

## Backers' motivations in sports clubs reward-based crowdfunding campaigns

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### Abstract:

**Introduction:** Crowdfunding is a form of fundraising by way of amassing typically small amounts from a number of persons, chiefly via electronic trade platforms. It forms four main models: reward-based, donation-based, peer-to-peer lending, and equity-based. In extensive research on consumer behaviour, each model is usually analysed separately. However, despite the growing literature on the motivations for participating in crowdfunding campaigns, research on the behaviours of sports fans in this area is considerably lacking.

**Purpose:** The aim of this study is to identify the motivations that drive fans to support sports clubs in reward-based crowdfunding campaigns (RBCC). The theoretical framework for this study is self-determination theory (SDT). **Methods:** As this research is exploratory in nature, in-depth interviews with RBCC participants were conducted. Data were processed and analysed with the application of the open-coding technique and thematic analysis, and with the participation of naïve coders. **Results:** In the results, two intrinsic and three extrinsic motivations were identified. Intrinsic motivations included emotional engagement with the club and altruism or the desire to help family or friends. Extrinsic motivations included the desire to belong to a community, collect rewards and causative agency. The conceptual distinction between sports crowdfunding, crowdfunding of sports and sports-related crowdfunding was also defined. In this context, the ongoing study is classified into the category of crowdfunding of sport. **Conclusions:** This study will contribute to the existing knowledge of the motivations of both crowdfunding backers and sports fans. This information can be used by sports managers in targeting RBCC by stressing the motives that will be identified in this study. As a result, the crowdfunding projects of sports clubs will be managed more effectively.

**Key Words:** consumer behaviours, crowdfunding of sport, fundraising, self-determination theory (SDT)

### Introduction

Although the financial structures of European sports clubs are highly varied (Perechuda, 2020), in terms of managerial priorities, most of them are more sporting-success oriented rather than profit-oriented (Szymanski, 2009). Theoretically, a sports club that operates on a financial deficit hires more skilful players by paying them higher salaries, which consequently leads to better sporting results for the club (Drut & Raballand, 2012). Operating with such high financial risk very often causes financial turbulence for sports clubs. Financial fair-play regulations aim to improve the financial capability of the football clubs in Europe (Dimitropoulos & Scafarto, 2021), but their effect is questionable (Ahtiainen & Jarva, 2020). However, this is not only the case with professional sports. Non-profit sports clubs also operate in conditions of financial shortages (Seippel et al., 2020) and depend on public subsidiaries (Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013).

Considering these problems, an instrument that can be useful for funding sports clubs is crowdfunding. Crowdfunding is defined as an open invitation, mainly through the Internet, to provide financial resources in the form of a donation or in exchange for some form of reward and/or voting rights to support a campaign or initiative (Schwienbacher & Larralde, 2010). In practice, this is a form of fundraising by way of amassing usually small amounts from a number of persons, chiefly via electronic trade platforms (Belleflamme, Lambert, & Schwienbacher, 2014). There are four main models of crowdfunding: reward-based (e.g., Kickstarter); donation-based (e.g., Chuffed); peer-to-peer lending (e.g., Kiva); and equity-based (e.g., Fundable) (e.g. Bretschneider, Knaub, & Wieck, 2014; Cholakova & Clarysse, 2015; Choy & Schlagwein, 2016). This distinction is based on the benefits that someone who supports the campaign receives in return. These benefits are, respectively: material rewards, no form of return, loan interests, and shares or assets similar to shares.

