CROWDFUNDING FOR A CAUSE: RHETORICALLY ORIENTED ACTION RESEARCH WITH CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this ***disquisition*** complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

When it comes to fundraising, many congregations and faith-related organizations struggle to keep up in the competitive charitable giving landscape. In recent years, online crowdfunding platforms (e.g. Kickstarter, GoFundMe, Indiegogo) have grown to a multi-billion-dollar industry, supporting fundraisers for diverse causes both charitable and for-profit. Does crowdfunding offer faith-related organizations potentially valuable opportunities for fundraising? If so, how should faith-related non-profit organizations best ask for money online?

To engage these questions, I employed a participatory action research framework to accompany, coach, and learn with organizations launching crowdfunding campaigns. This partnership resulted in meaningful engagement with nine would-be crowdfunders. Three of these organizations eventually launched crowdfunding campaigns. Though none reached their goal, crowdfunders secured over $36,000 for their organizations' aims. Significantly, all campaigners reported positive mission-related benefits in addition to funds raised. I analyzed data using a cross-case replication study design with three individual case write-ups. Additionally, I rhetorically examined the crowdfunding pages themselves seeking to understand how crowdfunders engaged the multimodal possibilities of the genre. Theories engaged include multimodal rhetoric, audience awareness, genre theory, and Christian giving rhetoric.

This project found that crowdfunding pages serve as a place for compact, powerful invitations to give. Yet, in their digital design template and scope of projects, crowdfunding methods also limit fundraisers' rhetorical choices. Existing scholarship from multiple fields has sought to discover factors related to crowdfunding success and failure. What has not been considered sufficiently, however, is the process potential crowdfunders go through as they discern whether to launch a campaign, how they imagine the audience of a possible campaign, and how the rhetoric of the resulting crowdfunding pages may be shaped by the expectations of the genre. My study identified new terminology to describe rhetorical phenomena of the campaigns including *hidden friction*, the *audience paradox*, *discrepant rhetoric*, as well as visual aids such as an explanatory action matrix. The action research methodology of the study brings the work of crowdfunders, previously behind the scenes, to the forefront. Ultimately, it shows that while the aims of the crowdfunders may be multiple, and even in conflict, crowdfunders can reap rewards beyond money alone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If I have not yet expressed significant gratitude to the many people, organizations, and institutions that have supported me through the long and winding road towards completing this research project and earning a Ph.D., I have been greatly remiss. Thank you again. Thank you always.

DEDICATION

For all the fundraisers who take up the call to relationship, embrace their potential to inspire goodness, and seek the story beyond the tools.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDIX FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

At its very best, academic research leads to new, unexpected places on the way to fascinating discoveries. This dissertation includes its modest share of discoveries, but it is as much a project of accompaniment as it is focused on reaching a precise destination. “Accompaniment” may be a strange term for research in rhetoric, but it aptly describes my posture of partnering with the leaders of several organizations as they embarked in rhetorical acts. Specifically, for just over a year, I partnered with three Christian faith-motivated organizations—a new justice-oriented podcast, an emerging faith community, and an established church—on their journey of planning, launching, completing, and reflecting upon their own crowdfunding campaigns. Motivated by their potential to reach new funders, these organizations invited “the crowd” to support their ministries. Namely, rather than passing a physical collection plate among their community, these crowdfunders launched digital fundraising campaigns available to the entire audience of the internet. Measured by dollars raised, success was limited. However, organizers embraced goals beyond mere financial, and all spoke positively of the campaigns upon completion. This project finds, ultimately, that the experience of crowdfunding helped the organizations to discover their own story more precisely as they gained valuable experience inviting new audiences to support their mission financially.

This study was an investigation into the phenomenon of faith-related crowdfunding, both how organizations work to launch persuasive campaigns and the rhetoric of the composed crowdfunding page itself. It was conducted as a form of crowdfunding research using qualitative methods, primarily participatory action research and case study. The project describes the rhetorical choices made by the crowdfunders, and in doing so, considers elements of community-decision making, audience awareness, and genre theory. It argues that a process of organizational self-discovery and struggle is often hidden behind the crowdfunding pages themselves. Further, it makes several assertions concerning multimodal rhetoric, identifying multiple variances in tone and content depending on the mode of communication. Research methods included collecting and analyzing internal crowdfunding planning documents, field notes, interviews, transcripts, and the crowdfunding pages themselves (which include multi-modal components). These data were analyzed using an organic, mixed-method approach including participatory action methods, case study, and coding.

My interest in how faith-motivated practitioners employ crowdfunding began around 2012 when I was an instructor in religion at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota.[1] At the time, crowdfunding campaigns were often in the news, but rarely did one see successful, big-budget faith-related campaigns. (Operational Definitions will follow in the next sub-section.) At Concordia College, I therefore found myself teaching courses examining digital culture and religion in which students and I frequently discussed the fact that Christian faith communities often seemed behind the curve of embracing digital practices. I sensed that faith-related crowdfunding might be a particular area of fruitful study, especially given the fact that some faith communities of which I was aware had begun to express dissatisfaction with their existing more traditional methods of fundraising, such as passing the offering plate. In 2013, therefore, I

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[1] At the outset, I should acknowledge my choice of first person reporting, as well as the use of personal self-reflection in this dissertation, aligns with the tradition of participatory action research (Yin 42–44).

undertook a final project for a course on innovation at NDSU taught by Dr. Andrew Mara (now at Arizona State University). Parts of that project included rhetorical analysis, highlighting several church crowdfunding projects, interviews with crowdfunding pastors, and a write-up of a lead-article style essay to be submitted to *The Christian Century* magazine. The article appeared as a cover story in 2015 (Copeland, "A Broader Appeal"). Thereafter, much to my surprise, I found myself a leading voice in Christian crowdfunding. Subsequently, I was asked to speak at several Christian leadership conferences on the topic of crowdfunding. I published two academic articles on the phenomenon, as well as a guide booklet for congregations and faith-related non-profits (Copeland, *Crowdfunding for Congregations and Faith-Related Non-Profits*). I now continue to speak on crowdfunding and digital fundraising every couple of months at events such as congregational adult forums and Christian leadership conferences. I also regularly use a crowdfunding teaching module in my course, *Money & the Mission of the Church,* at Luther Seminary. To sum up, my engagement in crowdfunding, like the design of action research itself, was and is an emergent process. While this study functions as a standalone document, it flows from previous scholarship, teaching, and practical leadership in the field.

In spring 2016, under the supervision of Kevin Brooks, I sought and received approval from NDSU's Internal Review Board for a study, "Crowdfunding for a Cause," in which I proposed to partner with several congregations and/or faith-related non-profits as a co-learner and collaborator in their crowdfunding venture (Protocol #HS16231). Ultimately, I was in serious conversation with nine congregations and non-profits about a crowdfunding partnership. After meetings with three of these organizations, I received positive initial responses but little follow-up engagement. Six other organizations carried the conversation further, and I met with leadership in person and carried on detailed email correspondence. For various reasons, however, two of these organizations did not move forward with crowdfunding campaigns. A third, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, after hitting several roadblocks in their crowdfunding planning efforts, opted not to crowdfund, instead revising their existing practices of receiving gifts to allow for more targeted giving via their website. While these six organizations did not proceed with crowdfunding campaigns, their process of deliberation and consideration of the crowdfunding genre still yielded valuable data and conclusions about the challenge of organizational decision-making related to launching crowdfunding campaigns.

Three organizations with whom I partnered did launch crowdfunding campaigns. While none reached their fundraising goal, interestingly, every leader who launched a campaign reported satisfaction with the process and gratitude for having undertaken the project. Between the campaigns and related fundraising events, a total of roughly $36,626 was raised.

Given my years-long work in the faith-related crowdfunding field, it is difficult to quantify the research time devoted to this project. Generally, however, I have pursued both an academic and practical interest in faith-related crowdfunding for over five years. As to this specific project, the participatory action research work with the organizations occurred over roughly 20 months, though my connections with some partners preexisted the research phase. About 30 months passed from launch of the study to dissertation submission. Below, in Figure 1, I describe some major research steps in timeline form. Further tables follow noting launch dates. I am gratified to note that all relationships with partners continue to flourish. Next, I will introduce my research questions, theoretical framework, and note the study’s significance.

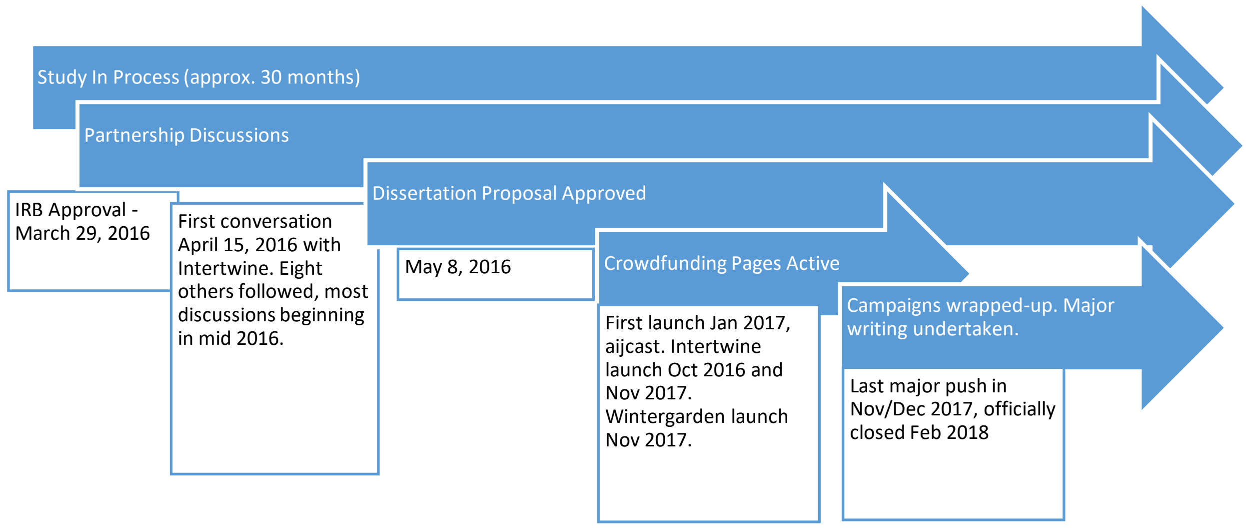

Figure 1. Research Process Timeline, March 2016 Launch to Oct 2018 Defense

Problem Statement

It is difficult to raise money, even for worthy causes. While few non-profit leaders go into the field due to a love of fundraising, the process of cultivating donors, harvesting gifts, and balancing the budget often takes up a significant portion of their time and effort. The potential of simplifying the fundraising process using digital methods, as well as expanding the audience of donors beyond existing networks, appeals greatly to many organizational leaders. After all, non-profits are not ultimately about raising money. Rather, they exist to accomplish a mission and bring about a societal good. Leaders inherently consider their organization worthy of support, and many view crowdfunding as an easy path to more gifts. Yet, as so many hopeful campaigners soon discover, crowdfunding is fraught with struggles. Even if crowdfunders do manage to compose a persuasive pitch, launching a crowdfunding page—and associated messaging campaign—with a consistent, compelling message can be a significant challenge. Indeed, for existing organizations the puzzling question soon arises: how can we communicate *both* existing strengths and mission-driven success *and* the need for more funds to fill unmet needs?

Yet, crowdfunding must present some potential for faith-related non-profits and, at the very least, if they fail to exploit the possibility of crowdfunding, they might get left behind by secular non-profits. Since my position at Luther Seminary consists, primarily, of teaching and scholarship related to faith-related fundraising, I felt it part of my vocation to take up these challenges associated with fundraising online. Given the complexity of the questions, my personal interests, and my hopes to positively influence funders to support worthy causes, I embarked on a research project in partnership with the organizations themselves. We sought not only to embrace the challenge of raising money—though that was certainly a primary motivating factor—we also sought to manifest a spirit of curiosity and mutual learning consistent with individual and organizational values. Ultimately, we sensed there was money to be raised out there and, if we did things right, we could also learn a lot along the way.

Operational Definitions

Though they are discussed in more detail below, it will be helpful to establish working definitions of several terms in this introduction.

First, I broadly define **crowdfunding** as *goal-based fundraising ventures, conducted by groups or individuals using the internet, that seek small contributions from a large number of people* (Copeland, *Crowdfunding for Congregations and Faith-Related Non-Profits* 4). Discussions of the types of crowdfunding follow in chapter 2, though it may be helpful now to consider what I have described as the "Digital Giving Spectrum" that seeks to illustrate the wide range of digital crowdfunding-like phenomena (see Figure 2). Some campaigns exist on the "pure" end of the spectrum, using the genre's all-or-nothing, time-sensitive, goal-driven approach. Donors receive rewards or perks in return for their gifts. On the other end of the spectrum is simple online giving options such as a “give now” button on a church website. These functions are not generally goal-based or time-sensitive, though they technically could receive many small contributions. Practically, crowdfunding is also associated with common websites that host crowdfunding campaigns, the most popular of which include Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and GoFundMe. Each site has its own character or niche, such as Kickstarter’s focus on artistic endeavors, Indiegogo’s support of innovation, and GoFundMe’s emphasis on charitable causes (Clarke). In 2017 and 2018, the industry saw significant consolidation as YouCaring acquired both CrowdRise and Generosity.com before YouCaring was acquired by GoFundMe (Harris).

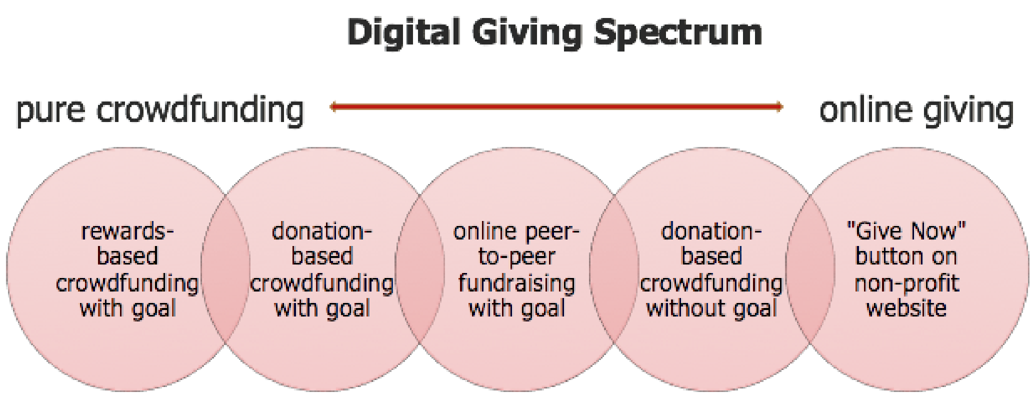

Figure 2. Digital Giving Spectrum
Note: (Copeland, *Crowdfunding for Congregations and Faith-Related Non-Profits* 7)

Second, this project is a multi-method study with **participatory action research** (PAR) methods at its center. Action research emphasizes partnership with organizations or communities. According to Herr and Anderson, “it is a reflective process, but is different from isolated spontaneous reflection in that it is deliberately and systematically undertaken and generally requires that some form of evidence be presented to support assertions” (3–4). Action research is also iterative in that it emphasizes a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. PAR often embraces social justice impulses, as is the case in this study. Further elements of PAR, as well as my particular approaches, will be discussed in detail below.

Third, it will be helpful to clarify the meaning of several phrases used throughout this dissertation. My **research partners** include those who agreed for me to join them in the PAR process of mutual discovery and support. Though I use the phrase “faith-based” or “faith-motivated” as a modifier at times, it should be noted that this project only approaches religion in (my own) tradition of Christianity. The project includes some ecumenical diversity within Christianity but does not extend to other faith traditions.

Nature of the Study

This project is a multi-method study with participatory action research methods as the engine. Pursuing a multiple-method approach presented both opportunities and challenges: “By definition, studies using mixed methods are more difficult to execute than studies limited to single methods” (Yin 67). Accordingly, the study—and particularly the research questions themselves—required a latticed approach. By that, I mean that while participatory action methods formed the bulk of my posture and approach, I also drew upon other methods for analysis and support as the research questions allowed. For example, given that the crowdfunding process called for a careful examination of a case of crowdfunding, and given my action research with several organizations, employing a cross-case analysis (also known as “multiple case study”) approach fit well. (I will further elucidate my case study approach in Chapter 2). Finally, analysis of the rhetorical work of the crowdfunding pages themselves invited qualitative coding approaches. Ultimately, the study considers a crowdfunding page—a piece of compact rhetoric—and considers what went on behind the scenes to develop that page while also deeply analyzing the message of the page itself.

In Table 1 below, I have listed the four crowdfunding campaigns that launched as part of my study.[2] Note that the organization, Intertwine Northeast, launched two campaigns. The table also includes data related to organization location as well as campaign details.

Table 1. Organizations that pursued and launched campaigns

Name	**Purpose**	**Location**	**Goal**	**Total Raised**	**Total Backers**
aijcast	Podcast	Atlanta, GA	$16,000	$7,573	65
Intertwine Northeast I – Oct. 2016	New faith community	Minneapolis, MN	$30,000	$5,258	40
Intertwine Northeast II – Nov. 2017	Continued support faith community	Minneapolis, MN	$10,000	$4,340	20
Wintergarden Presbyterian Church	Feeding ministries	Port Charlotte, FL	$3,660	$550	5

Participation action research fails without partners, and in the process of the study I had meaningful interactions with nine partner organizations and leaders. With each, I shared my IRB documents and sought to support their discernment efforts and potential launch of a successful campaign. Three of the organizations eventually launched campaigns (see Table 1), while the majority, six of the organizations, did not move to that stage of funding (see Table 2). Indeed, action research is a process of ongoing discovery. In my dissertation proposal, I referred to my contacts and early wonderings as a pilot study. As Herr and Anderson write, “In action research, a pilot study is likely to simply be early cycles of research in an ongoing research spiral” (86).

[2] Actual organizational names have been used. This choice is in accordance with my action research framework, IRB protocol, as well as the public intentions and open nature of crowdfunding itself.

