

Blanka Brzozowska

University of Łódź

Crowdfunding from the perspective of music fans — participation or exploitation?*

Abstract: Crowdfunding as a new form of financing culture is a relatively new phenomenon, but it is becoming more and more popular. The spectacular financial success of projects such as Veronica Mars, however, opens a discussion about the situation of the investing audience — the fans. The crowdfunding model is based on the active participation of fans not only at the level of funding, but also at the level of decision-making (this refers to the discussion of the cast, storyline, track list, etc.). As such, crowdfunding should lead to the dissolution of the boundaries between artists and their fans, but there are still certain doubts about who is the real beneficiary of big budget projects, and therefore it is unclear whether fans are becoming the objects of manipulation and exploitation. The paper aims to outline a framework for the discussion on the crowdfunding model and to show the ambiguity of the new situation of fans within this model.

Keywords: crowdfunding, participatory culture, gift economy, fandom

Crowdfunding as a new form of culture financing is a relatively new phenomenon, but it is gaining popularity¹. However, in spite of its postulated democratic character, it evokes a number of controversies and discussions on the actual role of fans/investors in the new model of financing. The discussions are further incited by spectacular and increasingly numerous financial successes of crowdfunding² campaigns in which not only well-known celebrities from the world of culture but also large media corporations are involved. The participation of the latter in particular

* The project was funded by the Polish National Science Centre (NCN) on the basis of decision number DEC-2011/03/D/HS4/03408.

¹ According to Massolution® Reports, in 2015 crowdfunding platforms raised \$34.4 billion comparing to \$16.2 billion in 2014, \$6.1 billion in 2013 and \$2.7 billion in 2012. See: <http://www.crowdsourcing.org/editorial/global-crowdfunding-market-to-reach-344b-in-2015-predicts-massolutions-2015cf-industry-report/45376>, <http://www.marketwired.com/press-release/crowdfunding-market-grows-167-2014-crowdfunding-platforms-raise-162-billion-finds-research-2005299.htm>.

² The best example is the success of the Veronica Mars film campaign on Kickstarter. See: R. Fishbein, *'Veronica Mars' Kickstarter Closes Today, Smashes Crowdfunding Records*. Retrieved from: http://laist.com/2013/04/12/veronica_mars_kickstarter_closes_to.php.

raises the question of the risks associated with the new model of culture financing and the actual potential of transformations in the field of organisation of cultural production. There are doubts as to who is the true financial beneficiary of high-budget projects; therefore, the question arises as to whether the investing fans are being subject to manipulation and exploitation by record companies representing artists. The importance of these questions stems from the fact that crowdsourcing is founded on the active participation of the “crowd” not only at the level of financing, but also at the level of the creation of a film, music, a game, etc.³ As such, the new model is supposed to bring about the dissolution of the borders between creators and their fans, which appears to be a dream come true for members of fandoms. However, it is simultaneously supposed to provide the creators with maximum freedom within the boundaries defined by mutual relations with the “crowd” of benefactors.

Considering the above matters from the perspective of culture studies and media studies requires a review of the notion of participation itself, as the models that have been developed so far are irrelevant to the sociocultural phenomena being created on the basis of the latest communication technology. Due to its character, crowdfunding requires the use of the notional apparatus developed for research on fandom, but modifications required by the transfer of most of fans’ activities to the Web need to be taken into account. This perspective of media and culture studies must be further supplied with certain concepts from anthropology and sociology which allow us to analyse the issue in the context of the problems of social trust, gift economy and new communal life.

The aim of this article is to outline the relevant themes of the above-mentioned discussion on the basis of an analysis of empirical material gathered during a research project “Produkcja partnerska dóbr kultury w modelu finansowania społecznościowego” [Commons based peer-production of cultural goods in the model of crowdfunding] funded by the Polish National Science Centre.

The characteristics of crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is an extension of crowdsourcing, that is, actions undertaken by large groups (defined as “crowds”) who do not belong to organisations, are not employed and who challenge certain tasks relevant to their competences and

³ New forms of cooperation are created and maintained by particular forms of new media informal participatory practices, for instance, circulation of information on social media, creating and sharing content, multiplayer gaming, collaborative task solving etc. Informal communication builds a community of the “informed” whose activity is determined in a grass-roots, organic and spontaneous manner. Hereby, an “emotional capital” is built and content is “spread” in an uncontrollable way. See: H. Jenkins, S. Ford, J. Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, New York 2013; H. Jenkins, *Kultura konwergencji: zderzenie starych i nowych mediów*, Warszawa 2010.

abilities, often in a joint effort to solve problems. The notion is coined from two elements: the actions of the “crowd” and “outsourcing”. It includes crowdfunding, co-creation and microtasking⁴. This of course requires a redefinition of the term “crowd”, which has a rich tradition in sociology, but generally has a negative undertone, especially because of its assignment to certain dialectics (crowd/individual, wisdom/foolishness, rationality/irrationality, etc.). The meaning used by the supporters of the new model of involvement and action is far from the classic conceptions of the word, such as those of Le Bon. Shared work here is based on the proposals of Pierre Lévy, James Surowiecki or, in its more moderate version, Henry Jenkins. In the common actions of a crowd, these proposals perceive a promise of freedom, a possibility for the creative development of potential and, eventually, new forms of communal or even civic life. Crowdsourcing therefore stresses the “co-” element of co-operation, with an emphasis on the exchange of thoughts, openness and creativity, all of which result from unexpected mixtures of different ideas.

