text, but also one that the creators need to appeal to the audience of the podcast to fund the creation of the program by asking them to donate through a crowdfunding website. It is significant that the Harry Potter series was published just as the internet was beginning to develop on a broader scale. More specifically, the internet has arguably provided a new way for fans to speculate on what would happen in future books and who would be cast for various parts in the films, deliver the latest news related to anything connected to the series, and submit their fan fiction and fan art (Dicieanu, 2018, p. 104).

MuggleCast, being an affiliate podcast of the site Mugglenet, and having been created in 2005, can tbe considered at part of the first phase of podcasting (McGregor, 2014). The first phase began in 2005, when the series was not yet completed and the early Internet-based fandom was just taking off; it aligns with dedicated fan sites like Mugglenet, early fandom events, and other niche fan properties (McGregor, 2019).

While recap and re-watch podcasts exist for a wide range of television shows, reread podcasts seem to be significantly dominated by Harry Potter themed shows – most likely because of the unique status Harry Potter holds as the most popular and most-reread book series in publishing history (McGregor, 2014). The consolidation of podcasting around established media was heightened by a post-2014 podcast boom, which is arguably linked to the success of the first season of *Serial* (McGregor, 2019). MuggleCast has continued to produce content, and since the podcast began, they have not only made use of social media pages but have made use of crowdfunding platforms as well.

In order to connect with their large listenership, the creators of MuggleCast have created social media pages for the podcast through platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. On these pages they post content recognizing dates and events related to the Harry Potter phenomenon, as well as throwbacks to some of the episodes they have uploaded in the past (MuggleCast, n.d.). As a whole, because they have episodes that span back to 2005, the hosts have had many years to develop and change their podcast, the way it is formatted, and how they interact with their listeners. The creators have also set up social media groups, and a means for their listeners to donate to the production of the podcast ("MuggleCast is…", n.d.).

Part of what makes MuggleCast and other similar podcasts intriguing is not only how long the program has been running, but the dynamic that the creators have with those who do choose to donate as well. In regard to MuggleCast specifically, support and collaboration with their listeners via Patreon has allowed them to release episodes weekly (Mugglecast, n.d.). The creators include the benefit of co-hosting by randomly

selecting each co-host and if the listener is not comfortable being on the show for the full episode, they involve these listeners in a different way (Mugglecast, n.d.). While other Patreon campaigns have tiers, all donation tier titles for Mugglecast are direct references to the Harry Potter story world, and ultimately suggest a certain amount of exclusivity the higher the donation tier.

Ultimately, in order to explore podcaster use of communal donation appeals, the Harry Potter podcast, *Mugglecast*, was chosen in part because fan-made media is shared among those with common passions, and fans ultimately understand their work as a contribution to the community as a whole (Jenkins, et al., 2018, p. 203). While podcasts, like *Serial*, and similarly, *MuggleCast*, arguably offers an opportunity for ''audiences to free themselves from the 'tyranny of live, unlike *Serial*, which is a podcast run by a radio station (Berry, 2015, p. 172), MuggleCast is not run by public broadcaster, but rather independent content creators that rely on platforms like Patreon. It is with this in mind that the present study aims to provide insight to how more independent podcasts may communicate the need for funding, and why MuggleCast has been chosen as a case through which to explore the gaps in the existing literature.

In consideration of the existing literature, there is a gap in the exploration of campaigning for donations by appealing to the donors' identity as a member within the listener group. There is also a noticeable gap in existing scholarship regarding communal donation appeals for podcasting. While scholars have explored the topic of communal appeals in relation to organ donation, and crowdfunding in. regard to media in general, there is a lack of existing scholarship that addresses crowdfunding for

podcasting show specifically. It seems necessary, therefore, to narrow the scope of Markus and Kitayama's (1991) ideas to those that specifically look at the ways in which podcasters specifically engage with their audiences and appeal to them as members of a collective group.

RQ1: In what ways do podcast hosts phrase their appeals for donations to their target audience?

RQ2: What terms do podcast hosts use to refer specifically to their target audience?

RQ3: What work do the podcasters do in addressing their target audiences as members of a communal group, as opposed to noncommunal individuals, through the use of communal appeals and techniques?

As the existing literature has not explored how media producers phrase these appeals for the purpose of crowdfunding, or how these rhetorical methods are ultimately meant to influence the target audiences to contribute to these campaigns, the present study will explore these methods in order to provide an understanding how podcasters appeal to listeners and followers by advertising that, when these listeners become a Patron, they are also joining a group.

An exploration of how podcasters fund their creation while also engaging and connecting with the fans of the media that they are ultimately creating will then be beneficial in helping to find an optimal way for podcasters to balance both needs. In using MuggleCast to aid in a content analysis study the goal for this research then will be to provide valuable insight into how content creators use this technique to both connect with their audiences and appeal to them to donate to the program.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

To address the motivating research questions, a general inductive content analysis of selected Patreon messages within both episodes and social media posts of MuggleCast was conducted in order to explore podcaster use of communal appeals. As shown through David Thomas's (2006) inductive approach for qualitative content evaluation, this method was chosen because it not only allows researchers to condense varied raw text data into a brief, summary format, but also establish clear links between the research objectives and the findings derived from the texts, and develop a theory about the underlying structure of the processes that are present in the textual data (p. 238).

The process for analysis, as described by Thomas (2006), was be carried out through multiple readings and interpretations of the raw data. Unlike deductive analysis, while the findings are influenced by the questions outlined for this study, the findings will arise directly from the analysis of the raw data, as opposed to previously established expectations or deduction models (p. 239). While Huhmann and Brotherton (1997) conducted a content analysis, their focus was primarily on the presence of guilt appeals, specifically, and their process was deductive. The researchers coded ads from the set of 153 guilt ads, in addition to 29 additional advertisements after developing a coding scheme (p. 38).