The research process itself forced me to develop considerable new skills as an action researcher. Indeed, I began resonating with Coghlan and Brannich who write, “in action research you typically start out with a fuzzy question, are fuzzy about your methodology in the initial stages, and have fuzzy answers in the early stages” (166). As the pilot continued, however, thanks to the cyclical nature of action research, specific research questions became more focused.

Table 2. Organizations that pursued campaigns though did not launch

Name	**Purpose**	**Location**	**Goal**
Exodus Lending	Payday lending non-profit	Minneapolis, MN	Undetermined
Christikon	Portion of capital campaign	McLeod, MT	Undetermined portion of total $1m goal
Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church	Pastor’s book on Sabbath keeping	Minneapolis, MN	Undetermined
Bethlehem Lutheran Church	Youth mission trip	Minneapolis, MN	Approx. $50,000
Cross of Glory Lutheran Church	Mission trip, food shelf, or summer ministry	Brooklyn Center, MN	Undetermined
St. Stephen Lutheran Church	TBD focused project to supplement annual giving campaigns	Bloomington, MN	Undetermined

Summaries of my interactions with each of the organizations that pursued but did not launch campaigns will follow in Chapter 3, along with fuller descriptions. Table 2 is intended to introduce the reader to the name and variety of project purposes considered.

Research Questions

Two main research questions drive this study. These questions were developed from my awareness of gaps in the literature, questions of practitioners, and my own curiosity relative to faith-related crowdfunding campaigns I had worked with previously. Each question became more nuanced and specific as the research process developed. The first question emphasizes audience and the process of crowdfunding related to audience awareness. I approach this question mainly using case study methods. The second question focuses on the messaging of the crowdfunding page itself. I approach this question mainly with rhetorically-oriented qualitative coding methods. Action research, as a means of systemic inquiry, undergirds the entire research process leading to insight related to both questions.

Research Question 1

Crowdfunding presents a strange both/and approach to envisioning the audience of a potential campaign. On the one hand, the digital, public nature of campaigns expand the perceived audience of a campaign to—most expansively—all users of the internet. In other words, “audience” becomes a word without great meaning because a potential donor could be anyone who happens upon the campaign page. Or, more narrowly, “audience” becomes the people the crowdfunder senses might give if only they became aware of the campaign. On the other hand, crowdfunding donors nearly always have *some* connection to the campaign, such as shared interests, previous awareness, or common network/friends. Many donors, in fact, are already supporters of the congregation or non-profit who, perhaps, have followed the development of the organization from the sidelines but have not stepped up to donate. In such cases, a crowdfunding campaign can become the opportunity for the first gift of a donor who already had some tie to the organization, someone who might be easily envisioned as part of the campaign’s audience. To complicate matters even further, for faith-related organizations, language concerning religious faith may strike one audience member as persuasive, while turn off another potential donor who supports the organization’s efforts for justice and inclusion but questions the religious nature of such efforts. Therefore, the first research question becomes: *As* *faith-related crowdfunders consider their campaign's potential audience and existing supporters, how do they plan, launch, and manage their campaigns to raise support?*

Research Question 2

The act of crowdfunding presents a huge variety of messaging options. Typically, crowdfunders at least develop textual descriptions and invitations to give, post images on campaign pages, and upload videos highlighting their efforts. Further, it is common practice for organizational campaigns to be accompanied by robust social media messaging campaigns (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, email, etc.). Some campaigns even include face-to-face launch events. Given this variety of options, the crowdfunding page itself still looms large in the crowdfunding campaign itself. One can have the best marketing campaign ever, but ultimately the page is the mechanism on which donors click to give and where the essentials of the pitch are delivered. Juxtaposed with the wide variety of messaging potential, the crowdfunding page itself functions as a preformed digital template. Crowdfunders must manipulate their messages to fit the template and, surely, the template in turn has effects on the messaging. What if, for example, crowdfunders did not plan on posting a video but the page template looks bare without one? And, if so, how does that video messaging vary from the textual or image-driven message? Given these variables and the templated nature of crowdfunding, the second research question becomes: *As faith-related crowdfunders launch and manage their campaign's page and the related public messaging, what is the nature of their use of the multimodal, rhetorical possibilities of the crowdfunding genre?*

Theoretical Framework

Addressed in detail in chapter 2, the theoretical framework for this study engages several areas of scholarship. First, the developing field of crowdfunding scholarship serves as a solid foundation for the study. Generally, crowdfunding scholars use quantitative methods to analyze large datasets of crowdfunding pages. While this work is important, it often misses the particularities of campaigns themselves, not to mention the processes and challenges crowdfunders encounter before the page is published. Second, genre theory approaches how awareness of particular genres influence composition choices. Genre pedagogy considers how we might teach writing with an awareness of genre. Within genre studies, scholars like John Gallagher and Kristin Arola suggest digital templates play a role in rhetorical action. Third, the field of Christian giving rhetoric addresses the long tradition of considering money and possessions and the invitation to share these gifts. For faith-related crowdfunders, the rhetorical act of inviting donors to give also draws upon religious traditions and implications. Fourth, composition scholars such as Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford have considered how an awareness of audience may support rhetorical decisions. As their scholarship has matured and engaged digital environments, they have blurred the lines between reader and writer, and considered audience as those who might participate in the process itself—perhaps as in positively commenting on a crowdfunding page after giving to the campaign. Finally, I consider how the field of digital religion engages questions of faith and culture online.

Scope and Limitations

The main focus of this project was the fundraising experience of Christian crowdfunders. According to the tradition of PAR, I sought to partner with existing small groups of like-minded individuals. I privileged cooperation, mutual understanding, and seeking justice—or, in this case, funds raised ethically, and partnerships approached with a spirit of collaboration and support. I made selections of partners organically from my existing network through an informal system of mutual curiosity and openness to crowdfunding and PAR. While these relationships allowed for the project to proceed in a timely manner and for relational trust to exist between myself and my partners, the limits of my existing network are many. For example, the partners are all mainline protestants and members of more progressive denominations. Furthermore, my interventions were all intended to support positive crowdfunding outcomes, yet they were certainly limited by the extent of my own abilities. In other words, another PAR researcher with more crowdfunding expertise may have partnered with the groups in a way that developed alterative practices. Similarly, while I prioritized work with my partners, the research was conducted while I also had other professional and personal responsibilities. In other words, surely we experienced the practical limits of time available to devote to the project. Further, the study does not consider how particular denominational affiliation, demographics, or beliefs differ among the crowdfunders or other potential crowdfunders. In other words, the study does not seek to consider if there is a Roman Catholic way of crowdfunding different from Lutheran or Evangelical. As will be shown below, I employed replication logic in relation to the three campaigns that launched. This approach, as will be discussed, focuses findings on what is common among the campaigns rather than examining organizational uniqueness. Findings, therefore, emphasize making logical generalizations and assertions. Finally, though the crowdfunders deemed their campaigns successful, it should be noted that none reached their intended goals.

Significance of the Study

Given the nascent nature of crowdfunding research, any dissertation-length project on the subject adds significantly to the developing field. Accordingly, the study suggests new terms to name discoveries surfaced in the research (e.g. audience paradox, hidden friction, discrepant video storytelling). It also highlights novel rhetorical variance found within crowdfunding modalities, particularly related to the invitation to give. By considering crowdfunding pages as digital templates, it uniquely explores the limits and possibilities of crowdfunding templates through the lens of genre theory.

More broadly, this study's embrace of PAR leads to meaningful insights into the actions of crowdfunders behind the scenes of the crowdfunding pages themselves. Further, the mixed method approach to the study exemplifies how PAR sensibilities can expand to incorporate other methodologies.

Finally, it should also be noted that the findings have already been helpful, and will likely continue to be so, in my work leading and teaching about fundraising in Christian communities. As suggested above, my thought leadership—though largely unplanned—continues in the area of Christian crowdfunding. The findings of this study allow me give greater depth and insight when I am asked to advise future faith-related crowdfunders.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Crowdfunding

While initially slow to keep up with the societal impact of the technology, in recent years scholarship on crowdfunding has expanded as crowdfunding has become a multi-billion-dollar sector of the economy. Crowdfunding areas of inquiry include the study of grassroots artists, micro-lending, entrepreneurship, donation-based campaigns, equity crowdfunding, and civic crowdfunding, to name a few. Below, I define crowdfunding and describe how recent scholarship is developing out of previously-existing disciplines.

Before discussing crowdfunding, however, we must note that "crowdfunding" is not the same as "crowdsourcing." The latter, Daren Brabham defines as "an online, distributed problem-solving and production model that leverages the collective intelligence of online communities to serve specific organizational goals" (xix). A common example of crowdsourcing is the T-shirt company Threadless which relies on artists to submit designs to be considered for production. The online community then rates the designs, and weekly winners receive a cash award and the design becomes available for purchase by the community. In the case of Threadless, then, the company functions as facilitator of "a shared process of bottom-up, open creation by the crowd and top-down management by those charged with serving an organization's strategic interest" (Brabham xxi). Power and control exists in the interaction of the company and the public. Note that, for Brabham, companies like *Wikipedia* are not strictly examples of crowdsourcing because the material is produced by bottom-up methods controlled by the whole community. Relatedly, a company merely asking its customers to weigh in on a new product design (e.g. the color of a new M&M) does not constitute crowdsourcing because the vast majority of control is still in the hands of the company and does not actually employ the public's talents or labor (Brabham xii).

While Brabham uses the term "crowdsourcing" narrowly, it has also come into vernacular use with a rather unspecific meaning. The word was coined in 2006 by Jeff Howe in *Wired*, so its definition and use remains young and still developing. In common usage, *crowdsourcing* means "the practice of obtaining information or services by soliciting input from a large number of people, typically via the Internet and often without offering compensation" ("Crowdsourcing, N."). Brabham argues for a more focused understanding of the word, one that requires the following: 1) an organization with a need, 2) a community/crowd responding to the need; 3) online interactions, and 4) the mutual benefit of organization and community (3). Brabham emphasizes that the locus of control must be shared *between* the organization and community, ensuring mutual benefit otherwise not available. While the nuances of "crowdsourcing" will continue to shift, importantly, I approach crowdfunding as a related but separate phenomenon. Using Brabham's understanding, **crowdfunding is not crowdsourcing** because the locus of control is not shared by project creator and backer. Crowdfunding is distributed fundraising, a phenomenon worthy of study but technically not crowdsourcing due to the level of interaction between project creators and backers. But, if crowdfunding is not crowdsourcing, what is it?

Conceptually, there are several different ways to approach the crowdfunding phenomenon. One view, which I will call "crowdfunding as revolution," approaches the technology by emphasizing its novel potential. Here we see the hyperbolic language as in *NY Times* attention-getting headline, "On the Web, a Revolution of Giving," or as one crowdfunding book jacket puts it, crowdfunding as a "radical new approach" (Rosenberg; Lawton and Marom). Such *crowdfunding as revolution* framing tends to trumpet the world-changing, revolution-inspiring, never-seen-before aspects of the technology. This view was certainly the prevailing understanding of the Executive Producer of the Global Crowdfunding Convention I attended in

2017. The producer had an affinity for phrases like “the power of crowdfunding” and “revolutionary” (“Global Crowdfunding Convention”). A more tempered view of crowdfunding seeks to connect the phenomenon to previous fundraising methods, an approach I call, “crowdfunding as evolution.”

Indeed, only somewhat adjacently, in the early days of the web, Carolyn Guyer employed the spatial metaphor of a room—actual, imagined, virtual—to draw awareness to the fact that “we need rooms in order to understand things, to make story” (323). Aware of scholars like Gregory Ulmer who argue that we have entered an entirely new age (*electracy*), Guyer takes a more step-wise approach as her title, “Into the Next Room,” suggests. After all, she writes, “all we can do is keep moving” and make our view (334). Guyer wrote long before crowdfunding sites launched, but her caution applies. Similarly, I find it helpful to connect contemporary instances of crowdfunding websites to historical forms of giving. A Guyer-informed, evolutionary approach to crowdfunding appreciates, particularly, historical instances of non-internet “crowdfunding.”

One such historic “crowdfunding” event occurred in 1885, when *New York World* publisher Joseph Pulitzer solicited 100,000 gifts of $1 to fund the completion of the Statue of Liberty’s pedestal (Copeland, “A Broader Appeal.” 22; Short et al. 150). Interestingly, crowdfunding is quite reminiscent of 19th century church stewardship campaigns in which a treasurer put a financial goal before the congregation and then invited pledges of certain amounts toward the goal until it was reached (Copeland, “A Broader Appeal. (Cover Story)”). In other words, crowdfunding as found in the particular digital nature and affordances of Kickstarter and GoFundMe is new, but it did not appear without a lineage.

While marketers may suggest otherwise, prevailing crowdfunding scholarship tends towards a *crowdfunding as evolution* approach, particularly as scholars have considered how crowdfunding connects to existing disciplines and offline social realities (see below). Such approaches often use wisdom from existing fields. For example, economists explore crowdfunding's economic impact (Mollick, *The Dynamics of Crowdfunding*), and audience and reception studies scholars examine its use by online fan communities (Potts). Rhetoricians consider persuasion on crowdfunding platforms (Friedman). Indeed, economic hardship journalists like Alissa Quart point to the campaigns for medical costs, school funding, and other social gaps as reasons she considers crowdfunding part of "America's dystopian social net" (Quart). Notable to PAR scholars with a social justice mindset, in crowdfunding Quart sees evidence of her broader work: "To me, though, the need for these efforts is a symptom of a whole generation of parents under siege – overworked and haunted by debt, abandoned by existing structures and unable to pay for anything extra for their kids" (Quart). In my judgement, then, the *crowdfunding as evolution* approach better allows researchers to understand the phenomenon. Further, however, I have affinity for positions on crowdfunding that seek to cut through overly optimistic innovation rhetoric about crowdfunding's revolutionary potential and note how it reflects—not magically solves—broader social realities. Next, I will describe the developing forms of crowdfunding before placing this study within the emerging field of crowdfunding scholarship.

Types of Crowdfunding

While not always clear cut, it should be noted that several models of crowdfunding exist. Appreciating these forms helps clarify appropriate aims of my PAR partners and places their campaigns within the developing categories of funding types. As will be noted below, the breadth and particularities of crowdfunding approaches also suggest a subtle sort of genre awareness held by my partners. These models suggest familial types of crowdfunding rather than formalized categories with rigid boundaries. Mollick describes four main models (*The Dynamics of Crowdfunding*):

Donation-based model (also called "Patronage Model"): funders act as philanthropists, supporting good causes. Projects usually include minimal rewards/perks for backers, if any.

Lending model: funders offer money to a cause or project creator in the form of a loan with the expectation the capital will result in a return on investment; this model sometimes includes elements of social good (e.g. Kiva microlending platform).

Rewards-based model: funders function as customers, allowing them access to the product at pre-release stage and promising other benefits; funders usually receive a reward for backing the product, some of which may not be offered later in the production cycle.

Equity-based model: funders become investors in companies in exchange for future profits, royalties, or payouts. Legalized in the U.S. in 2013.

Peer-to-Peer Fundraising

Perhaps because of its imprecise usage, definitions of "peer-to-peer" (P2P) fundraising seldom exist in the literature. At a fundamental level, P2P fundraising occurs when an individual asks others for donations—peers giving to peers—often on behalf of a charitable organization. P2P giving emphasizes the direct nature of the invitation to give because such invitations usually occur *by the individual* rather than the charity. While charities can facilitate P2P giving campaigns (e.g. the Susan G. Komen Foundation encourages supporters to start fundraisers via their online giving platform), the actual invitation to give and related messaging usually comes from the individual who is encouraged to share his or her own story. Since online social networks rely on person-to-person networks, it is difficult to disentangle *fundraising online* from *P2P fundraising online*. Some, like Marco Castillo et al, suggest that "the reduced costs to social interactions brought about by the advent of social media" allow for "increased opportunities for peer-to-peer fundraising" beneficial to charities (29). Certainly, if one considers P2P giving as crowdfunding as the Castillo et al do, the potential for future growth remains significant.

Some, however, argue for an understanding of P2P giving that distinguishes itself from crowdfunding. Andrew Dain, writing for the non-profit oriented tech company NeonCRM, suggests that while non-profits may use crowdfunding or P2P fundraising campaigns, P2P campaigns are a "technique only used by non-profits" (Dain). While on a basic level any campaign in which an individual asks others in her network to give to a campaign is P2P giving, I take Dain's point that the term "Peer-to-Peer Fundraising" is usually used in the industry to indicate a facilitated giving opportunity *on behalf of* a charity. Interestingly, in mid-2018 CrowdRise began using a new term, "DIY Fundraising" to market the site's functionality. Their materials emphasize the ability for users to select their own way, timeline, and reasons for fundraising without the organization serving as an intermediary. Gary Wohlfeill writes for the site, "with DIY (a subset of peer-to-peer) you are empowering your supporters to create a fundraiser whenever they want, based on whatever style of fundraiser they want to do" (Wohlfeill). Time will tell whether this nomenclature gains ground behind CrowdRise.

In his dissertation on crowdfunding, Kenton Anderson considers websites such as GoFundMe as both examples of P2P giving and direct competitors to charitable organizations (20–21). In a disaster, for instance, potential donors can choose to give to large, established charitable heavyweights such as the Red Cross or to individual GoFundMe pages. Anderson notes that P2P crowdfunding options give "individuals an alternative funding resource that appears to offer advantages of speed, simplicity, and greater personal involvement and satisfaction for all involved" (21). In some sense, then, crowdfunding sites such as GoFundMe may be the ultimate P2P fundraising opportunities, as they offer donors the potential to give to a needy person without an intermediary charity involved. For this project, therefore, I will consider all donation-based crowdfunding as a form of P2P fundraising. While P2P fundraising may exist (offline) that is not crowdfunding, by its nature, crowdfunding for charitable causes using the internet requires peers to ask peers to give.