Crowdfunding uses those rules, but instead of work, the “crowd’s” input is financial, usually in small amounts, as a gift or exchange⁵. Crowdfunding understood in this way is used for the financing of small and medium-sized projects⁶. Such projects are usually associated with the sphere of creative industries, but there are also pro-social campaigns (e.g. creating a community centre) or traditional charity, such as gathering funds for a therapy. Nevertheless, crowdfunding is most often chosen by creators, designers and inventors who employ it to avoid the limitations imposed by the traditional system of cultural production, such as record companies’ or film studios’ tampering with a creative product’s final form, often at the cost of its artistic value. In an attempt to avoid this problem, creators turn to a more or less anonymous “crowd” who usually expect various forms of gratification in return, such as film or music merchandise (CDs/DVDs, T-shirts, stickers, etc.), pre-release access to a product, a chance to meet the artists or, in

⁴ Claudia Pelzer, as cited in: J. Kasprzycki-Rosikoń, ‘Co zostało z pięknych wizji?’, [in:] *Crowdsourcing. Jak angażować konsumentów w świat marek*, ed. J. Kasprzycki-Rosikoń, J. Piątkowski, Gliwice 2013, p. 15.

“Co-creation” is a much broader term which can be applied to any initiative joining different groups (e.g. producers and consumers, company and clients) in order to produce a “mutually valued outcome”. See more: C.K. Prahalad, V. Ramaswamy, ‘Co-creation Experiences: The Next Practice in Value Creation’, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 2004.

Microtasking, on the other hand, is based on splitting a particular project into smaller tasks and distributing them over the Internet, often as a form of voluntary challenge or additional free labour for workers or clients (e.g. gathering/processing data, writing reviews etc.).

⁵ Zob. P. Belleflamme, T. Lambert, A. Schwienbacher, *Crowdfunding: Tapping the Right Crowd. International Conference of the French Finance Association (AFFI)*, May 11–13, 2011, Retrieved from: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1836873>.

⁶ Zob. A. Ordanini et al., ‘Crowd-Funding: Transforming Customers into Investors through Innovative Service Platforms’, *Journal of Service Management*, 22(4), 2011, pp. 443–470.

the case of higher contribution, even an opportunity to take part in the production process by playing a small part in a film or having another form of influence on a product's final form (naming a character, having the contributor's name in the credits, etc.). Because of the above, it is easy to notice that the new model not only changes the situation of creators and heavily modifies the process of their interaction with recipients, but also achieves best effects by aiming at a certain type of audience and texts such as those defined as fandom in culture studies.

Digital fandom — exploitation or gift economy?

Research on fandom has a rich tradition within culture studies, which is reflected in the works of such researchers as Henry Jenkins⁷, Matt Hills⁸ or Paul Booth⁹. Because of their connection with popular culture studies, which have treated the matters of power, resistance, participation and exploitation as key issues, placing the matter of fandom in the context of criticism of capitalistic culture and its relations and limitations. As the topic of this text is not the reconstruction of the scientific discourse of fandom research, I will stop at these general assumptions; they cover the most important themes that have been developed using opportunities for communication offered by the latest technology, which is also the base for the development of crowdfunding. In light of these transformations, Paul Booth introduces the notion of digital fandom. As I believe this corresponds very well with the “fan” side of crowdfunding, I will present it in more detail.

Paul Booth focuses on research on digital fandom, as he believes that the tools developed thus far by media studies and culture studies do not fully encompass online practices. ARG games and other activities stemming from the tradition of fandom become, in his view, metaphors for modern media practices and their intersection of the dialectics of work/fun, real/virtual, etc. Thanks to this, “fandom becomes one way to understand contemporary digital culture”¹⁰. Therefore, it seems reasonable to use the conclusion proposed by Booth in an attempt to understand the characteristics of the relations that occur within crowdfunding. What is most important about Booth's work, and at the same time differentiates it from most analyses of fan practices, is his focus on co-operation and treating fandom as a “work of collective community, and not fans as individual members”¹¹. By proposing such an interpretation, the author criticises theories based on the pro-

⁷ H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, New York 2013.

⁸ M. Hills, *Fan Cultures*, New York/London 2003.