While the Huhmann and Brotherton (1997) explored the use of a singular donation appeal technique, the focus of this present study, instead, explored the use of communal appeal technique, in addition to the themes and variations in the appeal's use by the podcast creators that emerge through the findings. Regarding the social media platforms, the creators started their Facebook in 2008, Twitter in 2018, and Instagram began in 2019. The Patreon itself began in 2016, and these dates were used to narrow down the range of posts on Facebook, in addition to the number of episodes. Figure 1 is included as an example of the language that will be analyzed in MuggleCast's social media posts and suggests the exclusivity of being a patron through the emphasis on communal rewards, in addition to the exclusivity of the Patron tiers themselves.

Figure 1 1000 Patrons - *@mugglecast* (2019) on Instagram.

343 likes

mugglecast We're SO CLOSE to 1,000 Patrons! Help us get there? From now through May 27, the next 20 new Patrons will receive MuggleCast stickers that we just pulled out of the vault, plus Eric will give you a first look at a Harry/Ginny fan fic he's writing, since he can't get over how the relationship was glossed over in HBP. ⚡
Dumbledore's Army Patrons and above will also receive signed album art this summer, a second to-be-announced physical gift, and instant access to lots of other benefits, including Bonus MuggleCast. Your support helps us grow the show and means a lot to us. Link in bio! THANK YOU!

Regarding the creators' crowdfunding efforts, special attention was paid to how they discuss their Patreon during the podcast episodes and on their social media. Special attention will also be paid in regard to the specific techniques that they use to appeal to their listeners to join that exclusive membership and become a part of the

communal group. The presence and variation of communal group appeal techniques were recorded in accordance with the developed coding scheme, and the observations from this study will provide descriptive data relevant to each of the research questions stated above. Similar to the method of evaluation that was employed by Murray, et al. (2016), a general inductive approach was adopted in order to identify frequently occurring themes and categories.

Preliminary analysis

To conduct a preliminary analysis, a sample of 30 podcast episodes, and 35 social media posts was collected. In developing the coding scheme, for the podcasts in particular, in conducting a preliminary analysis of the podcasts, the time range for the portion of the episode in which they do talk about their Patreon was recorded. If there were multiple sections of the episode that serve to discuss MuggleCast's Patreon, then those ranges were also recorded. Since the Patreon was not created until 2016, only episodes from episode 287 and onward were included in selecting episodes that have been released after the creators began to use Patreon to gain support.

Criteria for choosing specific episodes included whether or not the episode has a guest from podcast's highest donation tier, what the episode serves to discuss, such as topics regarding the Harry Potter fandom, and how the hosts choose to address the audience, and how directly they do so. Keywords like "join," "community," "our," and "support" were recorded for the purposes of exploring the presence of the appeals. Regarding MuggleCast's social media, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were each analyzed respectively. Social media platforms were analyzed by looking at the

language used in the posts and captions of the platforms. For posts that feature images, the images were recorded as well for additional analysis.

The emerging coding methods revealed five relevant themes and topics that were commonly discussed and used in appealing to listeners and followers. These topics include the donation tier involvement, physical benefits, live streams, virtual hangouts, and the Patron exclusive Facebook group, and the presence of these separate topics were thus included in the coding methods.

Coding Scheme

After a preliminary analysis, and similar to the sample size in Huhmann and Brotherton's (1997) study, this study ultimately aimed to analyze a selected sample of at least 50 appeals from the podcast episodes and 100 appeals from social media posts using emergent coding methods (Murray, et al., 2016, p. 18). A codebook was developed from the findings for analysis of both the podcast episodes and social media engagement. The purpose of the inductive approach, then, was to allow research findings to emerge from the significant themes found through the raw data (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). Considerations for the investigation included 1) the media channel used, 2) the presence of keywords as evidence of the presence of communal appeals, 3) the topic of focus for the appeal, such as Patreon, the patrons more specifically, and patron benefits, 4) how the audience is discussed, 5) and the different styles the emerging communal appeals.

The emerging topics were coded for the presence of the topic (0 – no presence, 1 – present): Tier Involvement, Physical Benefits, Live Recording, Virtual Hangout, and

the "Patron Only" Facebook Group. With regard toward the podcast episodes, whether or not there is a Slug Club Patreon member invited to co-host the episode with the regular hosts will also be coded 0 and 1. 0 will indicate that there is no Slug Club member on the show, and 1 will indicate that a Slug Club member was included as a co-host on that episode. Regarding social media, the number of Likes, the number of Comments/Replies, and whether or not the social media post has an Image will be recorded as well. The presence of the image will be coded 0 for no presence and 1 for the presence. The total word count was recorded for all social media posts. Because hashtags are argued to help create a community wherein users can share information and social support with each other (Myrick, et al., 2016, p. 598), hashtags and intext links were also included in the word count.

The "Presence of Communal Appeal" (on a scale of 1-5, 1 - low communal, 5 – strongly communal) will be based on a few clear indicators. The presence of the appeal will, first, be detected through the presence of several key words observed through preliminary research. These keywords and phrases include: "We," "Us," "Our," "Community," "Support (Supporting, Supporters)," "Participate," and "Join (Joining)." The combination of the presence of the topics, in addition to the keywords, will factor into the scoring of the appeal on the developed scale.

Cohen's Kappa

Having more than one coder is a critical component of content analysis and, while this type of reliability does not guarantee the validity when it is not established, the data and interpretations of the data cannot be considered valid (Lombard,

Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002, p. 549). To ensure inter-rater reliability in their study, Murray, et al. (2016) developed a codebook of frequently occurring categories with detailed guidelines and examples and was calculated by calculating Cohen's Kappa (p. 18). A similar process was implemented for the purposes of the present study.

Three coders were involved in the coding of these themes and trends. As in the study by Huhmann and Brotherton (1997), episodes and social media posts were coded separately to ensure objectivity (p. 39). The researcher was included as a coder, and the two coders apart from the lead researcher were recruited to split the coding in half. Each coder took on the task of coding 25 podcast episodes and 50 social media posts. Apart from being directed to the social media pages and the website for MuggleCast, each coder had access to both transcripts of specific sections of the selected episodes, in addition to screenshots of the social media posts.