Ultimately, this elaboration on the types of crowdfunding is not meant as a mere academic exercise. Such developing categories matter because crowdfunders, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, reflect the qualities of the crowdfunding models in their rhetorical approaches. Just as a pastor preaching a sermon on giving will likely build upon her previous experiences with money in the church and that sermon will strike hearers differently according to their experiences with faith and giving, experiences with crowdfunding by campaign organizers and potential donors affect their orientation towards the project. That the campaigns in this study are all donation-based matters due to the expectations associated with the campaigns. Even so, individual potential donors might be weighing—on a level disassociated with specific campaigns—whether to give their charitable dollars to donation-based or lending-based campaigns.

Further Crowdfunding Scholarship

Early studies of crowdfunding focused on defining the phenomenon and imagining its possibilities. Scholars like Mollick examined possible impacts of crowdfunding on project creators' careers, and whether funded Kickstarter campaigns fulfilled the promises of perks to donors (*The Dynamics of Crowdfunding*; *Swept Away by the Crowd?*; *Containing Multitudes*).

Ajay Agrawal and his colleagues surveyed the geographical distance separating investors and project creators, mapping actual distances of the technology with the power to connect distant strangers (Agrawal et al.). One of the first scholars to consider civic crowdfunding, or projects launched to provide services to communities, Rodrigo Davies suggested that regular success of community-inspired projects might encourage privatization of public services (Davies). After this initial phase of research seeking to quantify and imagine the impact of crowdfunding, a new stage of scholarship has sought to further link the phenomenon to existing research.

For example, in 2015, when the first special issue of a journal to consider crowdfunding, "*Crowdfunding: A New Media & Society* special issue," was published, the editors noted in an introduction that they expected most of the submitted articles to be from media studies disciplines. Instead, the editors found themselves "inundated" with many more submissions than expected from a wide variety of fields. Indeed, they suggested such an interest pointed to "the increasing use of the service across a wide range of fields and practices"—from media studies, to medical and scientific fields, to journalism and more (Bennett et al. 142). The published issue itself did include varied approaches, though with a decided emphasis on fandom and fan studies. Other scholars considered gender and sexuality, societal norms, civic crowdfunding, and freelance journalism (Bennett et al.). More recently, in March 2017, *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice* published a crowdfunding special issue. Appreciating the nascent features of the field, Short et al. note that researchers have employed a "variety of theoretical and empirical approaches encompassing a number of crowdfunding platforms" (151). Articles in the special issue consider the role of local community, serial entrepreneurs, innovation, and signaling theory. In short, the open nature of crowdfunding allows funders to employ campaigns for a wide variety of causes, thus implicating a huge range of academic disciplines.

Social scientists have approached crowdfunding as a place to further existing theories in the field. For instance, Berliner and Kenworthy examine healthcare policy and view crowdfunding as a rapidly institutionalized location for alleviating medical bills. Far from a democratizing solution to U.S. healthcare policy, however, the authors suggest "crowdfunding has the potential to exacerbate social and health inequities" due to the fact that successful campaigns build upon existing social networks and digital marketing facilities (Berliner and Kenworthy 6). Similarly, in a study of Kickstarter and GoFundMe campaigns to raise money to "save the local theater," Josefy and colleagues demonstrate the type of community—and their association with arts and culture—impacts the success of the campaign (Josefy et al.). Finally, entrepreneurship scholars, Chan and Parhankangas, find crowdfunding audiences prefer funding Kickstarter campaigns that show "incremental innovativeness" rather than "radical innovativeness" (Chan and Parhankangas). While such work has implications for would-be campaigners, it is noteworthy that the article speaks as much, if not more, to innovation theory and entrepreneurship as it does to crowdfunding.

Scholarship approaching crowdfunding using rhetorical methodologies is few and far between. In addition to Gallagher's study noted above, Ilya Tirdatov has conducted one of the few rhetorical studies on crowdfunding. Analyzing a set of the most-funded projects on Kickstarter, Tirdatov developed a "rhetorical profile" of successful pages using Aristotle's concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos. Jacob Friedman's Washington State University Ph.D. dissertation is likely the first to explore crowdfunding's rhetorical questions. Friedman argues "that new technologies, such as crowdfunding, although not inherently transformative, are always rhetorical, and therefore represent the creation of new rhetorical situations" (19). In addition to Bitzer, Friedman's analysis builds upon Upton and Cohen's notion of "move analysis," a subset of discourse analysis.

Some scholars have approached crowdfunding rhetoric using their background in entrepreneurship and political rhetoric, particularly in the realm of microlending websites such as Kiva. Crowdfunded microlending draws from blends of existing theories such as cognitive evaluation theory related to traditional investment decision-making, charitable giving decision-making, and intrinsic motivations. Such work may be helpful for microlenders, as Allison et al find, "that entrepreneurs obtaining funding via microlending will tend to achieve the highest probabilities of loan funding when their appeals for funding are framed to appeal to the intrinsic reasons microlenders provide capital—to help others" (Allison, Davis, et al. 68). Allison et al, with another set of researchers, do make some rhetorical claims, but again through the prism of entrepreneurial studies. They find microlending pitches that anticipate warm-glow giving ("warm-glow theory" explores the positive feeling that donors anticipate experiencing upon making a charitable gift), as opposed to language that might draw upon more investment-related motivations (Allison, McKenny, et al.).

Given the open-ended nature of crowdfunding literature, my study necessarily tills new ground. Particularly, PAR allowed me to take up the actual questions considered and challenges faced by crowdfunders. In other words, a PAR orientation supported engagement in the entire process (or much of it) of crowdfunding in a way that suggests process-approach scholarship in rhetoric and composition. Crowdfunders did not say a thing about "warm-glow theory" in their ideation process, though they certainly hoped giving to their campaigns would help donors feel good. Further, my study builds upon my previous work on faith-related crowdfunding, a topic as yet unconsidered by other scholars.

Multimodal Theory

Following Kathleen Yancey, Jody Shipka frames her discussion of multimodal theory with the statement: “composition is, at once, a thing with parts—with visual-verbal or multimodal aspects—the expression of relationships and, perhaps most importantly, the result of complex, ongoing processes that are shaped by, and provide shape for, living” (*Toward a Composition Made Whole* 17). Multimodal theory appreciates the broad and multiple ways authors approach meaning-making. Given the realities of “digital composing environments,” the theory suggests that scholars appreciate how the consideration of materiality and/or mode of communication relates to the composition process (Brooke 178–79). Shipka admonishes not to narrow the definition of technology to mere digital tools, arguing,

> as we continue rethinking, redefining, or even expanding terms like *writing*, *authoring*, or *composing*, it is crucial that we not limit our attention to a consideration of new media texts or to what the newest computer technologies make possible—or even make problematic—but attend to the highly distributed, complexly mediated, multimodal dimensions of all communicative practice. (*Toward a Composition Made Whole* 29)

Therefore, while multi-modality is often associated with digital composition, it is important to remember it is not limited to the digital.

I have argued previously that such an approach appreciates the multi-faceted, multi-modal composition process inherent to crowdfunding pages. Further, in a small study I identified that faith-related crowdfunders used the video and textual modes differently. The videos functioned as relationally-rich, “hugely powerful communicative practices” while the “textual rhetoric of the campaigns functions more to share information” (Copeland, “Crowdfunding a New Church” 15).

Further, however, multimodal theory may support insights into the distributed and highly complex argumentation process associated not just with a crowdfunding *page* but with a crowdfunding *campaign*. For example, this project illustrates how composing a crowdfunding page, with all its multimodal possibilities, is a multi-step, complex process often involving negotiation with a writing team. Further, sophisticated campaigns also include emails, Facebook updates, informal video updates, and even face-to-face invitations to give. Multimodal theory provides helpful insights to this process as it appreciates the composition process as working towards a goal by tackling a series of communicative problems to be solved. As Shipka suggests, wise composition is about identifying and defining these problems, as well as understanding the process as a dynamic, multimodal whole rather than a mere sum of its digital parts.

Another aspect of this dynamism concerns textual circulation, or the emerging field of circulation studies that studies and theorizes the way texts move through space and time. The digital nature of crowdfunding texts and the crowdfunders' hopes that these texts be shared widely highlights the potential of such considerations. In recent years, scholars have begun to consider how traditional conceptions of the rhetorical situation might be complicated by the multitude of possibilities writers might anticipate (or not) in digital settings such as crowdfunding. John Trimbur, for example, has argued that circulation awareness should be renewed in writing instruction settings (Trimbur). Seeing Trimbur's approach as too concerned with a fixed notion of delivery, however, scholars like Douglas Eyman seek to complicate fixed notions of delivery as mere production. Instead, Eyman considers production, distribution, exchange, *and* consumption, writing, "I see circulation as influential in each of these activities, but not as a container for them" (Eyman). Eyman points to the work of Fatima Pashaei whose thesis considered blogs addressing Muslim identity. Pashaei suggests a new model of circulation that emphasizes the dynamic nature of digital rhetoric and "accounts for multiple exigencies that drive intersections between author (blogger) and the public (discursive) as the blog's rhetoric circulates in time, space and society" (Pashaei 33). These considerations of the digital realities of composition are an important factor in circulation studies. Indeed, Gregory Ulmer has suggested rhetoric today takes place in an entirely new age, "electracy," amidst the realities of "flash reason," a rhetoric at light speed which redefines the velocity of thought (Ulmer). Ulmer sees this age of electracy as having its own set of practices for our new era: "'Electracy' is to digital media what 'literacy' is to alphabetic writing" (xv). Without seeking to disregard the potential of these new directions of study, however, this project does not directly engage with circulation studies to allow for appropriate emphasis elsewhere. More importantly, however, notions of circulation came up very seldom in the deliberations of the crowdfunders. Given the PAR nature of the study, I have elected to focus more upon the concerns claimed by the crowdfunders even as I admit curiosity for the possibilities of what future circulation scholars might bring to crowdfunding scholarship.

Genre Theory

Though it is perhaps unusual to consider crowdfunding as a genre, approaching the phenomenon with the lens of genre theory helps elucidate the practice, particularly in relation to the field of rhetoric and composition. Often connected to genre pedagogies, genre theory explores recurrent situations and strategic choices made concerning particular types of texts. As Amy Devitt explains, "Contemporary understandings see genres as rhetorical acts rather than textual conventions," and teaching genre theory often emphasizes the following: 1) analyzing particular genres, 2) growing genre awareness, and 3) genre critique (146–47). In my work with this study, as well as interactions with crowdfunders and crowdfunding teaching beyond the study, I have witnessed a growing appreciation for the crowdfunding genre. Very practically, leaders who see successful campaigns in their social media feeds long for their organization to also be among those that bring in big gifts. Naturally, they look to the success of like organizations that crowdfund and they seek to build similar campaigns—not exactly copying, but certainly wanting to *go and do likewise* and never miss an opportunity to receive gifts. Though they would not use "genre theory" language, these inquiries reflect the sense that there is inherent wisdom in studying the crowdfunding genre. Similarly, my action research partners addressed genre-related questions to me early in their campaign contemplation. Even so, few crowdfunders approach these concerns by building upon the field of genre pedagogy explicitly. As I will show below, however, in their acts of composition crowdfunders are participating in complex genre ecologies. In their campaigns, they have the opportunity to both reflect the conventions of other campaigns and seek, by their own creativity and the appeal of their organization's mission, to stand out and be granted a financial gift.

Scholars of genre theory have developed strategies to support thoughtful composition. For example, in the context of a writing classroom, Devitt, Reiff, and Bawarshi argue that building genre awareness should include the following process:

- Collect samples of the genre.
- Identify the larger context and the rhetorical situation in which the genre is used (including setting, subject, participants, and purposes).
- Identify and describe patterns in the genre's features (including its content, rhetorical appeals, structure, format, and sentence and word style).
- Analyze what these patterns reveal about the situation and larger context. (93–94)

While these strategies may support a more reflective and productive composition style, in digital modalities genre theory also must make space for an analysis of the rhetoric of the platform or interface itself.

These traditions noted, recently scholars have begun to acknowledge the hybrid, shifting nature of genre analysis in the digital age, both as shifting genres (formal letter writing vs. email) and the creation of potential new genres. Scholars such as Stephen Levinson and JoAnne Yates have called for a "bottom-up" approach to genre classification, emphasizing how genre is tied to social and societal realities. In digital spaces, however, such realities are difficult to classify. Janet Giltrow and Dieter Stein write, "The Internet enables a new communication setting which reconfigures the conditions to which pragmatic features of language respond. The main components of this new communication setting are the vast and variable range, new pull and push mechanisms, new distance-synchronic forms of communication, new combinations of N-to-N—the number of people speaking and the number of people receiving the communication—and the high speed as well as the archiving interaction, to name only a few" (9). They suggest, therefore, a "constant and fast proliferation of genres" and genre candidates, the possibility of sub-genres and other necessary shifts (9). Expanding upon this language, Theresa Heyd notes the Internet's tendency to claim *newness* in all things at all times and proposes the notion of a genre "ecology," allowing for an awareness of digital hybrids that both accepts newness and seeks to appreciate their continuity with previous forms. Employing what they term an "open-system framework" to genre, Clay Spinuzzi and Mark Zachary also embrace the metaphor of ecology. They explain, a "genre ecology includes an interrelated group of genres (artifact types and the interpretive habits that have developed around them) used to jointly mediate the activities that allow people to accomplish complex objectives. In genre ecologies, multiple genres and constituent subtasks co-exist in a lively interplay as people grapple with information technologies" (172). Ultimately, then in this age of digital realities, genres "are not static forms; they are dynamic, organic, and messy" (173). Ecological language helps account for this variety and provides insight into crowdfunding by allowing for an appreciation of the *ecology,* the interplay of like rhetorical acts, without necessitating a firm stance on whether crowdfunding itself is its own genre. Indeed, donation crowdfunding clearly draws from a complex variety of related genre candidates—snail mail charitable donation letters, business-oriented funding pitches, ministers' invitation before passing the plate—to name just a few. My aim, therefore, is to situate crowdfunding within this complex ecology, embracing its multiplicity. While this approach negates any neat-and-tidy boundaries, such is the true reality of digital fundraising rhetoric.

Finally, a more particular way of looking at genre and the Internet considers how technological design of a digital template interacts with human composition. John Gallagher has employed genre theory to explore web-based templates, or "prefabricated designs that allow writers to create a coherent text" (2). The challenge of considering web-based templates, however, is that they are not a "discrete element." This causes Gallagher to ask, "Is it the writer or the template that is the origin of rhetorical discourse?" (2). In the case of a crowdfunding campaign, the question deepens. We might ask, then, is it the writer, the template, or the broader crowdfunding campaign goal that is the origin of rhetorical discourse? This question will remain unanswered for now, but what seems to be clear is that to accomplish the larger goal of a crowdfunding campaign one must negotiate a web-based template. The template itself is folded into the rhetorical situation of crowdfunders. While Gallagher stops short of considering templates as a genre themselves—"Templates are clearly not genres"—he does employ genre theory in his assessment of template writing, suggesting templates provide “a baseline series of choices for writers” (4). Filling in web-based templates, then, “fosters recurring rhetorical action” and in the case of crowdfunding, template writing becomes a nuanced type of rhetorical action designed to exact a specific response—support of the campaign.

Gallagher’s work builds upon that of Kristin Arola who notes that even though digital publishing has become more sophisticated and seamless for the composer, one must not neglect that “the design of the space shapes understanding” (12). Writing as a professor, Arola fears “that unless we, along with our students, engage in analysis and discussions of online design, in the absence of creating designs—our alienation from ‘form’ or ‘presentation’—we will further render the template invisible” (6). These cautions present a double-edged sword for crowdfunders. On the one hand, their rhetorical decisions are in danger of being “over-shaped” by the design of the crowdfunding template. On the other hand, the crowdfunding genre has created certain expectations of potential funders. Varying too far beyond the patterned features of the genre could prove unpersuasive.

Finally, related to potential funders’ expectations, it should be noted that the “Case Statement” is a recognized sub-genre in the field of fundraising. Case statements are often developed for the rhetorical situation of capital campaign appeals (Panas). M. Gasby Brown, a fundraising consultant, argues that case statements are opportunities to motivate gifts by doing the following:

- Capture the heart, spirit and mind of the reader…is inspirational
- Ignite a passionate interest in your work
- Create a zest, exuberance and a certain element of surprise to engage the reader
- Answer the question: so what?

- Share your thoughtfully laid out plan
- Inspire action (Brown)

Crowdfunding pages employ digital templates, and, though I find it helpful to consider crowdfunding as genre-like itself, it might also be placed under the umbrella of the case statement genre. Relatedly, I found it helpful to share a PowerPoint slide of Brown's six points with action research partners, suggesting that high quality crowdfunding pages also seek to accomplish Brown's approach to case statements. In summary, when composing crowdfunding campaigns, crowdfunders navigate a complex set of rhetorical choices, including, but not limited to the rhetorical realities of web template/designs and crowdfunding genre expectations. Having considered the studies' relationship with genre theory and scholarship on digital templates, next I will situate crowdfunding as it relates to rhetoric and Christian stewardship.

Christian Giving Rhetoric

From its beginning, Christianity has enjoyed a complicated relationship with money and wealth. The Bible itself approaches money with varied perspectives, from teachings against worship of the golden calf to praising rich kings, from Jesus' exhortations to sell possessions and feed the poor to Revelation's vision of a city with streets of gold. Amidst this complex tapestry, Walter Brueggemann suggests, ultimately, "A [biblical] study of money and possessions makes clear that the neighborly common good is the only viable sustainable context for individual well-being" (xxi). For Christian community, then, an approach towards money must always consider the welfare of others, and not simply their own "financial wellness." Donation-based crowdfunding aligns with such a posture towards money by focusing on giving it away.