To date, a limited number of studies have focused on crowdfunding in the context of sports. Conceptually, according to Kopera (2016), efficient crowdfunding campaigns may primarily be pursued by clubs building fan communities in the social media space. In contrast, Fallone (2014) forecasts that although this particular tool increases the accessibility of equity participation (or interest) in sports organisations, it will not fundamentally alter the ownership structure of sports clubs any time soon. Empirically, Camelia and Olteanu (2018) found that sports-related crowdfunding campaigns include projects that aim to promote sports, support

sports clubs, develop sports infrastructure and create innovative sports equipment. Leroux-Sostenes and Bayle (2019) identify the creators of these kinds of campaigns: individuals or groups of non-sports people; individual athletes (both beginners and those known to the wider public); sports managers; sports clubs; and members of amateur sports clubs, federations or companies organising sports events. The funding success of crowdfunding related to sports is determined by the number of backers, the size of the financial goal, and the settlement model (Brochado, 2017), whereas sports channels on YouTube receive more money via donation-based crowdfunding when they have more subscribers, more views per video, and more banner links (Ciechan-Kujawa & Górniewicz, 2020). However, from a sports marketing management perspective, relevant information about customer behaviours in this market is still lacking.

The key issue when managing crowdfunding campaigns is to reach and convince a sufficiently large group of supporters to participate in it through the appropriate usage of the marketing mix elements. Specific decisions in this area should result from the provisions of the marketing strategy, which is based on understanding the needs and motivations of customers' purchases. However, while the motivations related to participation in crowdfunding have already been addressed by scholars (e.g. Bretschneider et al., 2014; Cholakova & Clarysse, 2015; Colombo, Franzoni, & Rossi-Lamastra, 2015; Cox, Nguyen, & Kang, 2018; Gerber & Hui, 2013; Herrero, Hernández-Ortega, & San Martín, 2020; Zhang & Chen, 2019), none of these referred to projects carried out by sports organisations (including both reward-based and other forms of crowdfunding). Given the lack of research pointing to the consumer behaviours of backers of sports clubs' crowdfunding campaigns, it seems necessary to commence the research project through an inductive study of exploratory behavioural factors determining the consumers' voiced demand for this particular kind of product. Hence, the following research question has been posed: What are the motivations for supporting a sports club through a reward-based crowdfunding campaign?

The aim of this study is, therefore, to identify the motivations that drive fans to support sports clubs in reward-based crowdfunding campaigns. Data for this study were collected using in-depth interviews which provided the statements that were afterwards encoded into consistent motivations. Consequently, this paper contributes to the literature by exploring the list of motivations that drive people to support the crowdfunding of sports clubs. From a managerial point of view, this research provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of how crowdfunding-related marketing programmes should be designed by sports managers.

### **Theoretical framework**

The research is based on self-determination theory (SDT), which is a macro-theory encompassing six "mini-theories" explaining human motivation, development, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In general, in line with SDT, the behaviors of humans are determined by a willingness to satisfy three basic needs: competencies, relevance, and autonomy. Competence refers to the need to feel the effectiveness of one's efforts; relevance refers to feeling a connection to others; and autonomy refers to feeling freedom and self-direction. Participation in the RBCC can be an action that meets each of the given needs: competencies when a campaign is successfully funded because of one's decision (Schwienbacher & Larralde, 2010); relevance when the crowdfunding process creates a community focused around the project (Gerber & Hui, 2013); and autonomy because of the *signals* influencing backers' decisions (Kromidha & Robson, 2016), which are analyzed by each of them individually.

According to SDT, individuals are motivated externally and internally to satisfy their needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Internal motivation is when actions are taken to achieve an individual's own enjoyment and interest, while external motivation occurs when a certain activity is conducted because of its expected consequences. In the area of crowdfunding studies, it has previously been observed that both intrinsic (Bretschneider et al., 2014; Herrero et al., 2020) and extrinsic motivations (Gerber & Hui, 2013; Herrero et al., 2020) drive support for the campaigns of each crowdfunding model. Due to the social context, the dependence of innate human needs, and motivations associated with them (Deci & Ryan, 2008), exploring SDT in the context of sports clubs' RBCC seems to be relevant.