Preliminary coding revealed an overall coder agreement of .678 when looking at the coding of the topics, the strength of the presence of the communal appeal, and additional numerical data, such as the number of likes and replies (see Table 1).

Table 1 Initial Cohen's Kappa.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error[a]	Approximate T[b]	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.678	.014	54.927	.000
N of Valid Cases		1500			

After the initial coding, variables were clarified and defined further. To further ensure the consistency of coding, three members of the research team coded the data separately and consensus was reached through discussion. Cohen's Kappa then reported an overall coder agreement of .802 (see Table 2).

Table 2 Final Cohen's Kappa.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error[a]	Approximate T[b]	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.802	.012	65.228	.000
N of Valid Cases		1500			

On the whole, inter-rater reliability was assessed by double-coding the full content from the 100 social media posts and 50 podcast episodes. Inter-rater reliability of the coded data, as determined by Cohen's kappa, thus ranged from .678 to .802 for the tests run through SPSS.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The previous sections proposed a general inductive approach to the content analysis of selected podcast episodes and social media posts and the following research questions: In what ways do podcast hosts phrase their appeals for donations to their target audience? (RQ1) What terms do podcast hosts use to refer specifically to their target audience? (RQ2) How do the podcast creators' efforts in addressing their target audiences as members of a communal group, as opposed to noncommunal individuals, influence target audiences to contribute to crowdfunding campaigns? (RQ3)

The emerging coding methods have revealed not only the common topics and themes that are used by the Podcasters as part of appealing to their audiences to join Patreon and become a member of a communal group, but also the relationship between topics and categories likes physical benefits, communal words and the strength of the appeal to the "likes" a post receives.

RQ1: In what ways do podcast hosts phrase their appeals for donations to their target audience?

Some consistent themes that have been identified include: Tier Involvement, Physical Benefits, Live Recording, Virtual Hangout, and the "Patron Only" Facebook Group. Digital Bonus content (Bonus MuggleCast/Videos on Patreon), New episodes,

and Milestones were also commonly discussed in relation to their Patreon, although these topics were not coded.

Keywords such as "We," "Us," "Our," "Join," "Community," "Support," and "Participate" were found to be used. Questions used in Social Media posts in particular were often directed toward the follower/reader (See Figure 2). The mean number of communal words was 2.78 communal words per social media post, while the mean number of communal words for podcast episode appeals was 11.7 words. Of the podcast episodes, only 12% of the appeals made to donate to Patreon explicitly used the word "community," and only 3% of social media posts by MuggleCast used the term. More common was references to support and supporters, with 74% of podcast appeals and 16% of social media posts using the terms.

In order to look for a significant relationship between the number of likes based on the number of communal words used in the appeal, a linear regression was run. The number of communal words was the independent variable, while the number of likes was the dependent variable. Logarithmic transformation on the number of likes was used in order to improve the fit of the model. A significant regression equation was found [$F(1,98)=3.418$, $p<.068$], with an R^2 of .034. The predicted number of likes is equal to $3.313+.079$ (communal words) likes when communal words are measured by the word count. The average number of likes increased by .079 for each communal word.

Table 3 LN(Likes) and Communal Words Regression Model Summary.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.184a	.034	.024	1.07382

a. Predictors: (Constant), CommunalWords

Table 4 LN(Likes) and Communal Words Regression ANOVA.

ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.941	1	3.941	3.418	.068b
	Residual	113.002	98	1.153		
	Total	116.943	99			

a. Dependent Variable: LogofLikes

b. Predictors: (Constant), CommunalWords

Table 5 LN(Likes) and Communal Words Regression Coefficients.

Coefficients_a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.313	.160		20.742	.000
	CommunalWords	.079	.043	.184	1.849	.068

a. Dependent Variable: LogofLikes

With the significance being .068, the significance is below the 90% confidence interval. This suggests that there is a significant relationship between the use of communal words and the number of likes a social media post receives. This seems to be in support of the use of the like or favorite button as a form of social support. Hayes, Carr, and Wohn (2016) found that participants talked about how significant life events or achievements warrant using PDAs to show their support (p. 179). In addition, if we assume that the use of communal words is meant to support the relationship between the podcasters and their audience, then this would also support the use of likes and favorites as a part of relationship maintenance, or developing a better relationship with the other person (Hayes, et al., 2016, p. 179). The role of the audience would then arguably be supporting the podcasters by liking the content that they post on their social media.

Overall, the use of communal words and prosocial language by MuggleCast is consistent with previous research that has found that language is important when formulating altruistic requests (Pietraszkiewicz, Soppe, & Formanowicz, 2017, p. 273). Regarding support and prosocial language specifically, Pietraszkiewicz, et al. (2017) found that the number of prosocial words positively affects campaign success and potential success, ultimately attracting a higher number of backers (p. 273). In the end, their findings indicated that people are not only focused on their own personal gain but also want to invest social and financial resources to contribute to their community (Pietraszkiewicz, et al., 2017, p. 275). In regards to the use of the term "community" specifically, this suggests that the term is used in order to invoke a sense of This could then help to explain not only why the MuggleCast choose to use language, like "community" and "join us," but also why they choose to address their audience in the way that they do.

RQ2: What terms do podcast hosts use to refer specifically to their target audience?

Regarding the purpose for the podcasters to address their audience specifically when appealing to potential audience members to donate, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1997) argue that group members who feel involved with their group are more likely to show commitment to their group, even when mobility is possible (p. 619). Therefore, although group boundaries may make people aware of themselves as movable agents in the social structure, whether they will take advantage of the opportunity to move is likely to depend on how they experience the properties of the

social structure, particularly their identity investment in the group (Ellemers, et al., 1997, p. 619). This suggests not only the importance of group identity as a whole, but the importance of group identity in the context of donor and recipient relationships as well, and the ability of the donor to choose whether or not to donate and become part of or leave the group.