That crowdfunding platforms emphasize the technical processes of money transfer rather than more examined reflection about money suggests a possible conflict with religion. Henri

Nouwen, for example, insists that for Christian fundraisers "the question is not how to get money. Rather, the question is about our relationship with money" (11). A split in the Christian giving literature exists between those who focus on *reasons* for giving, or the *theology* behind giving and those who study tactics and practical approaches to giving. Vaidyanathan and Snell are in the latter camp, as their work considers giving patterns in congregations, noting motivations for giving as well as how giving is out of line with expectations from their leaders. Ultimately, Vaidyanathan and Snell develop helpful descriptions of motives and obstacles for giving, categorizing givers as socialized givers, need givers, normative givers, or guilt givers. Need givers, who respond to giving opportunities primarily because they hear or know about a societal problem and decide to support the cause, may be drawn to crowdfunding's need-based pitches. However, well-crafted crowdfunding appeals move even beyond need, instead casting a vision, or dreaming aloud an entire new view of reality.

Contrasting this tactics-focused approach, other Christian giving scholars take on a more spiritually-oriented mindset that emphasizes one's relationship with money rather than specifics on *how* to ask for it effectively. For example, in his foundational work *Money and Power*, Jacques Ellul argues that the Bible approaches money differently than contemporary believers. In scripture, Ellul sees money as deeply connected to power, usually a spiritual power that brings with it great temptation. For Ellul, the act of giving away money becomes a demonstration of one's faith that rebels against the seductive potential of money. Giving money away, in fact, makes money profane. Ellul writes, "The ultimate expression of this Christian attitude toward the power of money is what we will call *profanation*. To profane money, like all other powers, is to take away its sacred character" (107). By giving money away, Christians go against the dangerous power of money and change its ability to seduce. "Giving to God," by which Ellul means giving to the work of Christian churches and ministries, “is the act of profanation par excellence” (111). Interestingly, Ellul approaches giving with a view towards what the practice does to the giver and particularly how giving affects one’s relationship with God and money. Most Christian congregations are accustomed to annual pledge campaigns, usually taking place in the fall, that seek to raise money from members of the congregation to support the ministry planned for the next year. With notable exceptions, mainline clergy have not emphasized fundraising as ministry and, relatedly, seminaries rarely offer fundraising or stewardship courses. Some church leaders like J. Clif Christopher, Kerry Alys Robinson, and Henri Nouwen have attempted to revitalize fundraising as ministry in Christian congregations. These writers emphasize the competition congregations face for members’ charitable giving, but rather than approaching fundraising as dirty or dismal, they characterize it as holy opportunity. Nouwen argues, for example, “Fundraising is proclaiming what we believe in such a way that we offer other people an opportunity to participate with us in our vision and mission. Fundraising is precisely the opposite of begging” (3). Robinson builds on Nouwen’s work to emphasize the “stewardship of potential” that occurs when would-be funders realize the possible mission that their donations could bring about. Accordingly, Robinson expands her definition of stewardship to allow for this vision and potential. She writes, “Stewardship is both the proper care of all that has been entrusted to one *and* the recognition of and response to the potential at hand” (34). Such an approach emphasizes the possibilities that might be realized if a fundraiser listens, with openness and curiosity, to the potential funder.

These writers are imminently successful fundraisers themselves, having raised millions for charitable causes, yet their work with congregations and their successful books presume Christian readers and audience. Nouwen, for example, references the “kingdom of God” often. In

Christian circles, the "kingdom" references the "inbreaking of God's rule" on earth, moments of justice, hope, and proclamation of the good news (Grenz et al. 71). The notion is one of both *already* and *not yet,* and Nouwen uses the potential of God's inbreaking kingdom rhetorically "Asking people for money is giving them the opportunity to put their resources at the disposal of the Kingdom" (24). This context is important because it speaks to the situation of most congregations and Christian non-profits. While fundraising may be in the process of being *redeemed* and appreciated as *ministry* rather than a secular annoyance, the audience the leading writers presume is other Christians and, specifically, those already active in organizations—usually, members of congregations. Crowdfunding, however, emphasizes a drastic shift in both genre and audience. The reach of campaigns extends, potentially at least, from congregation members only to the entire world of the internet. This shift has significant implications for crowdfunders' understanding of audience.

Audience Awareness

In writing studies, audience awareness gained a new foundation in the 1980s with the publication by Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford of an article seeking to expand the notion of audience, accounting for more fluidity and flexibility than previous work on the subject ("Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked"). Pushing for a more complex appreciation of "audience addressed" and "audience invoked" than existed at the time, Ede and Lunsford set the field on a generation of searching for more clarity concerning how writers might appreciate audience awareness and integrate such awareness into the composition process. The rise of new media and the internet has served to further complicate such questions. Indeed, in a later article Ede and Lunsford acknowledge, "in our contemporary world of digital and online literacies, it seems important to question that status and usefulness of the concept of *audience*" ("Among the

Audience" 45). Eventually, Ede and Lunsford opt not to jettison the term "audience" entirely, suggesting it does provide "a helpful theoretical and practical grounding for efforts to understand how texts (and writers and readers) work in today's world" ("Among the Audience" 47). Even so, they acknowledge the shifting sands of audience in the world of new media. Three shifts seem particularly noteworthy for this project: the 1) blurring of reader/writer, 2) rise of the attention economy, and 3) development of participatory culture.

Lunsford and Ede argue that traditional models of communication have shifted away from strict reader/writer relationships. The line between those who *create* messages and those who *receive* them have blurred, noting, "The roles of writers and audience often conflate, merge, and shift" ("Among the Audience" 48). Drawing upon the work of Richard Lanham, who has described a shift to an "attention economy" that privileges dissemination and notoriety of information rather than the composition itself, Lunsford and Ede acknowledge that the digital environment texts now inhabit brings with it new frontiers and interactions between writers, audiences, and media ("Among the Audience" 49–51). Finally, Lunsford and Ede lift up Henry Jenkins' work in *participatory culture*. In the digital age, audiences fall along a continuum from mere media consumers to those who enjoy the "full shared agency characteristic of many online communities" that encourage shared authorship, interaction, and even construction of content ("Among the Audience" 54).

My work with congregations and Christian non-profits, though not associated with the developments within the field of writing studies, has affirmed the shifts and growing awareness of the field. On one level, as explained above, church crowdfunding campaign authors are aware of a rudimentary—though, highly important—shift in their fundraising messaging from an audience made up of people *within* the congregation to an audience inclusive of the congregation but expanding well beyond it. Such an awareness, for example, leads to composition that seeks to expand beyond insider Christian language and assumptions help by members of the organization. Further, however, campaign authors are somewhat aware of the shifting nature of the digital environment. Though they usually do not have the language for it, they appreciate that composition for the crowdfunding and social media genre requires a new and different approach. David Beard's work in composition studies acknowledges such shifts (though via his work with university students' compositions), recognizing that audiences have become more complex and multivalent than they once were. Beard notes that new media writing can "be configured to enable radical dialogue and extreme interactivity," shifting an audience from consumers to those whom react and interact with the digital conversation (91). Indeed, also drawing from the work of Henry Jenkins, Beard suggests that audiences may form community in response to a text. The challenge for writers, though, is that such audience behavior is difficult to predict and even more difficult to control (99–100). Beard notes the various ways fan communities have reacted to texts (e.g. Trekkies) and how such reactions have flummoxed writers in the past. While Beard does suggest a few ways forward for writers given the unpredictable nature of audience reactions, the weight of his argument is on the appreciation of uncertainty of writing in the digital age. Such an emphasis seems wise for composers of crowdfunding campaigns, even if those crowdfunders would prefer more reliable, predictable outcomes. Beard's conclusion wisely warns, "Audiences simply don't always behave in the ways that theories predict; therefore they cannot be controlled by adherence to such theories" (105). Crowdfunders must—and do—consider audience awareness in their composition process, even if such considerations may not lead to the clarity or consistency desired.

To complicate matters more, the field of religious giving is beginning to appreciate audience awareness—and audience segmentation—as potential practices. William Enright encourages Christian fundraisers to "personalize the way you talk about money" (66). Invoking research that suggests the potential for donors to respond differently to messages depending on their net worth, Enright instructs leaders to "know your audience and personalize the stories you tell to fit the group or individual you are addressing" (68). While these guidelines may seem second nature to rhetoricians, they are actually fairly novel in the Christian giving world.

Finally, the crowdfunding scholar Ethan Mollick has also emphasized the importance of community as potential audience when considering a potential campaign. This fact is particularly noteworthy because Mollick's background is business scholarship, not rhetoric or composition. Interestingly then, in a crowdfunding course hosted in the Coursera online platform, Mollick encourages potential funders to build campaigns with the interests of existing communities in mind. He teaches, "So my first piece of advice is start with your community. Crowdfunding efforts are much more likely to be successful if you already have a reputation among a group of people of being creative and innovative. And if you're producing an innovation that you know that group of people wants" (Mollick, "The 'Crowd' in Crowdfunding"). Though Mollick's research is not situated in audience awareness studies, his business-oriented crowdfunding scholarship does raise audience awareness—in this case under the guise of "community"—as an important aspect of the field. He advises, "The crowd, the communities that you're in, are absolutely critical in crowdfunding. Spend time building communities, both in the real world and virtually, and they will pay off for you" (Mollick, "The 'Crowd' in Crowdfunding"). In sum, communities—audiences—are an essential aspect of the rhetorical nature of crowdfunding campaigns and play an important role in composition decisions.

Digital Religion

My pilot study envisioned this larger project would include significant interaction with the field of digital religion. Yet, as the study progressed, it became clear religious motivations were seldom cited by the crowdfunders, and faith claims rarely surfaced. The study, therefore, does not delve into digital religion very deeply, except in the places where the field interacts with other disciplines (e.g. media studies, rhetoric of technology, etc.). Even so, it might be argued that such an approach is indeed consistent with digital religion scholarship because it reflects an openness to the lived experiences of religious crowdfunders. Indeed, such an approach is informed by Stewart Hoover's culturalist turn in the study of media and religion. Largely, this study sought not what I *think* should be meaningful—theologically, ecclesiologically, or rhetorically—but, to borrow from Hoover, "what is meaning*ful* to specific people in specific places and specific times" (37). PAR recognizes the power and complexity of decisions made by individuals. Today, individuals must negotiate a complicated relationship between their faith and culture. As Wade Clark Roof explains,

> The believer is thrust into the situation of the *bricoleur*, who in cobbling together from a variety of imageries, doctrines, symbols, texts, moral codes, and spiritual disciplines finds new religious meaning and in doing so often discovers a nuance, an insight, an angle of vision that is revitalizing in its creativity. (137)

Thus, as the study progressed, I sought to remain aware of how religious crowdfunders live out their vocation as *bricoleur*. Though each crowdfunder was informed by Christian convictions and each organization is connected to a church body of some sort, religion played a relatively minor role in the crowdfunding campaigns themselves. The main exception, as noted above, is the influence of Christian giving rhetorics on campaigners.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

Participatory Action Research Methodology

Variously described as action research, collaborative action research, cooperative inquiry, appreciative inquiry, emancipatory praxis, and community-based participatory research, among others, participatory action research (PAR) is research conducted collaboratively with the researcher and practitioners. PAR may be conducted with a researcher positioned as part of the community (insider research) or with the researcher understood as more separate (outsider research), though welcomed by the community stakeholders for the duration of inquiry. Though there are many streams of PAR, and debates persist, Herr and Anderson summarize the consensus: "Action research is inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them. It is a reflective process, but is different from isolated, spontaneous reflection in that it is deliberately and systematically undertaken and generally requires that some form of evidence be presented to support assertions" (3–4). PAR emphasizes participation of the community as *partners*, not *objects* of study. As Brydon-Miller et al. note, PAR scholars approach the work embracing its power to bring about change, and in such a way, "PAR is distinct in its focus on collaboration, political engagement, and an explicit commitment to social justice" (388).

Foundations for PAR include Clifford Geertz's work on "local knowledge," Paulo Freire's liberative approach to critical pedagogy, as well as feminist epistemologies. John Dewey's early 20th century education reform work emphasizing experiential learning and *ways of thinking* instead of mere memorization of facts was built upon by future PAR scholars. My own affinity for PAR likely mirrors my sympathy for these traditions. By putting the focus on the actual experience of the learner—rather than a colonial I-know-best approach—PAR privileges participants' journeys above that of the researchers. Perhaps it is my own engagement with Christianity that has led me to such an approach, for I have been formed by progressive faith traditions that eschew heavy-handed evangelism in favor of an open-minded curiosity about the lived experiences of others/neighbors. Similarly, in contrast to other research traditions that strive towards researcher objectivity and hesitate to assign moral value, PAR not only acknowledges, but embraces the reality that "the identities and positionalities of those involved in knowledge creation affect its processes and outcomes" (Brydon-Miller et al. 388).

While action research is more common—and perhaps more readily accepted—in the global south and European academy (especially Scandinavia as influenced by the folk school movement), the growth of stateside applied doctoral programs may be shifting the state of PAR in the U.S. Applied doctorate programs such as education, social work, nursing, and criminology have become common homes for action research dissertations, though some researchers question why so few graduate courses are taught on the subject, resulting in a dearth of academics trained in the field (Herr and Anderson 7). While the origin of PAR is disciplinarily and geographically diverse, its roots are clearly tied to various activist academic movements such as labor activists, civil rights workers, and literacy and development workers (Herr and Anderson 389).

Finally, among the interesting facets of PAR is the variety of ways scholars refer to the practice. Herr and Anderson tend toward describing PAR as an orientation or mode of inquiry rather than a "methodology." Yet, others embrace "methods" language, including Andrea Cornwall who often refers to PAR "methodologies" even as she emphasizes specific approaches or "strategies" making up the larger method. In an article on the roots of PAR, Brydon-Miller et al. similarly do not hesitate to refer to the approach as a "methodology," yet they draw out the theory behind the methods, reveling in PAR's potential to "challenge and unsettle existing structures of power and privilege…and for people to work together to bring about positive social change and to create more just and equitable political and social systems" (396). In sum, the breadth of PAR allows for a variety of descriptions as scholars search for language to describe its fit among the many modes of research. In her book, *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*, Luker uses the metaphor of salsa dancing to show how the two steps of research (theory and method) both ground sound research and allow for infinite variety, creativity, and improvisation. In this study, to use another metaphor, I understand PAR as a sort of mantra or meditative aid that grounds the whole of one's orientation to the world. Action research served as a constant, beautiful hum always in the background of my work, helping me frame my justice-focused, covenantal relationships and spirit of expectant curiosity. Indeed, for me PAR is both method and orientation.

Strengths of PAR

Any significant research project must embrace flexibility, but for PAR, cycles of action and reflection, or iterative cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect require a posture of inquisitive openness to be successful (Kemmis et al.). As Brydon-Miller et al. explain, "PAR is responsive to changing circumstances, adapting its methods, and drawing on the resources of all participants to address the needs of the community" (387). PAR, therefore, allows the experiences of the community to guide the direction of research, thus unraveling threads the researcher may not have anticipated prior to the project. To guard against a colonial takeover of the community's aims, action researchers must employ strict ethical standards and openness to collaboration. By using "colonial" here, I am intentionally recalling part of the Christian missionary tradition. Unfortunately, the history of Christian mission is full of instances of PAR's opposite, times in which Christian outsiders barge into a new community with a set of ideals they are determined to impose upon the new community regardless of their local customs. Thankfully, PAR embraces another way. Indeed, in contrast with some research methods, PAR assumes and works towards changing the research subject/partner, but in a way that remains consistent with the participant's own hopes and dreams. From the framework of covenantal ethics, then, Brydon-Miller et al. call for "an ethical stance enacted through relationship and commitment to working for the good of others" (244). Such an approach aims towards a reciprocal relationship. Hilsen suggests a covenantal relationship might develop "between researchers and local participants where the best interests of the other, refracted through a lens of social justice, are paramount" (Herr and Anderson 151).

Tensions within PAR

Like all methodologies, PAR brings with it certain tensions for the researcher. One challenge is the reality that, due to the ongoing research process, there often exists no clear stop/start point between data gathering, data analysis, and decision making. "One tension for the insider researchers," write Herr and Anderson, "is that decisions for action must sometimes be made before the researcher has reached a thorough understanding of the data" (101). Further, there may exist a tension between the type of results accepted locally and the more generalizable results sought from the academy. In the case of insider researchers, the challenge of how to communicate community realities may cause tension within the researcher or community. Herr and Anderson note, "practitioners, because they *are* native to the setting, must work to see the taken-for-granted aspects of their practice from an outsider perspective" (63). Relatedly, it becomes essential for the researcher to reflect on his or her own positionality, showing a willingness "to embrace the hard work of examining how his or her multiple identities shape and inform engagement with community members" (Brydon-Miller et al. 389).

PAR and Faith-related Crowdfunding

For this study, PAR methodologies serve as a strong fit for several reasons. First, to address my first research question on how faith communities negotiate questions of audience in their fundraising teams, a degree of access to internal deliberations is required. Given my prior experience related to Christian fundraising and crowdfunding and given my insider status as a pastoral leader and seminary professor, it would feel odd to accompany crowdfunding teams without offering support and, as appropriate, guidance.[3] While ethnographic methods might provide worthy analysis, attempting such an approach would likely make fundraising teams uncomfortable given their awareness that I teach stewardship and study crowdfunding. Second, faith-related crowdfunding is a relatively new phenomenon, and the genre is beset by constant shifts and new developments. The reflective process of PAR allows for interventions throughout the research process that may respond to the changing nature of the field. Given the cyclical, layered nature of PAR research, PAR methods allowed me to share ongoing learnings and experiences of the research partners with each other. This allowed for a helpful mutual learning and, ideally, greater fundraising effectiveness. Third, crowdfunding itself is a *process*, an endeavor that usually requires many actors working together over several weeks to months, making modifications along the way. In other words, the crowdfunding phenomenon itself employs its own sort of participatory action framework. PAR neatly dovetails with the natural experiences of many crowdfunders as they act and reflect within their own settings and for the

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[3] Relatedly, I should disclose that I personally contributed small amounts ($25-$50) to each campaign. These donations were in keeping with my positionality as supportive of the goals of the campaign as well as serving as a collaborative partner with the leaders.

purpose of raising money, increasing connections, and gaining attention. Finally, the outcome validity approaches of PAR also align with the nature of the congregational teams' approach to their crowdfunding projects. While, certainly, they sought to make their financial goals, the teams also sought broader understandings about their communities and culture. Herr and Anderson affirm the work of J. Greene who argues that for action researchers, "getting it right" is less important than "making it meaningful," an approach to knowing largely consonant with the aims of the crowdfunding teams (72).