### **Material & methods**

#### *Research design*

The research method used in this study was in-depth interviews with fans who have participated in the RBCC of sports clubs. The interviews were prepared according to Lune and Berg's (2017) recommendations, and the thematic scope was inspired by the interview protocol developed by Qian, Wang, Zhang and Lu (2019) to identify the motivations of e-sport game spectatorship. Thus, the interviews consisted of three parts: (i) opening part – including questions about the conditions of and feelings about participating in RBCC; (ii) main part – consisting of questions about the perceived benefits of RBCC as well as an assessment of this particular campaign; and (iii) closing part – providing interviewees space to express other thoughts. Both essential questions concerned the central focus of the study and other questions aiming to verify the consistency of the given answers were also applied.

According to Camelia and Olteanu (2018), more than half of successfully funded campaigns via Kickstarter (the most popular reward-based crowdfunding platform) raised money for sports-related projects.

Because of the large number of units, it was necessary to narrow down the campaigns from which participants were sampled. Thus, the study focused on projects implemented on the Fans4Club platform, which targets sports organisations. Overall, 44 campaigns were settled on this platform and all of them reached their funding goal.

#### *Data collection and analysis*

Interviewees were recruited from community groups on social media targeting fans of the clubs that were creators of campaigns on the Fans4Club platform. The selection of participants was based on judgement sampling in an effort to assure sample heterogeneity in terms of gender and supported campaign creators – to provide various sports disciplines and, in the context of football, different league levels (Table 1). Subsequent interviewees were recruited as long as new threads appeared in the conversations. It was stopped at the number of 12 participants, representing seven crowdfunding campaigns – two from Wisla Krakow (football team) and one each from Pogon Szczecin (football), Blekitni Starogard (football), Wisla Plock (handball), Krakow Football Kings (American football) and Wataha Zielona Gora (American football). Interviews were conducted by phone or communication apps (Messenger and WhatsApp), lasting from 8 to 25 minutes, which gives the total number of ca. 170 minutes of recordings. The personal data of the participants were anonymised by replacing their names with P1 – P12 labels.

Table 1. Structure of participants of crowdfunding campaigns included in the study

Campaign	Creator (sport discipline)	No. of participants
Wisla Krakow is our story	Wisla Krakow (football)	3 [P1, P2*, P3*]
12 <sup>th</sup> player	Wisla Krakow (football)	3 [P2*, P3*, P4]
The cloakroom worthy “Oilers”	Wisla Plock (handball)	3 [P5, P6, P7, P8]
In pursuit of stadium	Pogon Szczecin (football)	1 [P9]
Support Wataha	Wataha Zielona Gora (American football)	1 [P10]
The blue dream continues	Blekitni Starogard (football)	1 [P11]
The new clothes of Kings	Krakow Football Kings (American football)	1 [P12]

\* Participants P3 and P4 took part in two of Wisla Krakow’s campaigns

The collected recordings were transcribed and, afterwards, qualitatively encoded sentence-by-sentence. In order to avoid subjective biases, four external researchers, working independently, encoded the statements. In line with the exploratory view on the issue, an inductive approach was applied using open coding, resulting in the development of multiple types of motivations. Then, all researchers compared the code lists and, through discussion, came up with a final solution (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). The interpretation of the data was guided by behavioural concepts deeply grounded in social science – SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), as well as concepts from sports management and crowdfunding literature.

#### **Results**

The first step of the coding procedure revealed between 3 and 6 motivation categories, including between 1 and 32 statements per dimension. When discussing the preliminary encoding, it turned out that three dimensions with slightly different names given by researchers tended to cluster the same motivations: “collecting rewards”, “helping family or friends” and “altruism” (called also “selfless help”, “willingness to help and satisfaction” and “good deed”). One of the coders established one group of motivation related to “feeling integrated with a club”, but he was convinced by other researchers that this should be distinguished into the two separate categories of “belonging to a community” and “emotional engagement with a club”. Four of the coders, moreover, distinguished “causative agency” (called also “achieving the goal”, “the possibility of using the campaign effects” and “self-interest”) as one additional motivation. Finally, out of 66 statements, 49 were agreed to be classified into one motivation, 4 were interpreted inconsistently and were eliminated from further examination and 12 describe more than one motivation. The analysis is as follows (Table 2).