⁹ P. Booth, *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies*, New York 2010.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

duction/consumption dialectic, where consumption is perceived as destruction¹². This is found not only in works from the field of popular culture criticism, but also in the ones that use the logic of resistance in explaining fans' actions. Booth suggests forfeiting this direction in favour of "non-market economic antecedents to fans' use of media"¹³. Thus, he associates himself with fandom research that is related to traditions of the theory of culture that use notions such as potlatch, gift economy or carnival (in Bakhtin's understanding), which I will return to in a moment. It could be added that such an understanding of "collectivism" falls under Pierre Lévy's theory of "collective intelligence" and its creative, communal character¹⁴. Therefore, the foreground here is occupied by the dimension of the construction of relations and social status, not by financial profits or position in the economy¹⁵. This is noted by Bethan Jones in reference to crowdfunding: Jones points out that campaigns' participants are not "naïve" and that what they want to achieve is not financial, but social in its character¹⁶.

Booth refers to the type of collective relation building which Martyn Thayne described as:

shift towards a more flexible, open system of 'networked sociality' which consists of fleeting and transient relations; of ephemeral yet intense encounters which are created on a project-to-project basis, and by the movement of ideas¹⁷.

This leads to the creation of a "post-broadcast' model of media production which enables public citizens to express themselves in new and exciting ways"¹⁸.

¹² Ibid., p. 42.

¹³ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁴ See: B. Brzozowska, 'Nowe oblicza przewodnika w kontekście rozwoju kultury uczestniczącej', *Prace Kulturoznawcze*, 17, 2015.

¹⁵ However, these elements cannot be clearly separated from each other, as Trebor Scholz shows in his introduction to the conference *Digital Labor*, T. Scholz, *About: Digital Labor Conference*, <http://digitallabor.org/about> (31 July 2015).

¹⁶ Jones in: B. Chin et al., 'Veronica Mars Kickstarter and Crowd Funding [dialogue]', *Transformative Works and Cultures, Special Issue: Fandom and/as Labor*, ed. M. Stanfill, M. Condis, 15, 2014.

¹⁷ M. Thayne, 'Friends Like Mine: The Production of Socialised Subjectivity in the Attention Economy', *Culture Machine*, 13(0), 2012, p. 4.

¹⁸ Ibid. See also: D. Gauntlett, *Media Studies 2.0 — Article on Future of Media Studies by David Gauntlett at Theory.org.uk*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theory.org.uk/mediastudies2.htm> (31 July 2015); W. Merrin, *Media Studies 2.0*, New York/London 2014.

Post-broadcasting model is strictly connected to transition from analogue to digital media. It should be noted however, that neither the digital media are necessarily "post-broadcasting" (because of mass distribution of content, like e.g. computer games) nor the "broadcasting era" is over (broadcast media still exist in the new digital environment). The key factors here are an increase of individuals' productive and distributive capacity as well as informal grass-roots cooperation models of action that results in changing the focus from expert based media reading to everyday meanings produced by audience. This transition of relationships is the basis of participatory culture and spreadable media as Henry Jenkins understands it.

However, both digital fandom and other methods of co-operation on the Web, including crowdfunding, are threatened by their placement within a culture of consumption. Anna Nacher points out a number of dangers connected to crowdfunding. She emphasises that similar practices have existed before, especially in the music industry, but in this case we are dealing with a conventionalisation of what used to exist as separate “tactics”, and what may eventually lead to the “dismantling and erosion of the traditional policies of culture financing”. As in the case of crowdsourcing, the author believes there is a risk of exploitation associated with the use of users’ unpaid work, for example through Facebook. This danger is especially important in view of the development of creative industries, as their character allows for the dissolution of borders between what is considered to be “work” and what is not¹⁹.

This subject is also raised by Berta Chin in her analysis of the changing situation of fans in light of the development of the new media. Due to easy communication tools offered by social media, fans are becoming the actual promoters and co-creators of the texts of culture, but this does not mean that they will gain additional profits:

In consuming and producing media content, fans are performing labor that benefits the media industry in some way, whether by delivering audience numbers or by utilizing their contacts in fandom to promote a text; and they are providing this labor without any form of compensation from the media industry²⁰.

Arguments from culture studies are repeated in this approach in connection with the actions of fans, which are a certain accumulation of the opportunities and limitations offered by the culture of consumption. This is how Henry Jenkins perceives it in his key theory which defines fandom as an area of “poaching”. In this view, fandom, and therefore crowdfunding as its “heir”, is an attempt by the producers of culture to impose domination and a tactical (in de Certeau’s understanding) resistance from the recipients. These actions are subversive to the system and are constantly in danger of takeover and commercialisation as a result of their position within the economy. In this approach, crowdfunding inherits the threat of fans’/investors’ activities being intercepted so that large record companies can cut costs, which actually results in maintaining the status quo while giving the illusion of greater freedom²¹.

Chin’s arguments support a different view by referring to the concept of gift economy and emphasising the elementary level of fans’ practices, which is mainly

¹⁹ A. Nacher, *Rubieże kultury popularnej. Popkultura w świecie przepływów*, Poznań 2013, p. 230.

²⁰ B. Chin, ‘Sherlockology and Galactica.tv: Fan Sites as Gifts or Exploited Labor?’, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 15, 2013, [1.1].