Positionality of Action Research

The tradition of action research is particularly concerned with questions concerning the positionality of researchers because the understanding and actuality of that relationship affects research validity and ethics. Acknowledging that positions of "insider and outsider" are somewhat limiting, may shift, and are multilayered, Herr and Anderson suggest a continuum approach may be helpful to gain understanding (see Table 3). On the left-hand side of the continuum, column 1 marks true insider researcher in which a researcher considers him/herself via autobiography or other means. On the other side of the spectrum, column 6 is more traditional university-based research in which an institution supports formal academic-stream research using action research methods. Much action research, however, falls somewhere along the mid-points of the continuum if its place is able to be identified at all: "While the researcher's positionality in relation to the setting is important, it is often no simple matter to define one's position" (Herr and Anderson 39).

Table 3. Positionality of Researcher Continuum

Insider (1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**Outsider (6)**
Insider (researcher studies own self/practice)	Insider(s) in collaboration with other insiders	Insider(s) in collaboration with outsider(s)	Reciprocal collaboration (insider-outsider teams)	Outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s)	Outsider(s) studies insider(s)

Note: Adapted from Herr and Anderson 40–41.

Assessing the location of my research on the continuum is a significant interpretative challenge for several reasons, but most notably due to a sense of movement over the course of the study. Generally speaking, on the right side (6) of the spectrum, given the fact that my research pertains to this university-required dissertation, it could be considered an outsider undertaking. On the left side (2) of the spectrum, I am a fellow Christian leader, member of a congregation, and teach faith-related fundraising. I am not, however, a member of any of the congregations or a formal leader in their particular local systems. In other words, though I had an affinity and prior relationship with every organization in this study, I have no formal role, membership, or connection with their day-to-day operations beyond the crowdfunding project. The research process will be discussed below, but in determining my positionality it is also noteworthy that each of the crowdfunding partners *approached me* for information about crowdfunding because they had prior knowledge of my interest in the subject. In other words, those who eventually became my research partners sought to collaborate before they were aware of the formal nature of this study. Further, they all also had a prior connection to me personally, though some more longstanding and closer than others.

Interestingly, I found my affinity with elements of Table 3 shifting over the course of the study. Early on, my relationship felt closer to the outsider positionality, but it shifted towards an insider positionality as I developed rapport and trust with partners. This shift towards insider research felt stronger as the time and effort with each organization progressed. Thus, my connection with the three organizations that launched campaigns ultimately moves closer to (2), insider in collaboration with insiders, while my work with the other six organizations remained approximately a reciprocal collaboration (4). Noteworthy, then, is how PAR orientation permitted the potential for research relationships to shift over time as our covenantal ties grew stronger.

From the inception of this PAR study, I sought to employ a cooperative and co-learning approach, working with crowdfunding teams but not deciding for them (see Table 4). While I would give input and advise as requested, I did not intend to overtake the aims of the groups, nor set the agenda. This posture I claimed specifically in a "Research Covenant" included in my Informed Consent letter (see Appendix A). The covenant includes two sections, clarifying expectations for myself as researcher and for my research partners. While the fuller letter explains details associated with the research process and procedures, the covenant is particularly concerned with positionality. In this version of the letter, I have bolded words and phrases particularly concerning positionality and the nature of the relationship and expectations between researcher and research partners:

As a researcher, I (Adam J. Copeland) covenant to:

- Work ***with*** you and be present and available in the **co-learning** process as often as I can
- Never view you as objects of study, but as fellow **collaborators** and **co-generators** of knowledge
- Treat you with respect, approach our **partnership** with an ethical stance, and strive always to be worthy of your trust

- Ask good questions, model curiosity, and embody good humor
- **Share** my knowledge, research, and opinions about crowdfunding with you so that we might discover more together
- As your **partner, serve** you with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love
- Orient my work, and the ultimate dissemination of my research, towards social justice
- Do my part to **support** the success of your crowdfunding project

As a partner and participant in this participatory action research, I/we covenant to:

- Treat the team with respect, **working together** for the good of the whole
- Work alongside Adam, **partnering** with him as a **co-learner, collaborator**, and curious crowdfunding researcher
- Serve with good humor and an open spirit
- Share any concerns about the process with the team leader
- Do my part to **support the success** of our crowdfunding project

The heavy use of versions of the word “partner,” along with terms such as “collaborator” and “co-learner,” emphasize my aim to work as a cooperative researcher, coming alongside and working *with* the local people rather than conducting research *on* or *for* them.

Table 4. Participatory Methods: Means to What End?

Mode of Participation	Involvement of Local People	Relationship of Research and Action to Local People
Co-option	Token; representatives are chosen, but no real input or power	on
Compliance	Tasks are assigned, with incentives; outsiders decide agenda	for
Consultation	Local opinions asked; outsiders analyze and decide on course of action	for/with
Cooperation	Local people work together with outsiders to determine priorities; responsibility remains with outsiders for directing the process	with
Co-learning	Local people and outsiders share their knowledge to create new understanding and work together to form action plans, with outsider facilitation	with/by
Collective action	Local people set their own agenda and mobilize to carry it out in the absence of outside initiators and facilitators	by

Note: (Herr and Anderson 51; Cornwall 96).

More broadly, my selection of covenantal language to describe the research process is an intentional nod to the Christian practice of embracing covenants (which, indeed, harkens to the biblical tradition itself). In the practice of Christian community, covenants are often used for the establishment of communal norms. For example, many youth groups establish covenants to describe guidelines and expectations of conduct—rules—for interacting. In some ways, "covenant" is just another word for "contract," but my impression is that the word carries a more faith-forward feel for many, engaging these Christian shades of meaning. All these associations noted, however, I did not have an actual discussion with my partners about the choice of the word "covenant." Indeed, it likely seemed like the natural description for the circumstance, even as I expect it was somewhat unusual for an IRB process. Now having described the strengths and tensions of PAR, and claiming my particular positionality with the tradition and in relationship to the study, I will explain the main principles with which I approached the research.

PAR Research Process Design

As a work of participatory action research, this project's methodology aligns with the expectations of the discipline, one that upholds the view "there is no 'one way' but a set of practices and principles that guide the methodology and choices of methods" (Hunter et al. 61). These principles, and my practices, include the following.

First, I have embraced PAR practices of reflection, a series of cyclical, or spiral, cycles of 1) understand/plan, 2) act, 3) observe, 4) reflect. While each of these steps is essential to PAR, considering the multiple case study nature of the research, it should be noted the steps occur on a cyclical, ongoing basis rather than a linear, step-by-step approach. In other words, the nature of discernment, composition, and marketing of crowdfunding allows for multiple, ongoing reflective acts. I approached the research process open to "a degree of latitude in terms of the evolution of the methodology and where the successive cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect" might take the research (Herr and Anderson 97). This openness was part of the design and allowed me to respond to the needs and desires of my action partners with a posture of curiosity and freedom, unbound to an exacting pre-planned form. Even so, at the conclusion of each campaign I conducted a process of more deliberate reflection during which I discussed the campaign with others, gathered notes, conducted interviews, and reflected upon the PAR cycle itself.

Second, as a researcher undertaking PAR with a posture of co-learning, I approached the process seeking also to learn about my own professional practice of stewardship leadership and my own understanding of crowdfunding. In this sense, as Herr and Anderson note, in some ways PAR requires researchers to study and reflect upon themselves, their own decisions, and their involvement in the project. Therefore, the research documentation process and my own process of reflection considered my own "roles, actions, and decisions" throughout the PAR partnerships (97–98). For example, with each partner I had to decide, and then explain to them, how much hands-on interventions I would take with the project. Would I, for instance, request access to the backend of the crowdfunding pages? Would I write scripts for videos? Would I donate myself or share their pages using my social media networks? These questions were especially fraught due to the inexact and unexpected nature of crowdfunding. There was no way before launching a project to predict its chance of success. So, while my gut – based on my experience in the field – might suggest a certain direction wiser than another, I was always very aware that "giving advice" could unintentionally lead creators away from a successful campaign. At one point in the ideation stages, for instance, the Wintergarden Presbyterian Church campaign goal was imagined to be $80,000. While hitting such a goal would be transformative to the congregation, my experience and analysis of other successful campaigns suggested the chances of reaching a goal of this magnitude were quite small. So, as I discussed the plans for the campaign with the planners, I had to decide how to balance my sense of the campaign's potential success with the unknown nature of crowdfunding, the *possibility* of a transformational financial windfall, and the welfare of my partners. Such decisions required a balancing of multiple factors and always called me to reconsider my own ethical stance towards the research, as well as the Research Covenant I strove to uphold.

Third, beyond the self-reflective spiral, my research embraced the following seven key features highlighted by Kemmis and McTaggart:

- Participatory action research is a social process
- Participatory action research is participatory

- Participatory action research is practical and collaborative
- Participatory action research is emancipatory
- Participatory action research is critical
- Participatory action research is reflexive
- Participatory action research aims to transform both theory and practice (280–84)

While it is well and good to claim these PAR attributes, they only became present in my study through my careful work surfacing and refocusing my efforts. I sought to both "indicate the fluidity and emergent nature of the process" of PAR while also affirming my intentions to engage the features above with an ethical stance (Herr and Anderson 90). To implement my action research plans, I needed research partners curious about and/or planning to launch a crowdfunding project to benefit their organization. Given my experience with leadership in mainline protestant congregations and expertise teaching leadership in such contexts, I sought to focus partnerships on congregations or faith-related non-profits. Contemporaneous to the early stages of dissertation research, I was also presenting at church leadership events related to digital giving and crowdfunding, as well as publishing articles on faith-related crowdfunding. My initial research design imagined a process of reaching out to potential partners with a semi-formal "Call for Collaboration" or similar. Likely, I would have initially pursued my existing professional network using face-to-face communication in addition to social media, blogs, and email. Interestingly, however, I was never required to initiate such a process due to the fact that several congregational and non-profit leaders approached me. When they did so, very early in the communication process I shared with them my IRB documents and discussed the nature of my research. I made it clear that I would be happy to continue the conversation about crowdfunding even if they did not opt to be part of the research. In each case, however, the groups agreed, and we moved forward as research partners. Reflecting on positionality discussion above, while I was perhaps approached initially as more of an outsider-consultant, my sense of this role gradually shifted towards insider as the partnerships progressed.

Fourth, my preexisting knowledge and leadership in faith-related fundraising raised questions as to the best way to describe my relationship to my PAR collaborators. While the words, “partner” and “partnership” accurately describe my hopes for the relationships, in other ways it seems more precise to describe myself as a crowdfunding “consultant” to the organizations. Herr and Anderson note that, in recent decades, action research scholarship has tended to emphasize reflection upon one’s outsider/insider status. In the middle of the 20th century, however, “the consultancy approach to action research was dominant in many fields” (Herr and Anderson 37). In some fields, PAR consultancy remains strong today.
PAR researchers as consultants often receive grant funding to contract with an organization or non-profit. Such approaches, Herr and Anderson write, are “usually funded to solve a particular problem or evaluate a particular program” (38).

Was I “consultant”? Well, in my actions I certainly engaged in consultant-like processes. Particularly, I worked with my partners to solve a single problem, namely how to launch a successful crowdfunding campaign for their organization. I also possessed some knowledge and experiences in crowdfunding and faith-related giving that could help solve the problem at hand. In my communications with the teams, however, I did not refer to myself as a “consultant,” preferring the language of “partner” or “coach.” Additionally, I neither received grant funding nor charged the partners for any consulting services. Yet, indeed, I functioned practically in ways that a traditional consultant might.

Upon reflection, the description of "consultant" seems appropriate, even as I still prefer language that indicates a stronger relational bond. My use of a "covenant" to describe our commitment to one another instead of a "contract" also indicates my discomfort with viewing this work as merely transactional. Indeed, as Herr and Anderson write, "sorting out the implications of this unique relationship to one's study is often confusing" (37). Ultimately, I hesitate to use the language of "consultant" because I fear it might not allow for the collaboration and co-learning I sought for the study. Even so, I acknowledge that as a shorthand, "consultant" works as an apt, and potentially helpful, description of my engagement with the teams.

Fifth, it should be noted that my process of "recruitment" reflects the biases and realities of my network. Since the partners reached out to me, aware of my work in the area of faith-related crowdfunding, they already possessed at least a mild interest in pursuing a crowdfunding project. In other words, each partner or potential partner included in this study already had an openness to the idea of crowdfunding and an inkling about its positive potential for their ministry. Interestingly, however, in several cases what these potential partners lacked was a clear idea of *what* they hoped to crowdfund for. They all sought the financial fruits of the technology, but they tended not to approach me with one specific idea of an ideal crowdfunding goal. To put the situation in rhetorical terms, many had selected the genre of their persuasive act but not the purpose of it beyond generally raising money. I suspect some were simply drawn to the novel nature of the phenomenon and/or the draw to try something new. In any case, it is clear that the results of this research must account for the somewhat limited nature of the participant pool. Even so, such pre-existing relationships leading to partnerships in PAR studies is common practice and, in fact, can be a benefit to the research. Indeed, in my case little time was lost to the need to develop relational trust. Finally, since the partners first approached me, I could progress with the research without second-guessing myself that it was the partners' intention to crowdfund—as opposed to the possibility, if I approached potential partners, of them agreeing to crowdfund out of some perceived need to placate my aims.

Given the weight of the ethics and recruitment related considerations above, it is tempting to minimize the practical concerns of research collection, but such steps actually help to form the foundation of any ethical research. Accordingly, after receiving permission to include the partners in this research, I began saving all electronic correspondence in a password protected database. All field notes and PAR reflections were stored in the same manner. For some campaigns, leaders sought particular feedback from me regarding difficult implementation questions, and I often wrote my responses to them using a memo style and saved the document accordingly. When partners launched crowdfunding pages, in addition to saving copies of the URL of the pages, I collected screen shots of the pages and made records of much of their corresponding marketing campaigns (e.g. campaign updates on their organizations' Facebook pages). Coghlan and Brannick argue that, in action research, every action is an intervention, so "it is more appropriate to speak of data generation than data-gathering" (89). Indeed, as in active insider research, data generation itself feeds back into the process, creating an opportunity for reflection and action. At the conclusion of each campaign, I conducted an interview with campaign leaders that were later transcribed. Finally, I shared a draft of this dissertation with each crowdfunding partner to seek their feedback, related both to accuracy and any further reflections on the PAR/crowdfunding process. This participant feedback served as another opportunity for reflection, and comments are discussed in the Case Study write-ups below.

Engagement with PAR Partners

The PAR posture towards research allows for many ways to engage with partners. While I have discussed my general research posture preferencing collaboration and cooperation above, here I will note, more specifically, the ways I engaged with my PAR partners. Aware of the PAR cycle or spiral of 1) understand/plan, 2) act, 3) observe, 4) reflect, some PAR studies allow for discrete acts of a singular nature. For example, an action researcher engaging an organization might develop a survey instrument as part of the understanding phase of research. A clear *action*/*intervention* could follow, then, resulting from the data gathered in the survey. My project generally did not allow for any single discrete action common to all the campaigns. Instead, I used the PAR framework as an ever-cycling method to fuel my engagements with my partners.

Acts—or particular instances of engagement, change-seeking, or intervention—occurred throughout in both ways small and more significant. For example, in the case of my work with the leaders at Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church (described in more detail below), one clear action developed out of a meeting in the form of a follow-up memorandum I wrote for the committee with descriptions, links, and discussion of several faith-related crowdfunding projects germane to their considerations. This act was designed to help further their project discernment. In my own analytic memos, I reflected on the meeting that led to my composition of the memo for the leadership team. I also acted in the form of following-up with the pastor in a phone call.

With other partners, however, the acts varied significantly. For example, I did not speak on the phone with many of the partners but did so extensively with Wintergarden Presbyterian Church. Further, a clear act in my partnership with Wintergarden was giving specific feedback to a draft of a crowdfunding video. This feedback led Devon to make changes to the video before it was released on the page. With Intertwine, however, I was not asked to engage any video feedback, and it would have felt odd to request to do so. Instead, I met with Mike in person at coffee shops for updates, engaging in active listening and feedback conversationally. In summary, therefore, my engagement with the partners always occurred on their terms and in response to needs of a particular partner. Each action, large or small, triggered my reflection in an analytic memo. In the tradition of PAR, I sought to allow the partners to drive the process in the manner that fit with their culture and aims.

Case Study Research

As a form of qualitative research, case study research methods allow "the reader into the [research] setting with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytic reporting formats" (Marshall and Rossman 164). For this reason, case study reports are often used in classroom settings so that students might understand a phenomenon evidenced in a past real-world setting with characters, plot, and outcomes. However, case study research is much more than a data reporting strategy or pedagogical tool. Rather, "case studies are a **strategy of inquiry** in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (Creswell 13; emphasis added). In fact, as Robert Yin argues, case study research is a "rigorous methodological path" of its own (3).

Yin's definition of case study research is twofold, touching on the *scope* and *features* of a case study:

1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case" in depth and within its real-world context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.

2. A case study inquiry

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin 16–17)

Note, therefore, that the case study method goes well beyond mere reporting, but instead takes an all-encompassing approach from research design, data analysis, and finally, to data presentation.

For this project, case study methods are particularly appropriate for the following reasons. First, case study research calls for the type of *research questions* this project is taking up: "how" and "why" questions, more explanatory than predictive, that "deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence" (Yin 10). Case study research is particularly apt in applications in which it might *explain*, *describe*, *illustrate*, and *enlighten* concerning actions over time—exactly the realm of faith-related crowdfunding.