Participants called the campaign creator:

*my club* [P1, P3, P11];

*club that I like/love* [P2, P3, P7, P8];

*club I’m a fan of* [P7, P8, P9];

and declared long relation with the organization:

*I’ve supported this club since childhood* [P3].

Fans who identify with a team feel an internal obligation to support the organisation when the organisation needs help. P11 confirms this fact directly:

*My association with the team was my reason for taking part in this project.*

The following sentence clearly exemplifies this state of mind:

*To be a fan does not only mean receiving something, but also giving something to the club you support* [P8].

In this sense, the crucial factor explaining somebody’s participation in reward-based crowdfunding is the fact who is the creator of the campaign.

Notably, numerous backers are also motivated by the willingness to do something selflessly. As they do it for their own satisfaction and need to do something without the expectation of a material reward, this motivation is called *altruism*. Only one sentence showed pure altruistic motivation:

*I'm just happy I could help* [P11].

In the other sentences, *altruism* was mixed with other motivations, such as emotional engagement with a club:

*I had the feeling that I could do something for the club without expecting anything more* [P3]

and causative agency:

*I feel the need to do something to make something I care about function well* [P8].

Causative agency takes place when somebody supports a club with the hope that it will have a positive effect on their future enjoyment of the club. For example, P9 declared satisfaction with the fact that the club will have a new stadium where he will be able to watch matches. P4 confirms that it is good to know the common person can make an important contribution to his or her environment.

However, collecting “typical” materialistic rewards motivates a group of fans as well. This is especially true when the reward is unique in the sense that it is not accessible in non-crowdfunding conditions. P5 said that campaigns make it possible to shake hands with Wisla Krakow players. Another example is the Orlen Wisla Plock campaign, which offered a chance to see a game between the current team and former stars of the club and to visit the club’s dressing room [P6]. One of the participants said they regretted being late for the rewards they planned to buy and were sorry about this [P5]. Nevertheless, the reward does not need to be valuable. The context of the sentences provides the information that rewards, though appreciated by fans, are not perceived as the reason why they participate in the RBCC. P2 provides important proof for this claim:

*I would support the next campaign as I did it before, i.e. having something in return, some entertainment from it, but so that the club could also benefit from it.*

Two of the analysed campaigns were related to amateur American football clubs. These kinds of organisations have no crowds of highly engaged fans, but have the possibility of receiving support from family or friends instead. Participation in RBCC as a way of helping people from one’s immediate environment is declared directly by P10 and also stressed by P12, who confessed to backing the campaign of Krakow Football Kings because his brother had asked him to. On this basis, it can be assumed the emotional engagement that leads people to support RBCC has two substitutional categories: emotional connection with a club (related to professional sports clubs) and interpersonal relationships (in the case of amateurs).

Table 2. List of motivations with descriptions and examples

Motivation	Description	Example
Emotional engagement with a club	The extent to which backers support projects due to a psychological relationship to the sports team.	<i>Each of us fans was obliged to support the club that we like, love, and have in our hearts.</i>
Altruism	The extent to which backers support projects because of a philanthropic desire to help.	<i>I was satisfied that I could do something positive for the club.</i>
Helping family or friends	The extent to which backers support projects because of a desire to help creators who are their family members or friends.	<i>I backed the club [Krakow Football Kings] because my brother asked me to.</i>
Collecting rewards	The extent to which backers support projects because of a desire to collect external rewards.	<i>I did something good, and now I have a nice reward that reminds me of it.</i>
Causative agency	The extent to which backers support projects to bring certain initiatives to fruition.	<i>It is really fun to have your own impact on reality, when you, an ordinary person, can influence something.</i>
Belonging to a community	The extent to which backers support projects because they feel part of a community of like-minded people.	<i>What encouraged me to take part in this project was the advantage of being able to engage in club life. It is good to know that we can do something together.</i>