²¹ The *Veronica Mars* project is an example of a controversial role of a film studio. See: B. Brzozowska, P. Gałuszka, ‘Crowdfunding: Towards a Redefinition of the Artist’s Role. The Case of MegaTotal’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4 June 2015; and B. Chin et al., op. cit.

associated with the construction of social relations. The exchange of gifts here serves to build a reputation within a group, which sometimes leads to the status being transferred outside the group:

Some of these fans who have attained skills and a good reputation within fandom occasionally go on to collaborate with media producers, participating in (and sometimes even organizing) grassroots marketing campaigns or assisting in the production of extra fan materials, such as contributions to official wikis and the production of extra DVD or Blu-ray specials²².

Mauss' famous concept is referred to by other researchers, including Henry Jenkins (2013) and Howard Rheinghold (1993), in their works on the new forms of communal action in the age of media development. There are, however, numerous doubts, mostly resulting from the fact that it is difficult to compare the organised societies studied by Mauss with the community form on the Web, where hierarchy and status serve a different purpose and are less concrete²³.

Another researcher, Rachael Sabotini, describes the phenomenon of "fan potlatch", pointing out the "dark side" of building social status in fan communities. Using an analogy to traditional Native American rituals, the author admits that, as in the antecedent patterns described by anthropologists, this situation does not occur in a utopian, democratic society where everyone is appreciated for their efforts. The exchange of gifts serves mostly for the construction of complex social hierarchies, which are visible, for example, in fans' Internet forums. Within these hierarchies, the achieved status is decided by what rights we do or do not have. However, not all gifts are equally prized, and they do not have to be accepted. The slightest oversight in matters of the etiquette of the current hierarchy may end the gift exchange²⁴.

The question asked by Chin in the context of a gift economy refers to whether we are dealing with an opening of the culture industry and extending an invitation to fans as co-creators, or with a camouflaged exploitation of fans' unpaid efforts, where fans cannot see the danger as they think they are participating in a gift economy. The author replies critically to Helleksen's (2009) argument that having a gift economy protects the community endangered by exploitation and provides it with autonomy. Chin believes that such thinking renders discussion on the dialectics of power and resistance impossible, as it makes us unable to see the complexities and ambiguities of fans' actions²⁵.

Chin concludes:

²² B. Chin, op. cit. [1.4.]

²³ E. Pearson, 'Digital Gifts: Participation and Gift Exchange in Livejournal Communities', *First Monday*, 12(5), 2007.

²⁴ R. Sabotini, *Fanfic Symposium: The Fannish Potlatch*. Retrieved from: <http://www.trickster.org/symposium/symp41.htm> (1 September 2015).

²⁵ B. Chin, op. cit., [3.5.].

we need to take into account notions of fan agency, or fan choice in participating or providing labor, even if we remain skeptical about the media industry's stakes in fandom. We must not disregard the possibility that fans might even be aware of the rhetoric on fan exploitation, but disagree with it, choosing to continue providing the service or the labor anyway²⁶.

It is also significant that fans who have contact with the producers of culture perceive themselves as intermediaries between studios and fandom. By citing Terranova and Milner, Chin emphasises that the gratuitousness of work does not equal exploitation, and such considerations lack input from the fans themselves²⁷.

Chin writes:

It is vital that we acknowledge that fans often perform labor because there is something beyond monetary gain to be achieved: something like status and access to the media industry²⁸.

It is worth emphasising that the very notion of “gift” in context of the culture of consumption has an ambivalent character, as items may fluently change their status depending on what practices consumers associate with them and what motivations consumers have²⁹. Another significant fact is that a gift does not have to be tangible; gifts can take the form of “effort gifts”, “gifts of time and companionship”³⁰ or “labour gifts”³¹. This makes it even more difficult to include crowdfunding in a model based on a clear division between producers and consumers. It also questions the matter of mutuality, which was crucial to Mauss' theory. Researchers such as Jenkins et. al³² or Turk³³ attempt to solve these issues by suggesting that there is a “circulation” of gifts instead of a symmetrical mutuality, as the latter is impossible in the diverse, constantly changing communities of the Web.

In response to these doubts, Booth presents the notion of Digi-Gratis Economy. The Digi-Gratis Economy is a combination of market and gift economies. As a combination, it has the characteristics of both economies, but constitutes a completely new entity. There is no financial exchange in this type of economy, but the structures of a market economy remain. Digi-Gratis assumes a balance between the two types of economies, which is best seen in the actions of fandoms: “Fans create ‘gifts’ out of the products they purchase in the market economy, and the market caters to the fan culture by offering free services that fans can interpret as gifts”³⁴. In a “Gratis” economy, people create and share content gratuitously as

²⁶ Ibid., [3.10].

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 4.2.–4.3., 4.13.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 6.2.

²⁹ H. Jenkins, S. Ford, J. Green, op. cit.; E. Pearson, op. cit.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ T. Turk, ‘Fan Work: Labor, Worth, and Participation in Fandom’s Gift Economy’ *Transformative Works and Cultures, Special Issue: Fandom and/as Labor*, ed. M. Stanfill and M. Condis, 15, 2014.