Second, like PAR, case study research is adaptive, able to incorporate multiple forms of data, and requires of the researcher a certain depth of knowledge about the subject being studied. In other words, case study research makes space for the complex undertaking of launching a crowdfunding campaign.

Third, case study methods allow for *cross-case* design and analysis (also called *multiple-case*) that gather and address evidence across multiple cases of similar phenomena. Yin urges researchers to view multiple cases from a replication design perspective rather than sampling design (56–67). To explain, consider that sampling logic from the realm of science and statistics emphasizes testing a sufficient number of cases as to gain a relevant sample of a larger pool.

When it comes to case studies, a sampling approach is nearly always impossible given the potential number and varieties of any given phenomenon. Instead, replication logic calls for the researcher to approach multiple cases as a scientist would approach replications of an experiment. The case study researcher looks for similar results (literal replication) or contracting results for explicable and/or anticipatable reasons (theoretical replication) among/between cases. As will be explained below, taking up Yin's approach in this project, I therefore consider the three crowdfunding experiences as replicated phenomena rather than three somehow statistically relevant samples of all faith-related crowdfunding.

Fourth, case study methods allow for a research design incorporating case study design into a larger, mixed methods study. As Yin writes, "The larger study will contain your completed case study but also should report separately the findings about the data from the other methods" (193). In the case of this project, PAR methods and rhetorical analysis encompass the entire study, and multiple case study methods help elucidate the distinctions and connections among the three organizational cases.

Case Study Research Methods Relative to Other Research Methods

As a strategy of qualitative research inquiry, case study research, it might be said, "plays well with others." Even so, or perhaps because of its generous flexibility, its relationship with other methods can be perplexing. Therefore, a few attempts at clarification follow.

First, case study research should not be confused with other research methodologies in which cases of *something* exist. For example, Luker invites researchers, as part of her instructions for grounded theory social science research, to go back to two mantras, "*What is this a case of?* And *How do you bump it up another level of generality?*" (131). Understanding Luker's lexicon here is important. She uses "case" in the more common meaning of the phrase, calling researchers to place that instance of an event, or set of data, in relationship to relevant *categories* beyond it. For Luker, cases help illuminate larger categories, sort through variables, consider alternative explanations, and take other research steps towards a theory-driven explanation. For Luker, considering what one's research "is a case of" is a key, driving question for wise researchers. Such an approach is certainly profitable for researchers, yet, using Luker's work as an example, it is important to note that, confusingly, not every use of the word "case" in qualitative research is an instance of "case study research." To sum up, using the language of Luker and Yin, this project employs three case studies using replication design as a strategy of inquiry to help determine what this research is a case of.

Second, case study research allows for theory development at an earlier stage than some qualitative methods, such as grounded theory development. In fact, "for case studies, some theory development as part of the design phase is highly desired," writes Yin (37). Again, this approach meshes well with my study since the PAR partners certainly depended upon a certain theory of faith-related fundraising and the potential of crowdfunding before they agreed to partnering. In other words, we proceeded with our approach to crowdfunding with the working theory that our actions might lead to the desired outcome of raising funds. So, for example, our work assumed certain potential about the crowdfunding page genre, and perhaps particularly, about the relational quality of video as an element in fundraising design. As in the case of my partnership with aijcast, we discussed the rhetorical move of connecting specific giving levels with relatable mission outcomes (e.g. the cost of a microphone). And then, aijcast leaders made the change—no real theory needed other than our lived experience and sense of positive fundraising potential. All that noted, however, case study research does allow for grounded theory, inductive analysis approaches at later stages of the project. In other words, case study research is not averse to grounded theory considerations, but it is more open to theoretical presumptions from the outset than some instances of grounded theory work.

Third, while case study research practices do allow for "participant-observation" techniques in which scholars engage with those being studied, such practices are relatively rare. Indeed, in a section noting the *possibility* of participant-observation, Yin warns scholars in a way that would strike those with PAR orientations as strange. Yin writes of the unwelcome potential that participant-observation might require a researcher "to assume positions or advocacy roles," which he assumes are "contrary to the interests of good social science practice" (117). Indeed, such a researcher might (gasp) even "become a supporter of the group or organization being studied" (117). Yet I, very specifically, supported the organizations with financial gifts, in addition to my time and energy. Suffice to say, case study methods tend not to embrace the action-oriented, justice-seeking orientation of PAR. Yet, the case study analysis can certainly bring insight to action research. For these reasons, in this study I consider case study methods supporting my larger PAR orientation. In doing so, I emphasize case study methods' potential to guide towards understanding rather than their perfectly snug fit. In my assessment, to state it bluntly, PAR researchers are an inclusive bunch comfortable borrowing methods that fit their diverse projects. Case study methodologies tend to have a more rigid design structure, though I certainly acknowledge an inherit diversity in that field as well. To summarize, by claiming my positionality as a PAR researcher *first*, I seek to locate myself in the PAR tradition that allows for a generous approach towards other research methodologies.

Participants' Recruitment

As introduced above, participant recruitment proceeded organically via previously-existing relationships, my professional network, and awareness by those paying attention to the world of stewardship education. Below, I briefly describe my early interactions with each potential partner.

Exodus Lending is a small non-profit based in Minneapolis that works to buy-out Minnesotans from payday lending debts and otherwise support the restoration of their financial health. Around April 2016, I became aware of Exodus Lending through a professional relationship with two members on their Board of Directors. At the time, the board was looking to expand their fundraising strategies and in the process of interviewing candidates for Executive Director (ED). In May 2016, the new ED contacted me to schedule a meeting to get to know one another as well as discuss fundraising strategies, including crowdfunding. We met in early June, again in mid-July, and for a final time in October, that time with another board member present. At the initial meeting, I shared my IRB materials and the Research Covenant and we discussed the nature of PAR and its ethical and research framework. While the ED expressed great interest in pursuing a crowdfunding campaign, and though she reported the board was also supportive, no campaign moved forward. The reasons, surely, were multifactorial but the ED reported the main challenge was having no mission-related fundraising need appropriate for crowdfunding. Most of the non-profit's budget goes either to the ED's salary or the loan pool, neither of which seemed like strong candidates for crowdfunding. After a few emails in December 2016, correspondence petered off. To date, while the non-profit is doing well, they have not launched a crowdfunding campaign.

Christikon is an outdoor ministry (camp) and non-profit associated with the Evangelical Luther Church in America (ELCA). In March 2017, a colleague in the fundraising department at Luther Seminary approached me seeking advice regarding plans for a Christikon capital campaign. The Board of Directors was interested in pursuing a digital component for their campaign, and the fundraiser sought my advice on possible approaches. I met with the fundraiser in March 2017 to discuss digital possibilities for a campaign. While the plans for the larger gifts towards the Capital Campaign were fairly clear, the digital aspect of the campaign was much less so. Christikon has a large database of email addresses but little social media presence and little to no experience with digital fundraising. Given the fundraiser's deep experience in the field, he intuitively understood the challenge of melding a crowdfunding campaign with a broader capital appeal. We discussed the pros and cons of launching a separate crowdfunding page on a branded site, like Generosity.com, versus a more traditional "Give Now" option on the ministry's website. Additionally, we agreed on the poor fit of an all-or-nothing crowdfunding campaign. The fundraiser planned to discuss a range of electronic giving possibilities with the ministry board following our meeting. While our conversation went well, I was not approached for further consultation and the ministry did not pursue formal crowdfunding. At our meeting, I shared my IRB materials and the Research Covenant and we discussed the nature of PAR and its ethical and research framework. I remained in contact with the fundraiser, keeping up-to-date on the broader capital campaign work, but the initial contact did not lead to short-term crowdfunding work together.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church is a large ELCA congregation in a suburb of Minneapolis-St. Paul. With active members who work in the tech industry, they have a history with forward-thinking congregational leadership. Their pastor is comfortable with and committed to leading quality stewardship ministry. In response to an invitation from the pastor, I met with four members of their stewardship committee in mid-April 2016 to discuss a possible crowdfunding campaign. In the course of the conversation I shared my IRB materials and the Research Covenant and we discussed the nature of PAR and its ethical and research framework.

The committee wondered, particularly, if crowdfunding might be a way to invite their marginal members to give—those who are only semi-regularly active but who do have an existing relationship with the congregation. The committee also expressed a hope to receive donations from those not previously connected to the congregation. While several ideas were presented as a potential focus of a campaign, it was agreed that none of these ideas would be inspirational for non-members (nor for most marginal members). We left the conversation with the committee planning, at a future gathering, to consider potential ideas. We noted, for instance, that a campaign in conjunction with a non-profit community partner might expand the usual audience of donors. While I have run into the pastor at other ministry events, the committee did not follow-up with crowdfunding ideas.

Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church (LNPC) is a small congregation (around 100 members) in Minneapolis. I have enjoyed several professional connections with the congregation over the years, as well as a long-term awareness of the congregation's creative Sabbath ministry. In October 2016, I became aware, via my social media network, that the congregation had launched a crowdfunding page with the company/platform razoo to support "The Lisa Larges Congregational Care Fund." Larges, who graduated from seminary in 1989, became well known in the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1991 when she came out to the presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry. Subsequently, Larges became embroiled in a long period of discernment and church judicial wrangling over ordination of LGBTQ candidates for ministry (Odom). The Presbyterian Church (USA) removed barriers for ordination of LGBTQ candidates in 2011, and Larges eventually was called as a part-time associate pastor for Congregational Care in 2016. As a small congregation, however, LNPC did not have the budgetary resources to pay Larges, so they launched a crowdfunding campaign to fund her salary of $13,000 per year.

According to the page, the congregation raised a total of $12,245 for the fund, though much of that came by way of offline checks and donations through a "Give Online" link on their website (Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church). The razoo page itself lists gifts of $3,800, though it has been updated with a note that a total of over $12,000 has been raised when including the other sources.

Given this crowdfunding experience, as well as my connections to the congregation, I contacted the pastor to discuss the campaign's success. The pastor invited me to meet with a committee of the congregation in early November 2016 to consider other crowdfunding campaign possibilities, as well as broader stewardship ministry at the church. In the course of the conversation I shared my IRB materials and Research Covenant. We discussed the nature of PAR and its ethical and research framework. At our meeting, the committee expressed an interest in pursuing other non-traditional, creative avenues of stewardship support as they were aware the small congregation had become overly reliant on spending down the corpus of its endowment to fund day-to-day ministry, including the pastor's salary and benefits. At the initial meeting, we discussed ideas for campaigns. One that rose to the top was supporting a portion of the pastor's time for committed hours to write a book on Sabbath practices. A member noted that though finances are tight, "We make the intentional choice to live in abundance and trust, rather than scarcity." The committee proceeded to brainstorm ideas that would inspire gifts. We left the meeting with the commitment to meet again "after the holidays" and the pastor's January travel break.

After several months of quiet, I was contacted by the pastor and asked to meet again with the LNPC committee. We did so on April 20, 2017. At the meeting, I briefly recapped their previous experience with crowdfunding for the Larges project, as well as qualities of other successful projects I saw (e.g. tangible, goal-focused projects rather than general fund support). The committee had a difficult time landing on an idea for a crowdfunding campaign, the pastor saying at one point, “I want us to be about where God is leading us, not where the money is.” The committee felt a strong need for a bathroom renovation to support the congregation’s ministry of hospitality, but it was generally understood that such a project would be difficult to pitch to a crowdfunding audience. After the meeting, on April 21, 2017, I sent the pastor a memo suggesting three options for crowdfunding, as well as links to successful crowdfunding projects. Though the memo received a positive response, I did not hear back until I reached out again in June. At that point, the pastor indicated the church board had recently appointed a Finance Team and would be in touch. I did not receive further communication for the next six months.

Reflecting on my work with LNPC, the committee members and pastors seemed to face a variety of challenges related to the potential of crowdfunding. Though they had enjoyed previous success with the genre, specifically the focused, “tangible,” goal-oriented aim of celebrating Larges’ ordination and supporting her first-year salary. The committee knew, however, that such a project would be unlikely to be replicated, and they also did not want to regularly fund pastor salaries via crowdfunding. Though several ideas of projects were discussed, no single, compelling project rose to the surface. I noted, in my correspondence with the pastor, my sense that a project focused on her book writing could be a strong campaign, given success of other book-oriented crowdfunding campaigns. While not disagreeing, the pastor seemed to have a concern that such a campaign would focus mainly on her and her writing, and not the congregation more broadly. Further, there seemed to be a lack of leadership regarding the actual details of launching a campaign, including writing the pitch, recording the video, building the communication plan, and more. The previous campaign had a festive spirit about it, and a clear, action-oriented date of Larges' ordination. No similar campaign idea surfaced and the energy around crowdfunding sputtered.

Cross of Glory Lutheran Church (CGLC) is a medium-sized congregation in a suburb of Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota. At an April 2016 stewardship leadership event, in which I presented on trends in giving, a gentleman serving as treasurer for CGLC approached me to discuss crowdfunding. At the time, he was not aware of my research, and I explained my interest in the fundraising possibilities crowdfunding has for congregations. He was eager to discuss with his leadership team the possibilities of crowdfunding to support costs related to construction of a community garden on the church's property. We exchanged cards, and I followed up by email to continue the conversation (as well as share my IRB materials). On April 25, the treasurer included me in an email exchange with other staff members regarding potential project ideas, including costs to support a mission trip the church was planning to the Dominican Republic. I shared some mission trip campaigns that had varied success on the Christian crowdfunding platform WeRaise, but also noted the importance of drawing others into the story beyond those already connected to the congregation. I suggested we meet in person if the congregational leaders wanted to pursue the possibility of launching a campaign. Communication petered out. In early July, I reached out again to see if the church had launched a campaign without contacting me, but the treasurer noted that though crowdfunding was considered for several projects, the congregation did not launch a campaign.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church (BLC) is a large congregation in Minneapolis, MN. I have known several members of their staff for years and worked with them on non-crowdfunding-related projects. In May 2017, a member of their staff reached out to me, asking if I would be willing to meet with their youth ministry team to discuss how they might implement crowdfunding into fundraising for a future mission trip. I met with four adult members of their youth ministry staff on August 16, 2017. They described their history of fundraising for youth mission trips—a "socialist model" in which all funds raised go to the total cost of the trip rather than a particular individual's participation costs, "gimmicks" such as selling cookies, wrapping paper, etc., and meal-related fundraisers. The BLC team expressed a desire to match their gifts and interests in storytelling with their fundraising approaches and wondered if crowdfunding might support such a move. Further, they expressed a desire to fundraise beyond only their congregational audience, as well as a general sense of fatigue around past fundraising approaches. In the course of the conversation I shared my IRB materials and Research Covenant, and we discussed the nature of PAR and its ethical and research framework. We discussed whether crowdfunding might fit their goals of fundraising for a mission trip to Israel/Palestine in summer 2018. The conversation focused on three challenges. First, the congregation already uses a denomination-sponsored method of electronic giving through the company Vanco Payment Solutions. They noted the ease of using Vanco for receiving and tracking donations, though Vanco does not offer traditional crowdfunding. Second, if the church was to use a crowdfunding platform (not Vanco), the team realized they might have to setup *individual* sites for each youth, the prospect of which was both a hassle and accounting nightmare. Finally, though the team sought to move to a fundraising model in which individual youth raised a certain amount of money to cover the cost of their own participation in the trip, the team noted that some members of the congregation may still wish to donate towards the corpus of the trip cost rather than sponsor any particular youth. We discussed these challenges and followed-up in emails multiple times over the next few weeks. It was eventually discovered that the crowdfunding platform Crowdrise (at least at that time) did not allow peer-to-peer fundraising in a way that would align with the church's goals. In the meantime, BLC leaders also discovered a way to allow youth to tag gifts with their name using Vanco.

Given the possibility that I might be working with the youth members of the church in the future, I revised my IRB protocol to allow for the possibility of working with minors. That revised protocol, along with a Parent Permission Form and Youth Assent Form was approved August 8, 2017. However, upon further communication with the Bethlehem youth leadership team (made up of adult staff members), we mutually agreed not to continue the PAR partnership.

In mid-November 2017, the team alerted me to the fact that their communication with Crowdrise was "slow going," having been delayed by legal and compliance issues related to the site itself. BLC planned to go ahead with Vanco's electronic giving capabilities for the short-term, at least, and perhaps use Crowdrise in 2018 if the legal issues were satisfied. Vanco, the company they already used for electronic gift processing, also notably offered lower fees than Crowdrise, though the technology Vanco provides is not crowdfunding according to common understandings of the term (see chapter 2). Instead, Vanco is more of an online giving system with options for designating individual gifts for particular purposes. Given this decision not to move forward, at least for the foreseeable future, with Crowdrise crowdfunding, the team wondered whether I wished—or should—meet with their youth and pursue further research. We decided together that it was preferable I should step back from the PAR work and not continue to meet the youth and their parents, explain my research, collect permission/assent forms, etc. It seemed, on the one hand, that the BLC team's original plan to crowdfund was perhaps shifting directions beyond the scope of this dissertation. While there is surely much good learning to be gained from the fundraising practices of the congregation, their mission trip fundraising plan seems to have moved beyond a simple crowdfunding approach. Additionally, the team and I noted that their electronic fundraising efforts likely would not wrap up until early summer 2018, and if they did launch with Crowdrise, that would not begin until January 2018 at the earliest. In other words, the BLC timeline shifted beyond my work for this dissertation. Therefore, while my collegial relationship and informal ministry partnership with the congregation and its staff will certainly continue, we elected not to continue further the PAR work together in late November 2017. In sum, the direction of BLC’s fundraising work and its decision not to pursue crowdfunding no longer fit with my ongoing research.

In Table 5 below, I have displayed a visualization of the ministries with which I met for possible recruitment and crowdfunding partnership. I have noted the number of emails exchanged, times meeting face-to-face, and other notes so that the reader might get at least a small sense of the scope of the connections.

Table 5. Recruitment of Non-Launching Crowdfunders.