With this in mind, regarding the identity of the patrons, the podcasters of MuggleCast call the members of their community, including themselves, MuggleCasters, and those who specifically donate at the highest level of support through their Patreon campaign, the "Slug Club." Groups at lesser levels of support are called "Dumbledore's Army" and "First Years," but it is members of the Slug Club who are included in the podcast on air. It is these terms for the tiers that are not only references to the Harry Potter series, but also give the Patrons an idea of where they fit in within the hierarchy of the group.

The words "you" and "your" are also used frequently, but it seems that when in the context of a question, such as "did you" they are more clearly being used to achieve a communal appeal. For example, as shown in Figure 2, they include the question, "Did you catch our bonus episode earlier this week?" The purpose for this question could be to get the followers to think about what they were missing if they were not already a patron.

Figure 2 Bonus Episode - *@mugglecast* (2019) on Instagram.

mugglecast Did you catch our bonus episode earlier this week? We broke down J.K. Rowling's controversial tweet, including the court battle she references, what Rowling's doing by saying this, how it affects trans people, and how it contradicts the message of Harry's story. Listen now to hear the discussion! ⚡

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#mugglecast #harrypotter #jkrowling #transgender #potterheads #muggles #hogwarts #potterfans #jkr #wizardingworld #allies

More commonly, the podcasters of MuggleCast refer to the followers and subscribers to their podcast and Patreon as "patrons" and "listeners" in the collective. The collective term "supporters" was also used. For instance, as shown in Figure 3, they reference Patrons as a collective group of people in order to explain who would be able to listen to their livestreams. In two posts the hashtag "#ThankYouPatrons" was also used. As a whole, 34% of social media posts analyzed through the sample used either the terms "patrons," "listeners," or "supporters" to refer to the collective audiences, and 56% of podcast appeals used these terms at least once.

Figure 3 MuggleCast 300- @*mugglecast* (2016) on Facebook.

It is by referencing the members of the highest donation tier, the Slug Club, the podcasters are referencing their most exclusive group of Patrons specifically. While 14% of social media posts referenced specific donation tiers, 34% of podcast episode appeals also mentioned specific donation tiers, such as the Slug Club and Dumbledore's Army, in referencing listeners, patrons, and the more exclusive groups of patrons who are part of the specific donation tiers.

Regarding the social media specifically, it is the Facebook Group that is referenced in conjunction with either a specific patron, or in relation to patrons in the collective. At the same time, only 6% of social media posts even mentioned the patron exclusive Facebook group, showing that at least that benefit is something the hosts

seem to feel is a big draw to patrons, as they don't mention it nearly as much as physical benefits or livestreams.

Overall, the way that MuggleCast addresses and mentions Patrons and listeners is consistent with the idea that the same rhetorical messaging can be aimed at both internal and external audiences (Cheney, et al., 2004, p. 83). Cheney, et al. (2004), argue that not only because organizational employees simultaneously are members of various external stakeholder groups but also because they typically ascribe more significance to messages posted in high-status media like advertising. As an example, they explain that when an organization sells itself in an advertisement as composed of 'dedicated employees who never sleep', it aims to advance a positive image while reinforcing the value of hard work to its members (Cheney, et al., 2004, p. 83-84). The same explanation can thus be applied to addressing patrons, as the patrons are not only internal Patreon subscribers, but external listeners of the podcast as a whole as well.

RQ3: What work do the podcasters do in addressing their target audiences as members of a communal group, as opposed to noncommunal individuals, through the use of communal appeals and techniques?

Part of the work in focusing on appealing through social media posts is in receiving engagement from followers through form of likes. Through the sample, the minimum number of likes was 4, while the post with the highest number of likes was 482. Overall, the mean number of likes over all three platforms that were examined (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) was 67.24. In relation to the number of likes, both the number of communal words was examined, and the strength of the appeal was

determined. On a scale of 1-5, the mean communal level for social media posts was 2.56. How the specific SNS influences the number of likes was examined through the use of a general linear model (See Figure 4). In this model, posts ranked 1 or 2 were labeled as 1, while posts ranked 3 and above were labeled as 2. For the social media posts, Facebook posts were re-coded as a 1, Instagram posts were labeled as 2, and Twitter posts were labeled as 3.

In running Post Hoc tests for the observed topics through ANOVA, there were significant differences in the number of posts that mentioned physical benefits and livestreams within the appeals (see Appendix 1). Specifically, there was a significant difference between Facebook and Instagram and Instagram and Twitter in the number of posts that mentioned physical benefits. There was also a strongly significant difference between Instagram and Twitter in the number of posts that mentioned livestreams of episodes.

Figure 4 LN(Likes) and SNS General Linear Model.
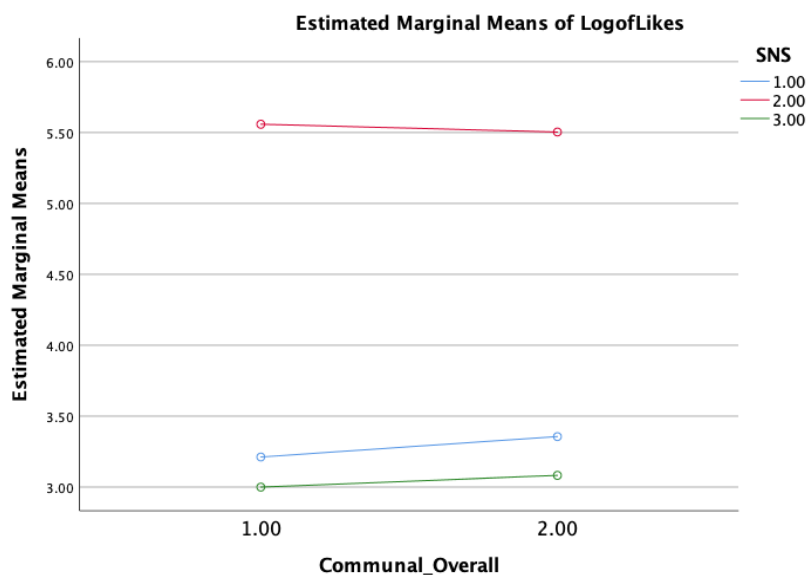
With a significance of .000, the resulting plot shows that there is a significant difference in the number of likes on Instagram compared to Facebook and Twitter. According to Hayes, Carr, and Wohn (2016), liking on Instagram was a more selective behavior, while the behavior on Facebook is more reactionary than on other platforms (p. 177 - 178).