³² H. Jenkins, S. Ford, J. Green, op. cit.

³³ T. Turk, op. cit.

³⁴ P. Booth, op. cit., p. 131.

it serves for building social bonds, not for market exchange. This point is similar to the one that Mauss have made. However, it is also Mauss who points out the fact that there is an expectation of an obligatory return gift, as is prescribed by strict social rules. This comes from the implied loss brought about by the view of consumption as destruction³⁵, which is an idea discarded by Booth in the context of digital fandom. There is no tangible loss in a digital economy, but an object can be reproduced by copying and exchanging it. A digital “gift” such as an .mp3 file can be reproduced endlessly. Booth claims that this proves that we are dealing with neither a gift economy nor a market economy. There is also no exploitation in its traditional meaning, as exchanges take place in a “non-monetary environment online” where communalism and the social dimension are dominant³⁶. Based on the theories of Bourdieu, de Certeau and Fiske, the proposal is therefore that the development of key works “disenchants” fandom, but it also broadens them by perceiving the activities of fans as “production-through-reproduction”, where the tangible element is no longer in the foreground³⁷. As Thayne claims, here, both production and reproduction are folded into what Gilles Deleuze calls a metaproduction: the production of relations rather than things³⁸.

Booth proposes an analogy to Bakhtin’s carnival, which in the case of digital fandom results in a suspension of the division of people into creators and recipients, and each individual input strengthens the community:

Through the intra-textual joining of the blog post with the blog comment, both fan writers not only rewrite the document, but also in that same act, reread the community to which that text belong³⁹.

We can see the “two faces” of the carnival — the simultaneous existence of the “official culture” and the “culture of laughter”, where one needs the other. Booth emphasises that fans need an official text just as the carnival needs an official culture⁴⁰ (it may be added that the official culture is refreshed thanks to the activities of fans, who make it come to “life”). The author also quotes Jenkins about the double morality of fans which is visible in their simultaneous fidelity to the canon and the concept of a right to modify the text⁴¹.

³⁵ Which would again refer to the notion of *potlatch*.

³⁶ P. Booth, op. cit., pp. 24–27.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 36–38.

³⁸ M. Thayne, op. cit.

³⁹ P. Booth, op. cit., p. 67.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 73.

⁴¹ H. Jenkins, ‘Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching’, [in:] *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, ed. H. Jenkins, New York 2006, after: P. Booth, op. cit., p. 70.

The perspective of fans — the example of users of the MegaTotal portal

The two-sided situation described above is also observable in crowdfunding, which I would now like to examine with the help of a research project “Produkcja partnerska dóbr kultury w modelu finansowania społecznościowego” [Commons based peer-production of cultural goods in the model of crowd-funding”] and the example of the MegaTotal.pl portal⁴².

When discussing the “carnival” double-meaning of crowdfunding, two issues need to be outlined. One is motivating supported artists and providing them with certain artistic freedom (in contrast to companies that try to monopolise cultural production) in an attempt to “upend the order”. The other is that, at the same time, fans want to control the content created by artists (crowdfunding portals facilitate communication between creators and investors, which is expected by the latter and used by them to voice their opinions and suggestions concerning created content). Furthermore, competition over status and prestige takes place within the fan community, where members display their competences in project evaluation. This is associated with the awarding of special rewards — in this case, the extras become part of building one’s position within the network of relations, as in Booth’s proposal.

The following words of one of the users confirm this:

According to the old rules, the fans from the top10 and top30 received special privileges (a record or a signed record). I admit that I often contributed just to stay in the “top” once I already got there. (Cv)⁴³

By assuming the roles of investors who decide whose project is going to be financed, fans put themselves in the position of being experts. The traditional model of cultural production is therefore interrupted, even though fans use its criteria of evaluation and can be objective and pragmatic. This is especially visible when an artist is evaluated as “not very commercial”, one who would not have a good chance under “normal” market conditions. The following statements of four different users prove this:

I liked their music more when they appeared on MegaTotal. But from the beginning I thought that the band had too little commercial potential to have their music published. I invested less than a hundred PLN into the project (in previous projects the amounts varied from a few hundred to even a thousand PLN). (Cq)

⁴² For more details on the portal’s characteristics and operation, see: B. Brzozowska, P. Gałuszka, *op. cit.*

⁴³ Quotes have been translated from the original Polish. Since the respondents were guaranteed anonymity their names were removed by Cx (where C stands for ‘contributors’ and the second letter (e.g. x) shows if a quote is from the same person or someone else).