Name	**Number of Emails Exchanged (by chain; approx.)**	**Times Met in Person (re crowdfunding)**	**Total Length of PAR/crowdfunding discernment**	**Other Notes**
Exodus Lending	8	3	8 months	Non-profit participates in statewide “Give to the Max” electronic giving day
Christikon	1	1	1 month	
St. Stephen Lutheran Church	1	1	1 month	
Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church	7	2	9 months	Successful crowdfunding campaign prior to PAR partnership
Cross of Glory Lutheran Church	2	0	3 months	
Bethlehem Lutheran Church	6	2	7 months	Moved forward with a form of digital fundraising. Mutually agreed to end PAR partnership

Data Generation and Analysis

Overview

The three case descriptions following in Chapter 4 are understood as part of a larger, multi-method project. In qualitative research of this sort, there is no single preferred method of data analysis. In fact, the opposite is true: scholars suggest a variety of data analysis methods, noting the benefits of their multiplicity. Even so, as one writes, “Data analysis is more of an art than a technique. Even if that is the case, artists benefit from training” (Bailey 125). Therefore, I relied on scholars in the fields of action research, case study research, and social science research to develop my analytic approach. While I embraced a systematic approach to analysis upon collection of all data as will be described below, it should also be noted that the PAR process emphasizes ongoing action-reflection throughout the study. For example, I composed analytic memos throughout the research process, and not merely at the time of forming final conclusions. So, it is not as if analysis only began after all data was collected. Indeed, the process of making analytic memos was certainly an act of reflective analysis. Yet, after writing a memo following a meeting with a crowdfunding team, I might then move back to the *action* stage of PAR, sending an email to the team with ideas of how to put a new idea into practice. In other words, as I will explain below, data analysis was both a separate, focused stage of research as well as an ongoing process taking place throughout the study.

My aim in analyzing the data might be summarized by the phrase “pattern recognition” (Luker 199). I sought to discern, in the vast array of data collected, underlying patterns of occurrences. There was no straightforward way to undergo this activity, however, especially considering the novel nature of my study and variety of methods employed. I took solace, then, in Bailey who writes,

> The multipronged process of **analysis** requires that the researcher make sense of the data: break it down, study its components, investigate its importance, and interpret its meanings. Despite the inherent value of analysis to field research, however, few concrete and easily understood instructions exist regarding how to gain analytical insight into the data one has collected. (Bailey 125)

I therefore sought insight, moving ahead with multiple analytical approaches open to the process of discovery, embracing the discomforting reality that the data would reveal insights, even if the analytical process would be complicated, messy, and sometimes frustrating.

Due to the complex nature of the study design, Figure 3 below attempts to visualize a simplification of the process for ease of understanding. At the top of the figure, I note the PAR orientation supported by the Research Covenant. One level down in the hierarchy, I list each research question. Below that, I have included the primary forms of data considered in relation to each research question. Finally, on the bottom level of the hierarchy, I note the analysis methods that I used on each RQ. The dotted line with arrows connecting Coding and Analytic Memos in the RQ2 column is meant to suggest the integration strategy of coding and memos, as will be explained below.

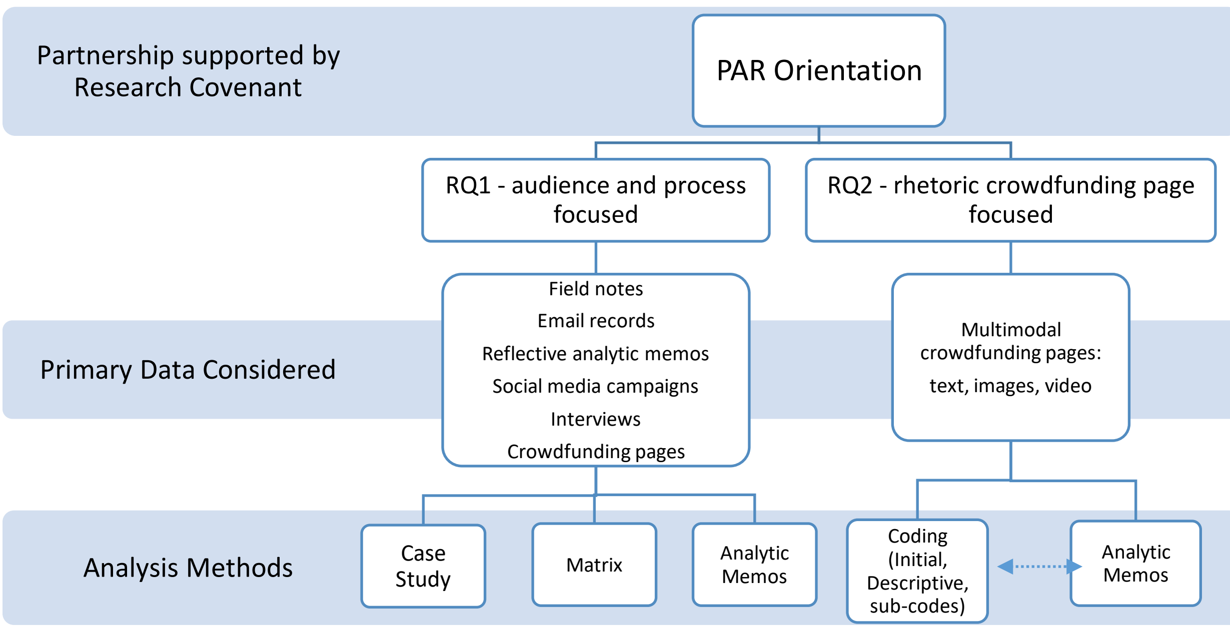

Figure 3. Visualization of Research Design

Having provided the visualization of my research approach, I will next describe my data collection practices and give fuller detail into analysis methods employed for each research question.

Data Collection

Data collected included a wide array of genres and materials. I selected these forms with considerations of both ease of use as well as my sense of potential long-term benefit to the research project itself. Data collected included, at least:

- Field notes from my meetings with potential PAR partners
- Email records of communication with partners
- Reflective and analytic memos
- Social media campaigns supporting the crowdfunding campaigns (not exhaustive—i.e. emails highlighting the campaigns were archived, but I did not make notations of every campaign mention on Facebook)
- Crowdfunding web pages
- Interviews with partners (field notes after interviews, audio recordings of the interviews, transcriptions of interviews)

These data were stored on a password protected computer that I used to access a password protected database. Most data were imported into or developed using the digital productivity platform Evernote. The process of collecting data occurred for approximately 22 months, from April 2016 to February 2018. This time period corresponded with any initial conversations with my partners through the conclusion and reflection upon a campaign.

Analysis Methods

PAR research orientation invites multiple forms of analysis, some of which may benefit the participants directly, others of which are intended more for the sake of the scholarly community. Unlike some forms of research, PAR emphasizes continuous reflection and ongoing analysis throughout the research process. For example, the conversation-based process of PAR guides researchers and participants to a self-reflective stance, so that as they engage in the research cycle, they are analyzing their experiences and acting on them. As Kemmis et al. note, PAR "differs from forms of research that seek solely to answer questions and resolve problems," instead embracing the raising of questions and helping people to change themselves (69–70). Likewise, small but beneficial points of analysis are built into the PAR process itself. For example, in the midst of a crowdfunding campaign, the group with whom I partnered at points *observed* something about their campaign that is particularly successful or unsuccessful, and then upon *reflection* moved quickly to a *new action.* Such moments of "data analysis" and response do not align with classic qualitative research practices, but they do align with the sub-field of PAR because they help to accomplish the aims of the participants. In a successful PAR study, data/evidence serves to further such ends by foregrounding reflective practices: "the primary purpose of gathering evidence in the 'research' part of action research is to feed and nurture self-reflection about practices, our understandings of our practices, and the conditions under which we practice" (Kemmis et al. 70). Even so, while PAR is a cyclical process, a dissertation reads as a more linear document, and I have worked in this project to clarify pauses in the cycle of reflection, as well as address a more cumulative hybrid PAR and case study research data analysis (Kemmis and Mctaggart 36).

Process and Steps

The data collected in these case studies is wide-ranging and multimodal because of the engaged PAR process and the digital nature of the crowdfunding campaigns themselves. Given this reality, I employed multiple analysis methods intended to match the variety of the data rather than imposing a prepackaged or predetermined analysis methodology. Foundationally, I embraced a posture towards research analysis that helped form my approach. That posture included at least two facets. First, leaning on Luker, I appreciated that while the data analysis stage certainly stands on its own to some extent, the "process of reduction and analysis is really an ongoing one that begins the first night you come home from gathering data or even the very first day you start your project" (Luker 199). Therefore, I was active in personal reflective practices throughout the study, taking analytic memos, discussing my crowdfunding ideas in shop talks with colleagues or in interviews for books and podcasts (Lewis Center for Church Leadership; Anderson and Drescher), as well as teaching about crowdfunding to my students. Second, as I searched for patterns, I sought to employ an openness to "play" with my data. This posture supported discovery and curiosity, affirming my belief that the data would reveal helpful insights and patterns without wrestling it to the ground with a rigid, preformed, standardized approach.

Initially, at least, given that my two guiding research questions are somewhat different, I approached each with a slightly distinct analytical approach. As Bailey suggests, "Sometimes more than a single [data analysis] technique is appropriate, even required" (127). My decision is consistent with the mixed-method approach of the study. As will be shown in the conclusion, a stark distinction is neither wise nor possible, but given that different data help uncover different patterns in qualitative research, I generally sought case study analytical methods to explore RQ1 and coding analysis to explore RQ2.

Important to both research questions, however, were two analytic strategies. First, I pursued active conversations about my research, both formal and informal. As Bailey suggests, "Talking, like writing, can be a way of clarifying thoughts and gaining insights" (Bailey 132). Second, I approached the process of writing this dissertation as a method of discovery and explanation building as well. It is my hope that the process of revising has led to clearer, more helpful explanations for the reader.

Research Question 1: Case Study Analysis Methods

To tackle RQ1, I sought to develop working case descriptions to organize the data. Case descriptions come in many forms, and I was met with a range of possibilities since my cases included interactions with nine separate organizations. After reviewing my materials for the six organizations that opted not to pursue crowdfunding campaigns, I opted not to write formal case descriptions of those interactions, because while that data was certainly relevant, it would not provide evidence for a case of a launched or completed crowdfunding campaign. Leaning heavily on Yin's description of case study research methods, I studied forms of case study descriptions. Note, however, that while my larger study includes case studies, the cases themselves are actually within the larger, mixed-method study (Yin 193). I therefore opted for a Multiple Case Format with a systematic Question-and-Answer style for the case study reports above. This format allows for cross-case comparisons, while also allowing each organization to tell their own story of crowdfunding. After composing the cases, I shared them with each PAR partner for their confirmation of accuracy and for any reflections. Those responses were then incorporated into the final case descriptions. Most of the comments were minor clarifications, though some were more thoughtful reflections and are noted below in the case studies themselves. I also reviewed and revised the cases with these questions in mind: Is this case "complete"? Does it display sufficient evidence? Is it composed in an engaging manner (Yin 201–06)? For example, upon reflection, I expanded upon the tables included in each case to give more relevant information. I also added more images so that the cases might be more visually engaging to the reader. It is my intention that the format produced cases that are both descriptive of the practicalities of crowdfunding procedures and outcomes, as well as explanatory of thought processes and organizational hurdles faced in the process.

Throughout the research process, and during the period of composing the case studies, I continued my practice of writing analytic memos. I then used these memos, along with the cases, to help ground my analysis moving forward. I embraced a combination approach of analysis including 1) working the data from the ground up, seeking to notice patterns, 2) developing the case descriptions, 3) examining rival explanations. Eventually, I found it productive to build a **matrix display** (found in Ch 5, Figure 9). As Miles and Huberman explain, matrix displays have a wide-range of designs and lack a fixed canon. Ultimately, Miles and Huberman encourage the matrix heuristic, "whether it is a *helpful*" matrix that "will give you reasonable answers to the questions you are asking—or suggest promising new ways to lay out the data and get answers" (240). As will be specified below, the matrix constructed helpfully explains the crowdfunding process overall.

Like all my research, since there is no "fixed canon" for constructing a matrix, I sought one that is creative, systematic, and above all, *helpful* for addressing my research questions (Miles et al. 240). Taking the advice of Miles et al, I initially sketched a rough version on a white board and revised multiple times on subsequent days. As the matrix iterated, I aimed to stay open to possibilities for further—or fewer—variables. Eventually, I moved a working version of the matrix from the white board to a Microsoft Word document, iterating once again. During the matrix composition process, I continued to consult the case study descriptions, field notes, and compose further analytic memos.

Research Question 2: Coding Analytic Strategy

Given the focus of this research question on the properties of the crowdfunding pages themselves, I employed coding methods as an analytic tactic. Coding is the strategy of using a word or short phrase that "symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña 4). Coding is analysis itself, and not mere mechanics. As Bailey explains, "The researcher must make decisions about what to code and how to code it, I believe this process serves as an important element in analysis" (133). Coding allows the researcher to look for patterns in the codes, eventually consolidating meaning through the development of categories, and finally, an assertion or theory. Given the nature of my study, I sought more to develop an assertion, which Saldaña, following Erickson, suggests is "a statement that proposes a summative, interpretative observation of the local contexts of a study" (15). Next, I describe the details of my approach to coding.

The Coding Process

To begin, it is important to note that my use of analytic memos helped fuel the coding process. In other words, I always sought to connect the purpose of coding to the reflective properties of analytic memos. Coding was never an end in itself, but in partnership with analytic memos, a strategic process towards the larger goal of meaning-making. Indeed researchers, like Gordon-Finlayson, suggest that "coding is simply a structure on which reflections (via memo-writing) happen. It is memo-writing that is the engine of grounded theory, not coding" (164).

Indeed, though I will describe in detail my codes below, they had to be paired with analytic memos to push me to make connections, test out potential conclusions, and link ideas. Next, I describe the steps and decision-making in the coding process itself.

Over the approximately 22 months of PAR, I collected a large amount of data. The prospect of coding every piece of data was both dauting and impractical. Bailey appreciates this challenge, suggesting "not every bit of data from months of observations, interactions, interviews, and writing field notes will be coded" (128). Instead, she suggests reviewing all the data and then to "code whatever you think might be potentially useful for analysis, knowing that later, more codes will be added, some changed, and large sections of coded data will go unused" (Bailey 129). With this approach in mind, I opted to code the data most pertinent to RQ2, namely the crowdfunding pages themselves, including textual rhetoric, campaign updates shared on the pages, images, videos appearing on the crowdfunding page, videos appearing on the funders' other social media streams that directly relate to the crowdfunding venture, and other page content. Though it is remarkably difficult to "count" these instances given their fluidity (is an image that is four digital pictures brought together into one design element on a website one or four images?), the rough estimates follow: four crowdfunding pages, ten images (though several were multiples made into a single), and thirteen videos.

Given the focus of RQ2, I also elected not to code the significant (and overwhelming) corpus of social media posts of the organizations that did not refer to the crowdfunding work itself. Neither did I code the corpus of emails, as I had reflected upon them in separate analytical memos, and few addressed page-focused rhetorical decision-making.

I proceeded with a strategy of Initial Coding the textual data on the pages, also called "open coding," to remain open to the possibilities of the data (Saldaña 115). This open-ended process of first cycle coding surfaced about 25 Initial Codes which I added to what Miles and Huberman refer to as the "Start List of Codes," or a document that includes early codes on a single sheet for easy reference (58–59). As its name implies, Initial Coding serves as a jumping off point, a "tentative and provisional" period of contemplating and analysis (Saldaña 115). My start list of Initial Codes is found in Table 6. During the Initial Coding process, I composed analytic memos about the process, early discoveries, and questions to consider in the future. As Saldaña urges, I took up his advice that "coding is a service to thinking," and in addition to analytic memos, used a white board for playing with early ideas, charting progress, and as a visual guide for ideation (Saldaña 80). I began to notice the challenge of dealing with different forms of communication such as plain text, images, and template-related items. Initial Coding proved helpful because it allowed me to become newly familiarized with the data, noting what words or themes repeated.

Table 6. Initial Code List

STORY/ABOUT
MISSION/VALUES
FAQS
INVITATION TO GIVE
DONATION OUTCOME
REWARDS
PERSON/LEADER/PARTNER NAMED
ACTIONS OF ORG
SOCIETY CLAIMS / SOCIETAL CONNECTIONS
AUDIENCE NOTED
COMMUNITY
MARKETING/PROMO
VISION
GRATITUDE EXPRESSED
SUPPORT / ATTESTATION
GROUP GATHERING
PERSONAL SHARING
MONEY
SENDING
ATTRIBUTES
Video (main header & additional)
Images
Text bold
Links
Updates
Posts from others
Social media sharing
Donation levels & rewards
Header

After Initial Coding and small revisions to my Start List of codes, I took up Bailey's advice to "start to pick out items that I might potentially use" (129). After reviewing my analytic memos, I saw the potential wisdom of pursuing Descriptive Coding, another first cycle coding method. Saldaña explains Descriptive Coding, also called "Topic Coding," as akin to the use of hashtags in social media. It seeks to identify the “topic of a passage of qualitative data” usually using a word or a short phrase (Saldaña 102). Descriptive Coding works best with nouns that draw out the *content* of the data, rather than the minds or emotions of the participants. After working with Descriptive Coding, I determined some codes to be too broad (e.g. INVITATION TO GIVE) and therefore utilized a strategy of Subcoding. According to Saldaña, a “Subcode is a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry” (91). These Subcodes drew out more insight from the primary coding scheme regarding the nature of the giving invitations. This process worked relatively smoothly for largely textual data, but I also needed to analyze visual data. Therefore, after consultation with colleagues and a review of the literature, I took up a strategy to analyze the visual data as described by Saldaña.

The problem of analyzing visual data is a vexed one for qualitative researchers. The pages themselves contained roughly thirty pictures or digital images and thirteen videos uploaded by the crowdfunders. These counts do not include brand-related images of the crowdfunding sites themselves or images linked to the crowdfunding page but not appearing on the main page itself. I took up Saldaña’s approach, which argues the following:

> the best approach to analyzing visual data is a holistic interpretative lens guided by intuitive inquiry and strategic questions. Rather than one-word or short phrase codes…the researcher’s careful scrutiny of and reflection on images, documented through field notes and analytic memos, generate language-based data that *accompany* the visual data. Ironically, we must use words to articulate our “take” on pictures and imagery. (Saldaña 57).

