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Crowdfunding Your DIY Project: Introducing Students to Kickstarter

Jason W. Luther
Rowan University

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Crowdfunding Your DIY Project: Introducing Students to Kickstarter

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this learning module is to help instructors consider how crowdfunding can serve as a meaningful way to build culturally rich, entrepreneurial projects. Such projects — which include film, music, publications, video and board games, art, performance, and technology — invite amateurs to not only articulate their vision of the world, but to ask others to participate in it, telling their story publicly in such a way that their network feels compelled to support them. While the obvious value of crowdfunding is that it financially supports the work of creators, it also uses the exigence of capital to lead communities into forms of mutual aid where their identities or needs are represented through a creative process and a final product.

In this sense, crowdfunding is a particularly attractive method for fundraising for creators such as our students who lack the typical assets of the culture industry, offer niche and/or innovative products, or who are seeking to build community through creative output. Often these projects speak to marginalized communities: people of color, LGBTQ+, AANHPI and indigenous groups, and women. For instance, recently successful projects on Kickstarter include Scott Joplin’s African American opera ([Treemonisha](#)), an LGBT zine ([Queer Chat](#)), a documentary about expanding access to abortion pills ([Plan C](#)), and a Latino fashion line ([Descalza](#)).

In this 75-minute adaptable and interactive lesson I:

1. frame crowdfunding through a concept Craighton Berman calls “creative entrepreneurship,”
2. provide an overview of typical categories and success rates on Kickstarter, and
3. consider the appeals of storytelling through “the pitch,” the core ingredient for any pre-launch plan.

In pursuit of this goal, the lesson shares a heuristic for pitch analysis, which scaffolds assessments of proposals, showing students how to notice the ways creators use rhetorical appeals, narrative structure, and multimodal affordances of Kickstarter to establish authentic and ethical human connection.

Learning Goals

1. Students will be introduced to the concept of crowdfunding as means for refocusing the goal of fundraising as an activity that *organizes influence* through a story-driven pitch.
2. Students will be introduced to *Kickstarter* as a prominent crowdfunding platform that includes finite categories, well-established success rates, and particular affordances and limitations.
3. Students will understand appeals to *desire, trust, and value* on Kickstarter and identify how those appeals are arranged and framed through storytelling in textual and multimodal forms.

Lesson Plan (75 minutes)

Preparation

To prepare for this lesson it will be helpful to browse and search Kickstarter's "[Discover](#)" page relative to your curriculum and instructional goals. This includes collections ("Projects We Love," "Trending," etc.), sections (arts, comics & illustration, film, food & craft, games, music, and publishing), categories (which are more niche), locations, as well as their "Spotlights" on AANHPI, Black, Hispanic and Latin, LGBTQIA+, and Women Creators. You might also take a look at Kickstarter's YouTube channel, especially its playlist "[Tips for Creators](#)," which includes short, helpful videos that could be worthwhile showing your students. You'll also want to look at:

1. "Crowdfunding your DIY Project: A quick introduction to pitching on Kickstarter" slidedeck
2. "Pitch Analysis" template. Make a copy of this table and share with students. Typically I make enough tables for the number of groups I create in my class, though you might choose to use this differently.

Plan and Pacing

10 minutes • Anticipatory set

1. Begin by showing Slides 1-4 to explain what crowdfunding is and why it is a promising approach to not only raising funds but developing an idea in relation to an audience. Note that slides 2-3 emphasize a shift in gatekeeping practices. While both are still corporate, the latter is more hospitable to entrepreneurs. Feel free to adapt the notes in the slidedeck.
2. Share a range of campaigns you found from your exploration of projects under Kickstarter's [Discover](#) page. You may choose a completed and successful campaign, a project that is native to New Jersey, one that has launched but not ended, etc. Walk students through the major components, including the

campaign's featured video or image, its timeline, goals, subsections, and links. If you have time, you might speculate as to why some were successful or not.

5 minutes • Affordances and limitations of Kickstarter

3. Use Slides 5-6 to talk about the affordances and limitations of using Kickstarter for crowdfunding and Slides 7-9 to position your curriculum in relation to categories and success rates. Note: since this data may change, it is worthwhile to seek updated numbers for these categories.
4. Depending on time, you might consider having students share examples from categories of successful vs. unsuccessful campaigns within certain (sub)categories. The point is to see the range of ideas, quality, and different storytelling techniques creators used for various projects.

10 minutes • The pitch and its storytelling appeals

5. Use Slides 10-15 to walk through Berman's 3 appeals of storytelling, including desire, trust, and value. I use the word *appeal* deliberately here in that these map onto classical rhetorical appeals (pathos, ethos, logos) somewhat nicely, but come across as more accessible. Together, these appeals should shape the story, which in turn becomes the pitch.
6. Use Slide 16 to emphasize how storytelling must manifest through modes other than alphanumeric text. In their analysis of over 325k projects Carradini & Fleischmann (2022) found that "successful campaigns, on average, featured more than double the amount of images and links than did unsuccessful campaigns" (16). Moreover:
 - Project videos are much more important than project images. successful campaigns more often included project videos than did unsuccessful campaigns (99.3% to 61.3%), and the existence of a project video increased the probability of a successful campaign.
 - Images are often more important than links
 - More than one or two images and links correlate with more successful campaigns.
 - Neither gifs nor galleries seemed to influence a campaign's success and are not as valuable as other multimodal elements.
7. If you choose (and time allows) you could supplement examples of each appeal within these slides, or have students go out and find them in class and share. That said, you might prefer to have them test them out together with the next step of this lesson since these often overlap. Also note that I synthesize Berman's story-telling appeals with additional research from Carradini & Fleischmann's (2022) literature review in my slide notes. Feel free to adapt as necessary.

45 minutes • Pitch analysis

8. Introduce students to the "Pitch Analysis" template, which tracks the title and link, amount pledged, days left, and whether they think the project is on track to

succeed. Students then use the table to consider how the three appeals manifest both textually and through multimodal elements.

- I typically run this as a group activity, with 3-5 students per group. Depending on my goals, I might actually provide them with the campaign title and link ahead of time.
 - Note that you can make separate documents for each group or you can add tables to the existing document by copying and pasting below in the same document.
9. Have each group report out. Share results and/or compare strategies in ways that make sense for your instructional goals. For instance, while you might prefer to have each group walk the class through the campaign, it could be equally valuable to compare campaign approaches to specific appeals and modes.

5 minutes • Moving forward

10. After students complete the chart, have them note what they might borrow from these pitch strategies. How might they apply this to their own campaign?

Suggestions for Further Reading/Research

1. There are many self-published books out there on crowdfunding. Some are terrible and outdated and some are quite helpful. However, the best I've found that is praxis-centered is Craighton Berman's [Crowdfunding for Designers](#), which I draw heavily from in my slidedeck. Not only is the zine really beautifully designed, but it presents an accessible but sophisticated way to think about crowdfunding as an ethical community activity.
2. I also draw heavily from the work of Stephen Carradini, specifically his 2022 [article](#) with Carolin Fleischmann "The Effects of Multimodal Elements on Success in Kickstarter Crowdfunding Campaigns."