If I believed that an artist had a chance to sell a large number of LPs (and therefore achieve commercial success), I invested as much as I could. (Cn)

I also wanted to help in the promotion of different and interesting bands. Our music scene needed some fresh air a few years ago. (Cw)

I started by listening to the tracks from albums that had just appeared, where the collected amount was small, so that at least a part of my input would return after some time. (Cp)

The changing of roles is even clearer in reference to promotion. Fans are active in the field and they also adopt the function of experts on the promotion of music that they decide to sponsor, often by stressing that the band “cannot manage” in this matter:

The band registered an account there because I asked them to [...] I drew many “investors”, de facto fans, to help with financing of the record. (Cq)

The bands that I supported the most were not much involved in the promotion of their projects on MegaTotal. I kind of stood in for them. (Cq)

The role of the fan is currently limited to that of a capital donor and recipient of eventual bonuses. When I really like a CD, I buy it in large quantities and give it to friends on different occasions. I believe this is a good thing to do. (Cv)

As the responses show, the fans see their role in the promotion of artists as “word of mouth marketing”, promotion in social media and among friends. Some of the respondents highlighted this element and pointed out that this is an expert function that could be fulfilled by no one except the fans in this model, and that is impossible for artists themselves to achieve. The shift in power relations is clearly visible. The creators are losing their special position and are becoming partners who need co-operation of the community, as they no longer have the support of a record company in the field of promotion and distribution.

On the other hand, when asked about their desire to be involved in a project, fans sometimes expressed their own lack of competence and left the field to artists while taking on the role of commentators/critics:

I don't know enough about this to give advice. I only expressed positive feelings (“great record”, “track 5 is the best”, “very successful concert”) and I asked about possible directions and targets rather than set them. A few album covers “went through” my hands — correction of typos. (Cv) Many times I commented on their music with more or less substantial remarks. Sometimes I suggested the shape of the set list before concerts [...]. I was the first reviewer of the band's lyrics. (Cq)

I never gathered the courage to give advice as a music layman. (Ck)

I always believed that the artists do what they do as well as they can. (Cx)

There were also various reactions from artists to the fans' desire to get involved⁴⁴. The artists deny such a possibility when they do not like the criticism:

I once suggested to an artist that he should work on his accent (English) and he banned me from his profile for that. (Cn)

⁴⁴ On the changing role of the artists in the crowdfunding model, see: B. Brzozowska, P. Gałuszka, *op. cit.*

Or the opposite, they accept the “gift” in the form of fans’ remarks:

My suggestions were more a review under the album, not a direct reference. I remember that Nell’s song *Szkoło* (Eng. *Glass*) was rather harshly criticised, it was made available with a “megaphone” filter on the vocals. In the final version, on the record, the track was already in the modified version, according to the suggestions. (Ce)

Whatever the reactions of the artists are, it is most important that, as one of the respondents said, “the user kind of becomes a part of a given project”.

The fans emphasise in their responses that profits from the selected projects matter as well, but they are not in the foreground:

I maintained a high input into the project, because at a relatively low cost I sometimes managed to profit from the new fans’ investments and I could invest in other projects. (Cq)

I could count on the fingers of one hand the projects that I invested in and had a return. (Cn)

I was more of an altruist than an investor in my approach. (Cx)

I treat this as fun, I don’t expect profits. (Cp)

I liked the original idea of the portal, where there was at least a potential possibility to have a return from an investment — although I was aware that I would never recover all of the funds. As of now, the portal is not attractive to me. (Co)

In view of this, the dominant motivations are emotional. The fans often pointed to involvement out of “sentiment” or “sympathy” for a given artist. Some of them indicated that the artists were their friends. Ludic motivation also played a significant role:

All in all for fun, because no one took the possibility of publishing a record seriously, including the band. (Cq)

At one moment it became a cool game — who can get more funds for further contributions. (Ce)

This multitude of motivations cannot be brought down to a one-dimensional model, as was summed up by one of the users who names several reasons for investing, including the ability to download songs, agitation from the band members and friends, and finally the following strategy:

I invested small amounts into each new project that had no investors yet — this way I could obtain money to support other artists I chose. (Cq)

As we can see, the motivations are complex and assume, on the one hand, a reference to the expert knowledge of amateurs, and on the other — a reference to fun and sentiment. The users see nothing wrong in connecting these discourses, or even the contrary, this is why they enjoy using the portal.

Sometimes it was cold calculation, sometimes I was enchanted by a song. (Cr)

The fans, however, have clearly outlined expectations based on broad practical knowledge, as can be seen in the following response to the question of how the artists may improve their activities on the portal:

Approach the topic more from the side of marketing, offer more kinds of profit for the investors. (Cf)

What is most important, the majority of respondents indicated the significant role of the “social” element of the portal and had negative opinions of the changes that have diminished it. In the opinion of respondents, the beginnings of the portal were characterised by “common work, common target”, working as a “family”, “a real community”, or a form which allowed them to “feel like” part of a community. The portal therefore consisted of:

A group of people who are hungry for contact with others, who are crazy about the same thing, can help together in publishing a given album and endlessly exchange observations. Just close-knit people. (Ce)

They described the current situation by saying that “Megatotal stopped being a social portal a few years ago”, it is created by “anonymous users” and:

It was no longer a community but individuals who were there just because they were there, but they had no active participation in the portal’s everyday life. (Cx)

One of the users concludes:

In the age of interactivity, where it’s the users who create the Internet, it’s hard to call people connected only by finances and co-investments a community. Fewer possibilities of the exchange of views make everyone just a login and a password. And a set of numbers. (Ce)