## Discussion

In previous studies, three different approaches to relations between areas of crowdfunding and sports were provided: sports-related crowdfunding campaigns (Camelia & Olteanu, 2018), crowdfunding of sports (Leroux-Sostenes & Bayle, 2019) and sports crowdfunding (Brochado, 2017). These works developed in parallel, but their subject scope is different, so these concepts need to be clarified first. In Camelia and Olteanu (2018), crowdfunding for sports-related projects includes all campaigns for any form of support for sports or physical activity (promoting sports, supporting sports clubs, creating sports infrastructure or equipment useful for sports). As Leroux-Sostenes and Bayle (2019) include in their research on the crowdfunding of sports only projects created by sports clubs, we can address these in terms of campaigns started by entities responsible for the supply of sports. Adhering to the distinction between sports marketing, marketing *through* sports and the marketing *of* sports (Shilbury, Westerbeek, Quick, & Funk, 2009), “sports crowdfunding” should be used as the general term covering two branches: the crowdfunding *of* sports and sports-related crowdfunding. Regarding this distinction, the ongoing study is classified into the field of the crowdfunding of sports (Fig. 1).

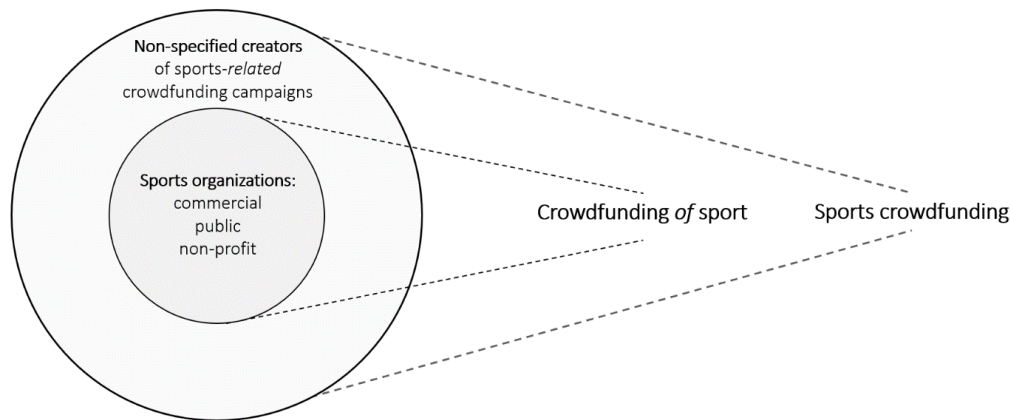


Fig. 1. Conceptualisation of sports crowdfunding

Six motivations of supporting crowdfunding for sports clubs were identified in this research: emotional engagement with a club, collecting rewards, belonging to a community, altruism, causative agency and helping family or friends. This finding broadly supports the work of other studies in the area of backers' motivations in RBCC. Collecting rewards was found as a crucial motivation in reward-based crowdfunding (Cholakova & Clarysse, 2015; Colombo et al., 2015; Gerber & Hui, 2013), although some participants refrain from receiving a material return from their backing (Cox et al., 2018) and take pleasure in helping altruistically (Gerber & Hui, 2013; Schwenbacher & Larralde, 2010). According to previous studies, backers were also motivated by the desire to belong to a community (Gerber & Hui, 2013), and as part of a local community, they were more willing to support a project that could be beneficial for themselves in the future (Herrero et al., 2020; Zhang & Chen, 2019). The originality of this study's outcomes lies in distinguishing the motivation of emotional engagement with the campaign creator (in this case, the sports club), which has not previously been described as a motivation for supporting RBCC. Regardless, this corroborates the findings of the previous work in the field of sports management that pointed to team identification (Kościółek, 2019; Park & Dittmore, 2014) as a crucial factor explaining the customer behaviours of sports fans.