Particularly when discussing Facebook and Instagram, a few participants suggested PDAs were a way to acknowledge they had seen a post (Hayes, et al., 2016, p. 178). Similarly, Hayes, et al., explains that reported "Favoriting" and "Liking" content in Twitter and Instagram, respectively, to later retrieve content, suggesting a practical, information-oriented use (Hayes, et al., 2016, p. 182). This is in contrast with the use of the like or favorite action as a form of social support (Hayes, et al., 2016, 179). At the same time, while the significance between Social Networking Sites was .000, the difference in likes between platforms are not significantly related to the strength of the communal appeal, shown by the resulting significance of .724.

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et al., 2016, p. 179). While the significance between Social Networking Sites was .000, the difference in likes between platforms are not significantly related to the strength of the communal appeal, shown by the resulting significance of .724.

On the social and mobile web, images can be argued to be more than just representations of people, events and places (Carah, 2014, p. 138). Regarding likes and other social media affordances, hashtags, tags, likes, comments and shares are 'manual' devices users employ to position images within the "larger flow" of the social media algorithms (Carah, 2014, p. 138). With this in mind, the relationship between the nature of the post, specifically the use of images, and the number of likes a post received was also examined (see Figure 5). The purpose of the image in regard to the appeals seem to then be to position the post so that the intended audience can see it in their social media feed.

Figure 5 LN(Likes) and Images General Linear Model.
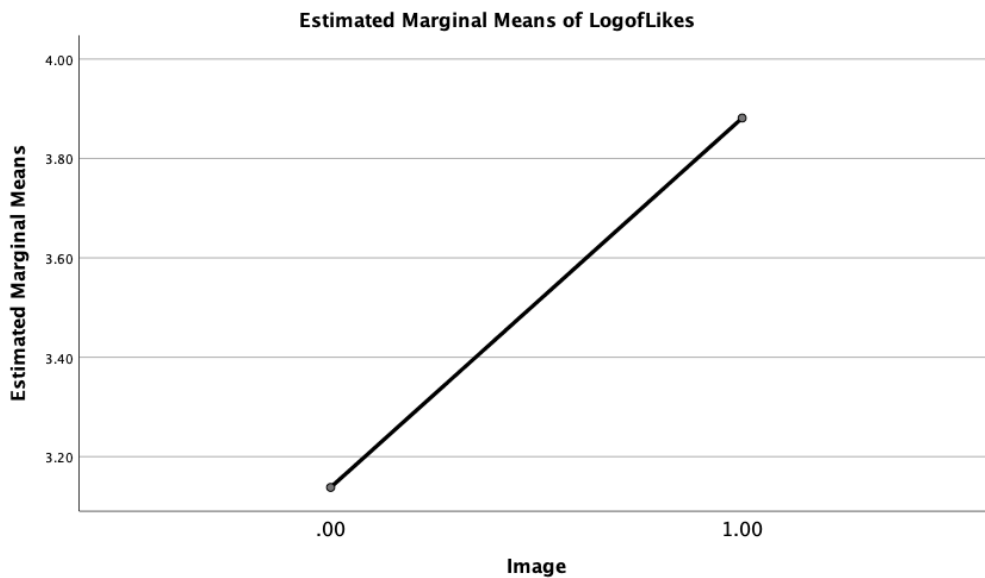
With a significance of .000, the resulting plot suggests that there is a significant difference in the number of likes a post with an image receives than posts that do not use an image. This is consistent with the argument that images also capture attention and generate data and networks. Ultimately, an image is a device that holds in place a network of associations and affects in time and place, that can be tracked and responded to (Carah, 2014, p. 138). In this case, this could explain why the creators o MuggleCast choose to make use of images on social media.

29% of social media posts specifically mentioned a physical benefit when appealing to followers to join the MuggleCast Patreon. This was in contrast with 14% that mentioned specific donation tiers, 18% that mentioned live streams of episodes, 4% that mentioned virtual hangouts for Slug Club Patrons, and 6% of posts that mentioned the patron only Facebook group. A general linear model was also calculated in order to see the effect that the mention of physical benefits has on the number of likes a social media post receives (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 LN(Likes) and Physical Benefits content General Linear Model.
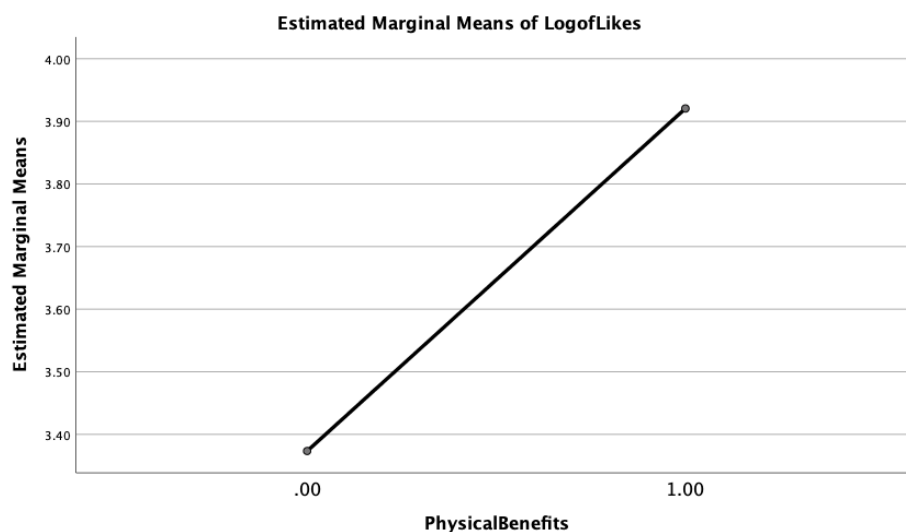
With a significance of .022, the resulting plot suggests that there is a significant difference in the number of likes between posts that do mention physical benefits than those that do not. This supports the importance of gifts serving many social functions, including conveying identity (Camerer, 1988, p. S181). This could explain why the podcasters use the physical gifts as incentives in their appeals, as it can be viewed as not just part of an exchange relationship, but rather a physical symbol that marks the recipient as a being a fan and patron of MuggleCast, and which can be used to identify fellow fans and patrons. The physical gifts that MugggleCast advertises as benefits, therefore, can be viewed as akin to team merchandise. Heere and James (2007), for instance, argue that sports teams not only serve as a source for group identity but also provide a symbolic representation of other aspects of social or community life (p. 320). The purpose of using the physical benefits as part of the appeal then seems to be in appealing to the audience and the want to have symbol of their membership as a MuggleCast patron and fan.