Conclusions

Crowdfunding is a relatively new phenomenon, so it is hard to predict the direction of its development and which of its forms will dominate in the future. Due to some similarities, the experience of fan studies is useful for the analysis of crowdfunding, but the changing context of the media needs to be taken into account. Liza Potts believes that in crowdfunding we are dealing not as much with fan practices in the traditional meaning, but with participation, although this notion needs to be re-defined before it becomes useful⁴⁵. Such a necessity is also indicated by researchers such as Booth and Turk. Booth (2014) indicates the fact that researchers focus on fan agency or fan labour, leaning towards the problem of exploitation or possibilities of subversive practices. According to the author of *Digital Fandom*, the focus should actually be on all the technological-cultural changes that have contributed to the construction of a new model of co-operation in a media environment. Fan practices as a predecessor of crowdfunding are therefore less a tactical (in Michael de Certeau’s understanding) form of resistance against the dominant system and more a model of community action based on the exchange of knowledge and competences and on voluntary “gifts” of time, effort and work, but never an agreement to be

⁴⁵ L. Potts, ‘Amanda Palmer and the #LOFNOTC: How Online Fan Participation Is Rewriting Music Labels’, *Participations. Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 9(2), 2012, p. 72.

exploited. In the case of crowdfunding, this also means significant transfers in the matter of motivation. The fans/investors are primarily motivated not by a desire to break the aesthetic domination (in Bourdieu's understanding) dictated by the media companies that produce the texts of culture, but by the need for communal work and the sharing of experiences. However, as the quoted responses of MegaTotal.pl's users show, other motivations, such as those of economic nature, are not excluded. This shows that the users are not "pushovers" lured by "bonuses" into an absolute agreement with the rules dictated by the producers of culture. Their aim is also not to "topple the system". Quite the opposite, they consider themselves to be a part of the system, but wish for more involvement in cultural production and the possibility of working within a "grass-root" community structure functioning on the principles similar to those of a gift economy, but at the same time reaching beyond them by considering the rules of a market economy. Fans consider actions that interrupt the flow of "gifts" and communication with a community to be oppressive. The point is not to create a utopian community that functions separately from the outside world and its rules (including the rules of the market), but to be able to display one's expert competences (also in the field of the market potential of music, etc.) in the course of a communal exchange of knowledge and competences accompanied by the strengthening of emotional and ludic dimension of the community. The use of classic concepts of anthropology, such as potlatch, gift economy or carnival, for the analysis of these new communities shows a certain inadequacy of the concepts — mostly because of the specific character of communities on the Web, which cannot be fully compared to traditional communities studied by anthropologists. On the other hand, this comparison draws attention to the possibility of idealising the new social phenomena. Such an idealisation could make us overlook the fact that communities such as those of crowdfunding portals are not only under threat from the outside because of the tendency of professional culture producers to "intercept" grass-root initiatives and commercialise them, but are also at risk of becoming a battlefield for the status and position within a hierarchy and its members. In spite of their ludicity, many members take a very serious approach to their roles and tasks when involved in cultural production.

Crowdfunding z perspektywy fanów muzyki — partycypacja czy wyzysk?

Abstrakt

Crowdfunding jako nowa forma finansowania kultury jest zjawiskiem stosunkowo nowym, lecz zdobywającym coraz większą popularność. Spektakularne finansowe sukcesy projektów takich jak Veronica Mars skłaniają jednak do namysłu nad sytuacją finansujących je odbiorców-fanów. Crowdfunding z założenia opiera się na aktywnej partycypacji fundatorów nie tylko na poziomie

finansowania, lecz także decyzyjnym (odnosi się to do dyskusji na temat obsady, fabuły itp.) i jako taki ma prowadzić do rozmycia granic między twórcą a jego fanami, co wydaje się ziszczeniem marzeń każdego członka fandomu. Jednocześnie jednak pojawiają się pytania na temat tego, kto jest rzeczywistym finansowym beneficjentem wysokobudżetowych projektów, a w związku z tym, czy fani nie stają się obiektami manipulacji i wyzysku ze strony reprezentujących twórców wytwórni. Rozważenie tych problemów z perspektywy teorii kultury i mediów wymaga ponownego namysłu nad samym pojęciem uczestnictwa, gdyż wypracowane do tej pory modele nie zdają egzaminu w odniesieniu do fenomenów społeczno-kulturowych opartych na najnowszych technologiach komunikacyjnych. Ze względu na swoją specyfikę crowdfunding wymaga zastosowania aparatu pojęciowego wypracowanego w odniesieniu do badań fandomu, jednak z uwzględnieniem jego modyfikacji, jakich wymaga przeniesienie większości aktywności fanów do sieci. Ta medialna i kulturoznawcza perspektywa musi być także uzupełniona o wybrane koncepcje z zakresu antropologii i socjologii, które umożliwią rozważenie problemu w kontekście problemów zaufania społecznego, ekonomii daru i nowej wspólnotowości.