Both intrinsic and extrinsic categories of motivations that come from self-determination theory are fulfilled with the results of this study (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivations are: emotional engagement with a club, altruism and helping family or friends. Backers motivated extrinsically expected: collecting rewards, belonging to a community and causative agency. The coexistence of these motivations was also reported by Herrero et al. (2020), whereas these results differ from Zhang and Chen (2019). Research on crowdfunding (Choy & Schlagwein, 2016) and, earlier on, crowdsourcing (Kaufmann & Veit, 2011) also stressed another distinction of backers' motivations: individual, when an actor does something for their own interest; and social, when an actor does something for the community (Forgas, Laham, & Vargas, 2005). When integrating these two classifications, each cell of the motivational matrix (Fig. 2) related to behaviours of sports fans in crowdfunding is fulfilled. Evidence that the identified motivations are complementary is not given, but their differentiation indicates the need to deal with a variety of backers' personal expectations.

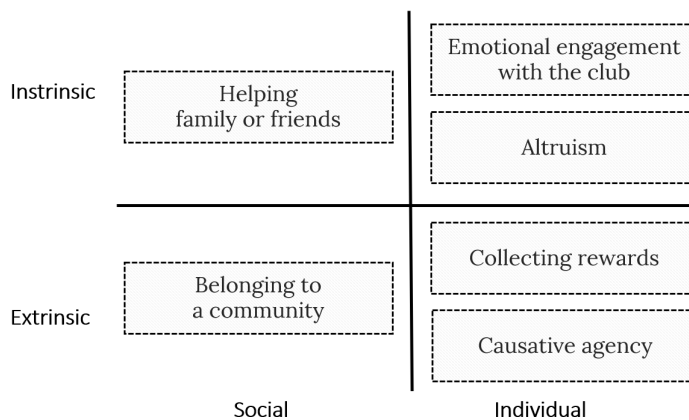


Fig. 2. Classification of sports fans' motivations in sports clubs crowdfunding campaigns

These findings have important implications for sports managers' development of the marketing programmes of their RBCC. Interestingly, crowdfunding has a dual financial-marketing role. On one hand, it is an instrument delivering money for the creator of the campaign. On the other hand, some crowdfunding is a

product that has to be *bought* by a potential customer for money. Thus, marketing-mix instruments must be applied in order to meet customer needs. The core of sports clubs' RBCC product is the reason why a campaign is started and money is collected. In this sense, the extensions of the product are the rewards customers can choose to receive in return for their support. When analysing a given motivation, achieving of the campaign's goal turned out to be a significant motivation for some of the interviewees. As fans are usually groups of highly engaged (Meng, Stavros, & Westberg, 2015) and loyal customers (Tapp, 2004), the main challenge of marketing management is not to reach customers, but to convince them to take part in the campaign. This can be done by stressing the benefits related to all seven of the motivational areas previously presented.

### Conclusions

In this paper, the distinction between sports crowdfunding and its two branches, the crowdfunding of sports and sports-related crowdfunding, was conceptualised. The empirical goal of the research was, however, to focus on the reward-based crowdfunding of sports and to identify the motivations that drive backers to support sports clubs through RBCC. As a result, seven motivations were identified through in-depth interviews. These motivations can be distinguished into the categories of: intrinsic-individual motivation – helping family or friends; intrinsic-social motivations – emotional engagement with a club and altruism; extrinsic-individual motivations – collecting rewards and causative agency; and extrinsic-social motivation – belonging to a community. The managerial recommendation is to include all these various motivations in sports clubs' communication strategy for their RBCC.

As only qualitative methods were implemented, the results are limited. Because of this, they should be treated with necessary caution. It is suggested, therefore, to verify the results quantitatively through survey research with Churchill's (1979) four-stage approach for developing motivation scales. As an exploratory list of motivations with descriptive sentences (items) has been identified through the research, the first stage of Churchill's procedure has already been conducted. In line with this, the challenge is now to design a psychometric scale that will also be applicable in further research on customer behaviours in the area of the crowdfunding of sports.

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**Conflicts of interest** - The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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