With this in mind, many of the posts with links to MuggleCast's Patreon page seem to be used to encourage Patrons to listen live, but also to encourage others who are not yet Patrons to become so. References to benefits are also used for the purpose of doing so as well. This suggests that they want to appeal to the potential sense of belonging that may come with receiving the same tote bag, album art, or t-shirt, as others within a group of people. As part of what can be viewed as a communal exchange relationship, the podcasters thus use physical gifts as part of the dialogue in

describing what the donors will receive if they choose to pledge to their Patreon (See Figure 7).

Figure 7 MuggleCast Tote Bag - *@mugglecast* (2019) on Instagram.

To encourage donations, project creators also offer rewards to donors with levels known as a "reward tier." There is no limit to the number of reward tiers a project creator can offer, and project creators often tie the size of the reward to the level of donation, with the larger the donation resulting in the donor receiving the bigger the reward (Chen, Thomas, & Kohli, 2016, p. 6). Some of these benefits include access to livestreams for all Patrons, and Google Hangout meetings for patrons of the highest donation tier. This relates to the names of the tiers themselves, such as "The Slug Club," and the hierarchy that comes with the benefits that come with being in a certain role within the patreon group. The purpose for this appeal is then appeal to the

potential donors to become part of the highest tier in order to receive the specific benefits that comes with being the members that donate the highest.

Live streaming contains a broadcasting element, where one person transmits content to a large number of anonymous viewers. In this sense, it is mass communication. However, it also has an interpersonal element—streamers can interact with viewers by addressing their comments verbally or conducting real time text chat. This type of hybrid communication is called mass personal but very little research has been done to explore how these interactions manifest in the context of live streaming (Wohn, Freeman, & McLoughlin, 2018, p. 1). Interactive social media (e.g., Facebook and online social games) has been well documented for its supportive functions in online users' social lives. Yet, according to Wohn, et al. (2018), how and why live streaming, as an emerging form of social television, mediates social support is a novel area of research. In particular, prior literature on mediated social support often focuses on informational or emotional support, but live streaming is unique from other social media in that it facilitates more tangible forms of support such as exchange of money and virtual gifts (Wohn, et al., 2018, p. 1). The purpose of including livestreams then seems to be to appeal to potential donors by offering a more tangible benefit that helps facilitate the exchange of donations for interaction.

MuggleCast also uses Google Hangouts to host Slug Club video meetings for those donating at the highest tier (See Figure 8). On the whole, this platform arguably constitutes a complex interactional space characterized by group size dynamics as well as multimodal configurations (Rosenbaun, Rafaeli, & Kurzon, 2016, p. 30).

Figure 8 Google Hangout - @*mugglecast* (2016) on Facebook.
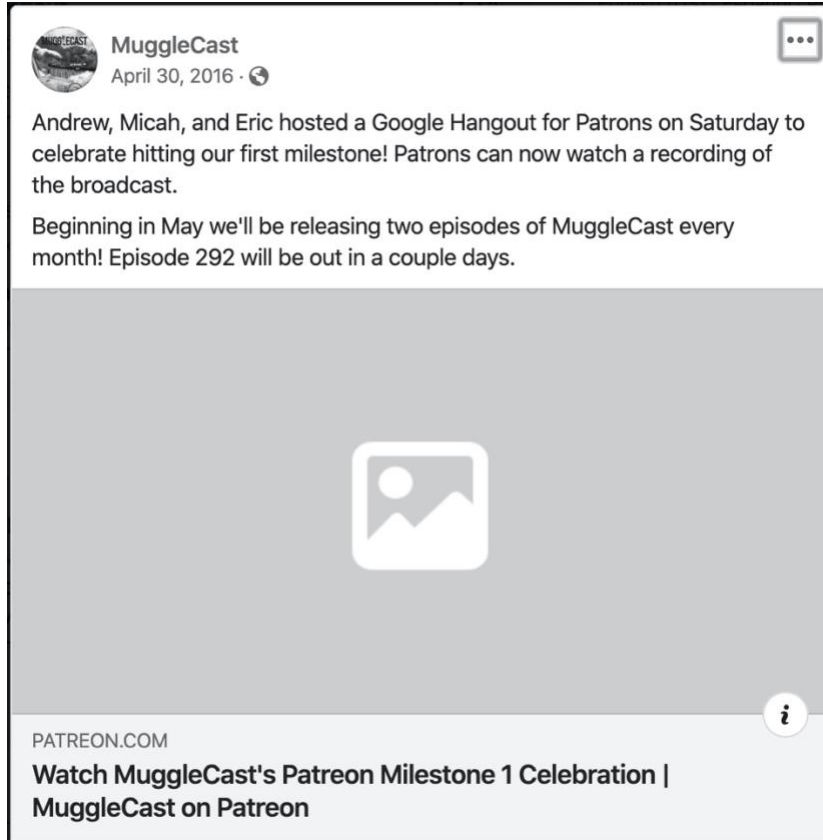
Ultimately, a linear regression was also calculated to examine whether there was a significant relationship between the number of LN(Likes) based on the determined strength of the appeal. A significant regression equation was found [$F_{(1,98)}=3.605$, $p<.061$], with an R_2 of .035. The predicted number of LN(Likes) is equal to 3.049+.189 (communal level) likes when the communal level is measured on a Likert scale of 1 through 5, 1 being uncommunal, and 5 being strongly communal. The average number of LN(Likes) increased by 0.189 for each determined communal level.