Artykuł ma nakreślić ramy dyskusji na temat nowej sytuacji fanów w modelu crowdfundingu, pokazując na konkretnych przykładach niejednoznaczność zarysowanej tu sytuacji. Jak pokazały cytowane w artykule badania, przeprowadzone w ramach grantu „Produkcja partnerska dóbr kultury w modelu finansowania społecznościowego” (2012–2015), fani jako fundatorzy nie kierują się przede wszystkim chęcią przełamania estetycznej dominacji narzucanej przez koncerty medialne produkujące teksty kultury, lecz potrzebą działania wspólnotowego i dzielenia się doświadczeniem, co jednak nie wyklucza innych motywacji, w tym ekonomicznych. Praktyki w ramach crowdfundingu nie mają zatem na celu tworzenia utopijnej społeczności, która funkcjonuje w oderwaniu od zewnętrznego świata i obowiązujących w nim reguł (w tym reguł rynkowych), lecz przede wszystkim dają możliwość prezentowania swoich eksperckich kompetencji (także w zakresie marketingowego potencjału muzyki) w toku wspólnotowej wymiany wiedzy i kompetencji, przy jednoczesnym umacnianiu emocjonalnego i ludycznego wymiaru wspólnoty.

Słowa klucze: *crowdfunding*, kultura uczestnictwa, ekonomia daru, *fandom*

Bibliography

- Belleflamme T., Lambert T., Schwienbacher A., *Crowdfunding: Tapping the Right Crowd. International Conference of the French Finance Association (AFFI)*, May 11–13, 2011, Retrieved from: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1836873>.
- Booth P., *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies*, New York 2010.
- Brzozowska B., ‘Nowe oblicza przewodnika w kontekście rozwoju kultury uczestnictwa’, *Prace Kulturoznawcze* 17, 2015.
- Brzozowska B., Gałuszka P., ‘Crowdfunding: Towards a Redefinition of the Artist’s Role. The Case of MegaTotal’ *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, June 4, 2015.
- Chin B., ‘Sherlockology and Galactica.tv: Fan Sites as Gifts or Exploited Labor?’, *Transformative Works and Cultures* 15, 2013.
- Chin B. et al., ‘Veronica Mars Kickstarter and Crowd Funding [dialogue]’, *Transformative Works and Cultures, Special Issue: Fandom and/as Labor*, ed. M. Stanfill, M. Condis, 15, 2014.
- Gauntlett D., *Media Studies 2.0 — Article on future of media studies by David Gauntlett at Theory.org.uk*, Retrieved from: <http://www.theory.org.uk/mediastudies2.htm> (31 July, 2015).
- Hills M., *Fan Cultures*, New York-London 2003.
- <http://www.crowdsourcing.org/editorial/global-crowdfunding-market-to-reach-344b-in-2015-predicts-massolutions-2015cf-industry-report/45376>.

- <http://www.marketwired.com/press-release/crowdfunding-market-grows-167-2014-crowdfunding-platforms-raise-162-billion-finds-research-2005299.htm>.
- Jenkins H., *Kultura konwergencji: zderzenie starych i nowych mediów*, Warszawa 2010.
- Jenkins H., 'Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching' [in:] *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, ed. H. Jenkins, New York 2006.
- Jenkins H., *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, New York 2013.
- Jenkins H., Ford S., Green J., *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, New York 2013.
- Kasprzycki-Rosikoń J., 'Co zostało z pięknych wizji?', [in:] *Crowdsourcing. Jak angażować konsumentów w świat marek*, ed. J. Kasprzycki-Rosikoń, J. Piątkowski, Gliwice 2013.
- Merrin W., *Media Studies 2.0*, New York-London 2014.
- Nacher A., *Rubieże kultury popularnej. Popkultura w świecie przepływów*, Poznań 2013.
- Ordanini A. et al., 'Crowd-funding: Transforming Customers into Investors Through Innovative Service Platforms', *Journal of Service Management*, 22(4), 2011, pp. 443–470.
- Pearson E., 'Digital Gifts: Participation and Gift Exchange in Livejournal Communities', *First Monday* 12(5), 2007.
- Potts L., 'Amanda Palmer and the #LOFNOTC: How Online Fan Participation Is Rewriting Music Labels', *Participations. Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 9(2), 2012.
- Prahalad C.K., Ramaswamy V., 'Co-creation Experiences: The Next Practice in Value Creation', *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 18(3), 2004.
- Sabotini R., *Fanfic Symposium: The Fannish Potlatch*. Retrived from: <http://www.trickster.org/symposium/symp41.htm> (1 September 2015).
- Scholz T., *About: Digital Labor Conference*. Retrieved from: <http://digitallabor.org/about> (31 July, 2015).
- Thayne M., 'Friends Like Mine: The Production of Socialised Subjectivity in the Attention Economy', *Culture Machine* 13(0), 2012.
- Turk T., 'Fan Work: Labor, Worth, and Participation in Fandom's Gift Economy', *Transformative Works and Cultures, Special Issue: Fandom and/as Labor*, ed. M. Stanfill, M. Condis, 15, 2014.