Table 6 LN(Likes) and Communal Appeal Level Regression Model Summary.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.188[a]	.035	.026	1.07282

a. Predictors: (Constant), Communal_Appeal_Level

Table 7 LN(Likes) and Communal Appeal Level Regression ANOVA.

ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.150	1	4.150	3.605	.061[b]
	Residual	112.793	98	1.151		
	Total	116.943	99			

a. Dependent Variable: LogofLikes

b. Predictors: (Constant), Communal_Appeal_Level

Table 8 LN(Likes) and Communal Appeal Level Regression Coefficients.

Coefficientsₐ

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.049	.276		11.048	.000
	Communal_Appeal_Level	.189	.099	.188	1.899	.061

a. Dependent Variable: LogofLikes

With the significance being .061, the significance level is also below the 90%

confidence interval. Ultimately the strength of the significance level suggests that

there is a significant relationship between the strength of the communal appeal, the

number of likes the social media post will receive. This would be consistent with the

idea that getting someone involved in brand, community, or organization is the

ultimate goal of marketing (Lim, Hwang, Kim, & Biocca, 2015, p. 160). Lim, et al.,

(2015) argue that the highest levels of social media engagement are online users'

involvement with brand, cause, and programs of an organization and their feelings of

belonging and social connection (p. 160). This is thus consistent with the social media

dimension of engagement being considered a communal component (Lim, et al., 2015,

p. 160). It is ultimately the purpose of the communal appeal to then that appealing to

the potential donors' identity within the group would not only serve the purpose of

helping the target audience feel involved in the community, and even if they are not a Patron yet, the purpose would be to make them feel involved with the brand.

In the end, in looking at the number of likes and how the podcasters refer to their audience, in addition to the mentioning of physical benefits, and the use of images, we can begin to understand not only how podcasters phrase the appeals to donate to Patreon, but the methods they use in order to do so. The emerging coding methods have revealed not only the common topics and themes that are used by the podcasters as part of appealing to their audiences to donate to the production of the program, but also how podcasters can appeal to the listeners and followers of the podcast to specifically become part of their communal group of patrons that do choose to donate through Patreon.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Since MuggleCast began its Patreon in 2016, Andrew Sims, one of the hosts and creators of the podcast, now runs his own Patreon and Podcast consulting service where part of the goal is to advise clients on how to appeal to fans to sign up in the first place (Sims, n.d.). Through these services, the host advertises that one of the reasons why Patreon is successful is because fans are getting more content at the same time the creators are earning more money than they do through advertising alone. Sims believes this is a "win-win" (Sims, n.d.). While these sentiments are consistent with the use of physical and digital benefits in advertising Patreon, Sims does not address the "community" building aspect that he seems to advertise through his longest running podcast, MuggleCast.

The present study has explored how media producers, specifically podcasters, phrase these appeals for the purpose of crowdfunding, and the rhetorical methods the podcasters of MuggleCast have used, in order to provide an understanding how podcasters appeal to listeners and followers as members of a collective group. The goal was to provide answers to the following questions:

RQ1: In what ways do podcast hosts phrase their appeals for donations to their target audience?

RQ2: What terms do podcast hosts use to refer specifically to their target audience?

RQ3: How do the podcast creators' efforts in addressing their target audiences as members of a communal group, as opposed to noncommunal individuals, influence target audiences to contribute to crowdfunding campaigns?

In regard to the phrasing of the appeals, not only have the podcasters chosen to use words and phrases like "community," "support," and "join us," the linear regression analysis conducted suggests that there is a significant relationship between the number of communal words that are used in a social media post, and the number of likes the post receives.

In addressing the audience, the findings suggest that, while the podcasters refer to their target audience as "patrons" and "listeners" respectively, the internal and external phrasing is not dissimilar from organizations that refer to employees in a similar way (Cheney, et al., 2004). This connects back to the argument that, as with other forms of internet content creation, many independent podcasters are actively looking for ways to monetize their programs through such methods as advertising, membership, sponsorship, and patronage (Linares, et al., 2018, p. 130), and so, are adapting methods of crowdfunding from existing organizational strategies. The purpose of using these terms with the language is then to appeal to the audience member's role within the communal group.

Lastly, regarding how the podcasters' efforts in appealing to their followers and listeners as members of a communal group influence the target audience to potentially donate to the crowdfunding campaign, the podcasters of MuggleCast advertise livestreams and physical benefits most frequently. It is the mentions of physical

benefits and the use of images that a general linear model revealed had a significant relationship to the number of likes a post received.

Ultimately, a linear regression analysis of the determined strength of the communal appeal and the number of likes had a significant relationship. This suggests that the clearer and stronger the communal appeal, the more likes the post will receive. If likes are considered to indicate what followers are likely to buy (Gehl, 2013), then this also supports the idea that followers that likes posts about Patreon are likely to become patrons themselves. It is then the use of communal appeals that becomes part of rhetorical techniques for doing so. At this same time, it is important to keep in mind that a like does not equal a guaranteed donation (Veszeleski, 2018, p. 422).

With consideration to the findings of this study, and podcasting as a media form, analyses that focus solely on audience numbers and economic potential ultimately ignore "the full spectrum of podcast culture, its forms and contexts, the reasons they are made, why they are listened to, and the complexity and the diversity of their impact" (Llinares, et al., 2018, p. 6). The findings of this study have ultimately explored how the interaction between media content creators and the consumers of their content are, in fact, closely tied to the economic needs of running programs like podcasts. It is then up to the podcasters to decide how to balance both the want to interact with their listeners, and the need to fund the content they are creating. Appealing to the listeners to donate to Patreon by appealing to them to join an exclusive group of listeners is one such solution that has been used by podcasters.

With this said, it is difficult to imagine that a consumer would continue to perceive a communal relationship with an organization if the exchanges that were part

of the relationship were thought to be unfair or inequitable (Johnson & Grimm, 2010, p. 283). Rather, Johnson and Grimm argue that it is likely a consumer who does perceive a communal relationship with an organization that would still expect the organization to behave consistently with some of the norms of an exchange relationship (2010, p. 283). In the context of MuggleCast, while the relationship between the podcasters and supporters is arguably communal, the creators still make use of the norms of exchange relationships, as they give rewards to Patrons in exchange for their support. Some of these rewards, however, enable a connection to the hosts and other Patrons, such as the Google Hangouts for certain Patreon levels and the livestreams of the episodes.

These findings suggest that appealing to followers and listeners to join a communal group is only one part of a larger story of how media content creators interact and gain support for the content they make. If Sims does not address the idea of community in consulting for Patreon campaigns, then perhaps his use of communal language for his podcast, MuggleCast, is an indicator that the use of communal appeals is something to take into consideration.

Limitations and future directions

Some of the limitations of the present study include the times at which the social media accounts for MuggleCast were created, as each two of the platforms were created after the MuggleCast creators began their Patreon. While the MuggleCast Facebook has been posting since 2008, the podcast did not set up a Twitter page until

2018 and did not begin posting on Instagram until 2019. This resulted in an imbalanced sample of posts from each platform when collecting data for observation.

The gaps within the research in the topic area also did not provide clear scales to serve as a basis for measurement. As such, one of the outcomes of this study has been the development of coding methods to examine communal appeals for media crowdfunding. These scales could be developed further with additional research, which could include additional keywords, such as "help," as well as additional testing. While the current study did not put weight toward specific communal topics when developing the coding scheme, future research could also explore more specifically the use and effect of specific communal benefits, such as livestreams and Google Hangouts, in comparison to others, such as physical group benefits.

The main limitation of this study, however, is the lack of conclusions that could be made from the podcast episodes themselves. While the likes and replies from the social media posts could be analyzed, any engagement observed could not be connected or attributed to any one specific episode.

Regarding the coding methods, future studies should take additional time for training coders. With devoting a greater length of time for communication between coders, more consistent inter-rater reliability for individual themes and topics could be assured. Furthermore, in developing the coding methods more, future research could potentially look further into the specific interactions between podcasters and the patrons through a more in-depth observation study.

In the end, while the findings suggest that the clearer and stronger the communal appeal, the more likes the post will receive, and therefore the more

followers who are likely to become patrons, based on Gehl's (2013) study, it is important to remember that a like is not equal to the conclusion of a deal or the sale of a product – not even in the case of the much-praised content marketing or organic marketing. With Patreon in mind, it arguably better to obtain and retain fewer active followers than many likers who later disappear (Veszeleski, 2018, p. 422). While the act of liking may be reactionary, using this language in the social media posts that followers do see and react to stems from a want to be able to interact with listeners and to create a close and clear relationship with them. Patreon is one way to do so, and it is the language then that makes this value on creating an engaged and active communal fan base clear to the consumers of the media content.

Appendix 1.

Multiple Comparisons

LSD

Dependent Variable	(I) SNS	(J) SNS	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
TierInvolvement	1.00	2.00	-.10566	.10202	.303	-.3081	.0968
		3.00	-.09316	.07809	.236	-.2482	.0618
	2.00	1.00	.10566	.10202	.303	-.0968	.3081
		3.00	.01250	.10916	.909	-.2041	.2291
	3.00	1.00	.09316	.07809	.236	-.0618	.2482
		2.00	-.01250	.10916	.909	-.2291	.2041
PhysicalBenefits	1.00	2.00	-.26918*	.13114	.043	-.5295	-.0089
		3.00	.04540	.10039	.652	-.1538	.2446
	2.00	1.00	.26918*	.13114	.043	.0089	.5295
		3.00	.31458*	.14031	.027	.0361	.5931
	3.00	1.00	-.04540	.10039	.652	-.2446	.1538
		2.00	-.31458*	.14031	.027	-.5931	-.0361
Livestreams	1.00	2.00	.18868	.11156	.094	-.0327	.4101
		3.00	-.06132	.08539	.474	-.2308	.1082
	2.00	1.00	-.18868	.11156	.094	-.4101	.0327
		3.00	-.25000*	.11936	.039	-.4869	-.0131
	3.00	1.00	.06132	.08539	.474	-.1082	.2308
		2.00	.25000*	.11936	.039	.0131	.4869
Virtual_Hangout	1.00	2.00	.03774	.05788	.516	-.0771	.1526
		3.00	-.02476	.04431	.578	-.1127	.0632
	2.00	1.00	-.03774	.05788	.516	-.1526	.0771
		3.00	-.06250	.06193	.315	-.1854	.0604

	3.00	1.00	.02476	.04431	.578	-.0632	.1127
		2.00	.06250	.06193	.315	-.0604	.1854
FB_Group	1.00	2.00	-.07673	.06985	.275	-.2154	.0619
		3.00	.02535	.05346	.636	-.0808	.1315
	2.00	1.00	.07673	.06985	.275	-.0619	.2154
		3.00	.10208	.07473	.175	-.0462	.2504
	3.00	1.00	-.02535	.05346	.636	-.1315	.0808
		2.00	-.10208	.07473	.175	-.2504	.0462

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

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