For the digital images, therefore, employing Saldaña’s approach, I first made rough jottings that then expanded into analytic memos (see Appendix C). “Codes within the memo derive *from* the interpretations of the visual *as* the analytic text is composed" (Saldaña 58). I also captioned the photos, seeking to capture the gist of the image. Similarly, I composed analytic memos on each of the thirteen videos appearing on the pages (see Appendix D). In addition to reflecting upon the visual discourses in the clips, I also transcribed each of the videos to allow for holistic interpretations. As Saldaña suggests, I stopped the videos at times to allow for nuanced visual analysis. I also sought particularly to consider how social actions, visual cues, and aural content interacted (62–63). At the end of each memo, I captioned each video with a summative phrase.

After a search of the literature and having discussed approaches to coding videos with a senior research methods faculty member at Luther Seminary, I became convinced there is no one right way to analyze—and code—visual content. Even so, this method of "organic inquiry" yielded sound results and seemed to honor the integrity of the crowdfunding genre and the crowdfunders themselves. Saldaña sums it up well, "From my readings of various systematic methods for analyzing visual data, I have yet to find a single satisfactory approach that rivals the holistic impressions when analyzing and writing about visual methods" (65). To summarize, then, while examples are included in Appendix C and D, the process is fundamentally one of essentializing the video and images into reflective memos with codes and focus. Many of the Descriptive Codes deriving from my analysis of the videos and images appeared already on my code list. Others, however, did not and I expanded the list accordingly.

In Table 7, below, I list the set of Descriptive Codes in the left-hand column, aside the subcodes for the "Invitation to Give" code in the right-hand column. At the bottom of the Descriptive Code column, I have marked with a single Asterix the codes that surfaced as I coded the pages such as the code "Image" which described an image analyzed later with Saldaña's image memoing process. The double Asterix marks three additional codes that arose from the video and image memoing that had not previously included in my Descriptive Coding. At this point, I had analyzed either by memo and/or coding nearly all the data directly connected to the crowdfunding pages themselves. In all, the process took several days of consistent work. It was leading, thankfully, to further clarity by reducing the data to its essentials. Indeed, Luker describes the process of data analysis as analogous to the cooking process of reduction, or seeking the thick, essential flavors of a sauce (198). Similarly, I found Saldaña's analysis process as helpfully drawing out the experienced essentials/reductions of images and videos. Next, I needed to move from this reduced data to a higher level of analysis.

Table 7. Descriptive Code List, Subcoding

Descriptive Codes	**Subcodes: INVITATION TO GIVE**
Mission	With gifts we can better
About (history, present, structure)	Money noted without asking for it
Values of org.	How to/process for digital giving
Societal claims / Societal connections	Direct invitation
Invitation to Give	First person phrasing (e.g. I/we need your support)
Help	Second person phrasing (e.g. you have the power)
Person/Leader/Partner Named	Conditional phrasing (e.g. If you would like to contribute)
Rewards	Need claimed
Supporter	Personal support noted
Gifts Accomplish	
Story	
Money	
Thanks	
*Funding status	
*Image	
*Donation Levels and Rewards	
*Video	
*Supporters/gifts received	
**Food	
**Community	
**Invite to share with others	
** Used in template descriptions*	***Used in images or videos, but not in textual rhetoric of page.*

To review, I coded the textual rhetoric of every crowdfunding page with using Descriptive and Subcoding; I composed analytic memos reflecting upon the visual rhetoric of pages; I transcribed, coded the transcripts, watched repeatedly, and then composed analytic memos reflecting upon the rhetoric of the videos associated with the pages. In total, I worked with 10 images (though several were montages of multiple images) and thirteen videos. While all of these processes are analytical ones, I next pushed the extra analytical step towards discoveries comparing, contrasting, and connecting the varied modes of communication.

I sought to transition from concrete codes and memos towards more theoretical or assertion-level insights. To do so, I reviewed the data and codes multiple times, pressing forward to assertion and hypothesis making. As always, analytical memoing helped to fuel this process. After the process of coding, and over the course of approximately two weeks, I composed eleven separate analytic memos in which I sought to crystalize the major themes and assertions arising from the RQ2 data. Alas, as Saldaña cautions, “there is no magic algorithm that leads to a new theory” (281). Upon reflection, I think taking time to allow the data steep helped my journey towards conclusions. In a sense, then, time for reflection also served as an analytic strategy. Continuing, I undertook a process of reflection seeking to integrate the story of the data. Eventually, my memo writing moved towards proto-assertions. For example, I wrote in one, “It’s noticeable that, for crowdfunding campaigns, there’s actually relatively little talk of money…there’s an implication that there’s a MISSION that the crowdfunder wishes to be accomplished, but there’s not a ton connecting the GIFTS with related outcomes.” A day later, in another memo, I wrote that I had examined the Descriptive Codes again and was struck that “MISSION seemed a given. They were clearly excited about explaining it. But what wasn’t there is the actual ask for support for the mission.” These reflections pushed me into deeper consideration of the way the mission was addressed in the textual rhetoric as compared to the video rhetoric. At times, I took up Saldaña’s suggestion of writing a powerful, single line describing what seems to be present in the data. Eventually, this practice led to the four assertions described below. Yet, I do not want to suggest this process was smooth or without its struggles. In fact, in one memo I wrote, “I’m also slightly frustrated about all the time spent treading water analyzing codes rather than actually writing. That’s the process, though!”

As I progressed to making initial conclusions, I carefully reflected upon the validity of my explanations, checking and double-checking, writing more analytical memos even while going back to review previous ones. Afterwards, when I went back to review my memos from this period, I was pleased to find several proto-assertions not included in the final project write-up. Such proto-assertions, upon further analysis of the data, did not prove to be demonstrable—whether across all cases, or, perhaps, at all. Yet, this process of reviewing my codes, memos, and the pages pushed me toward eventual conclusions. Alongside the memo writing, I also used other forms of reflective analysis including taking meditative walks around my neighborhood and using the white board in my office to help note my ideas and push myself towards conclusions. Below in Figure 4, I have included a picture of some of my white board jottings at the time. While several of the concepts appearing in the board did not make it to the final stage of writing, the process of expressing relationships and ideas visually on the white board in my study helped support the ideation process.

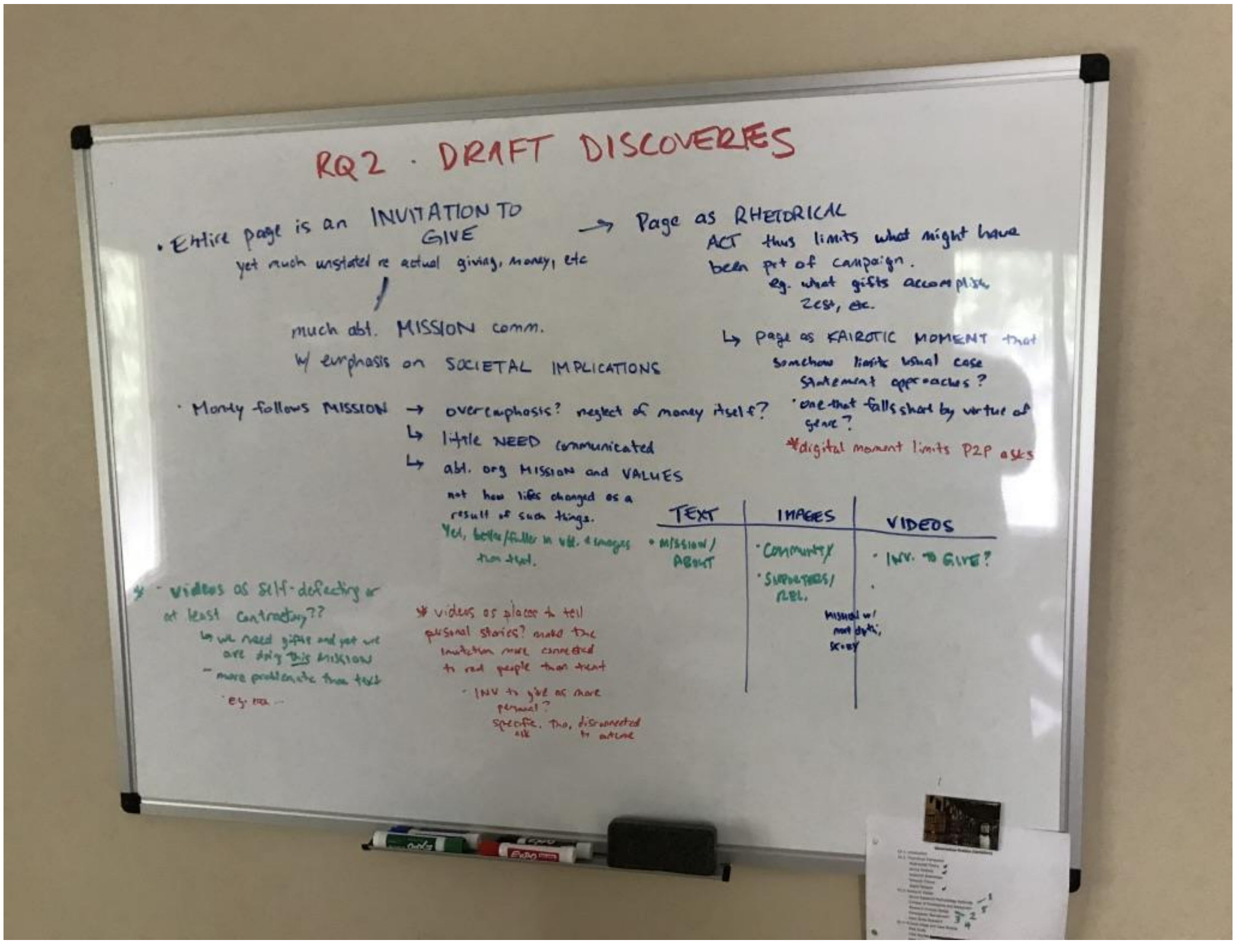

Figure 4. Picture of Office White Board During Analysis Stage

Without a team with which to code, I consistently reviewed my coding notes to avoid drift and discussed initial findings with colleagues. Further, I resisted claiming conclusions too early, seeking to look deeper into the data. I ended up scrapping several potential assertions when, upon double-checking, they did not cross-check sufficiently. I sought to ensure reliability by attending to all four campaigns (three campaigners/organizations) and all the data associated with them. Given the nature of my cross-case approach, it was important that conclusions identified be not only true for any single campaign, but consistently the case across all campaigns. Relatedly, I was very aware of the narrow scope of my study and took care not to generalize beyond the explanations available. With Luker, I took up the invitation of poet

William Blake to see the world in a grain of sand: “we want to examine a grain of sand very, very closely, and show how the world is reflected in it” (125).

Caveats Concerning Study Methods

At the risk of sounding cliché, the greatest strengths of this complex, mixed method study are also its greatest weaknesses. For example, the use of action research methodologies, case study methodologies, and qualitative coding methodologies are intended to provide a layered, rich, and flexible approach to the complicated questions approached in the study. Ideally, then, the best of these methods have been woven together to create a rich tapestry of discoveries and new questions. On the other hand, methodologists might argue such an approach thins out or covers up any potential findings. While such an outcome is far from my hope, I acknowledge it as a possibility.

Indeed, the project’s complex nature means aspects of the project come into conflict with itself. For example, early action research scholar Heinz Moser reflects upon the question of validity of PAR by suggesting, according to Rahman, “that PAR belongs to a different paradigm of social inquiry than positivist research, so that it is not answerable to the positivists’ question of validity or objectivity of the findings” (50). Yet, case study and qualitative research traditions lean towards—or at least seek to become vital conversation partners with—more positivist sensibilities. Even so, I believe there is room in these traditions for a multiplicity of pursuits. Indeed, into this conversation, Luker would remind us that there is room in social sciences to readily acknowledge the conflicted nature of seeking truth in a postmodern (or post-postmodern) era. As she puts it, “We can no longer take for granted—if we ever did—that social reality exists ‘out there’ in some uncomplicated way and that we can measure and study it without undue fuss” (8). Yet, even without expecting to reach perfect truth or claim complete objectivity, she still finds “the pursuit worthwhile” (6). The study, then, seeks not to find any sort of ultimate, always-reliable truth even as it attempts to claim a truthful, moral way of inquiry with action partners. Indeed, PAR’s emphasis on the search for further understanding as being a worthy endeavor itself, plus its embrace of making meaning throughout a partnership served as a helpful balm when I became overanxious in my quest for conclusions.

Similarly, Saldaña and Luker emphasize theory and/or model development in their texts. Given that I understand this study first as PAR, I avoided theory building. Instead, as will be shown in Chapter 5, I developed four key assertions related to the crowdfunders’ multimodal invitations to give. For example, my first assertion makes claims related to the messages of videos vs. the textual rhetoric of the pages. I opt not to, however, make broad, theory-level claims about the messaging of faith-related crowdfunders. Interestingly, Saldaña does allow for more limited research constructions, noting that a *key assertion* in his view functions as “a summative and data-supported statement about the *particulars* of [a] research study, rather than the suggested generalizable and transferable meanings of [a researcher’s] other findings to other settings and contexts” (282). Some may deem this assertation-rather-than-theory approach as limiting the study’s worth. While I appreciate this concern, my approach feels as if it carries with it more integrity than an unwieldy grasping for theories.

Speaking of integrity, it is my hope that the mixed, complex nature of this study actually becomes an example of tensegrity. In architecture, tensegrity is demonstrated by systems in which the tension and stresses of some elements are passed along to the stability of other elements. In other words, tensegrity suggests tension is necessary for strong functioning, as it is in the tension that strength is shared by the whole. Ideally then, the wholeness of this study gains strength and support from its parts, even with—or due to—any tensions within them.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDIES

Process Overview

Case study researchers face many questions when determining how to present written cases of their studies and subjects. Narrative decisions abound, including what data to include such as quotes from interviews, what information would be helpful to the audience (and who makes up the audience?), theoretical questions such as chronological or theory-building reporting structures, as well as practical decisions concerning length and inclusion of images. For this study, given the multiple case nature of the work, I also faced decisions around how to tackle the varied nature of the cases: would each case stand alone, or would they be combined into a single prototypical case or even have no section devoted to individual cases at all (Yin 186). I contemplated various approaches to reporting case studies including linear-analytic structures, comparative structures, chronological, theory-building structures, suspense structures, and unsequenced structure (Yin 187–90), eventually arriving upon a type of non-narrative form—question-and-answer format (Q&A). Yin describes the process of the Q&A format, suggesting they include a series of questions and answers, including "all the relevant evidence" in responses a few paragraphs in length (185). In my study, this Q&A approach helpfully led to communicative benefits. First, it ties the cases together in a way that helps the reader organize relevant portions of the data and supports readability in a large document. Second, this approach "facilitates cross-case synthesis" by focusing the study on particular questions (Yin 195). I developed the questions below with an eye towards narrative consistency and explanation, as well as explanation-building. As I revised the case study write-ups, the questions shifted slightly to allow for the fuller communication of important data, as well as the differences amongst the cases (see APPENDIX C for final version). Finally, the write-up of the cases themselves also served as a sort of research method itself. By employing writing to understand mentality when composing the cases, I was open to discoveries throughout the composition process. These case descriptions were shared with my research partners and revised accordingly.[4] When meaningful revisions occurred, I have noted as much in the cases themselves below.

Case Study 1: AIJCAST: art, inspiration, justice

Overview

What is the organization?

AIJCAST[5] is a weekly podcast "featuring artists from a variety of media" that explores "the connections between the artist and their art, the sources of and hopes for inspiration, and how it all tries to make the world a better place" ("aijcast/About"). The podcast was previewed on iTunes January 25, 2017 with a 3-minute trailer, "A Sneak Peak" followed by a "'Pre-Season'

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[4] In keeping with my IRB guidelines, I presented anonymized versions of the case studies to my research partners and invited them to select a pseudonym of their choosing. Each partner, noting the public nature of their leadership and the internet-based realities of crowdfunding, requested that his or her real name be used. This development is in keeping with the "most desirable option" for case study reports—disclosing the identities of both the case and individuals, and I am grateful to my partners for their openness (Yin 197). I am therefore respecting their wishes not to remain anonymous in these case reports.

[5] Note that aijcast, in their self-description and marketing materials, appears only in all lowercase lettering "aijcast" or, less often, all uppercase "AIJCAST." As I could not find an instance of the more traditional formulation, "Aijcast," I have opted to conform to their style. "aij" is a reference to their focus on "arts, inspiration, and justice."

Update" the following month. Marking the start of the first full episode, Episode 01 was released near the end of the crowdfunding push on March 31, 2017. Aijcast was in its fifth season and 70th episode by summer 2018. The podcast host, Marthame Sanders, is an Atlanta-based artist and pastor. The podcast receives encouragement and support (though not financial backing) from several religious organizations including the 1001 New Worshipping Communities Movement of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) and the New Church Development Commission (NCDC) of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta. Financial gifts to support the podcast are tax-deductible by way of the NCDC affiliation with the presbytery, a collection of Presbyterian churches in the Atlanta area. When I began work with Marthame, the podcast received around 600 hits weekly. By the end of 2017 that number was 1,000.

What was the crowdfunding goal? Was it reached? Are other metrics important and/or available?

Table 8. aijcast Campaign Data

Campaign Launch	**Name**	**Purpose**	**Location**	**Goal**	**Total Raised**	**Total Backers**	**Length**
Early January 2017	aijcast	Podcast	Atlanta, GA	$16,000	$7,573 ($12,573 with grant)	65	Approx. 90 days

The published goal of the aijcast campaign was to raise $16,000 by the end of March 2017. By that date, the campaign received $7,573 from 61 donations. After the original deadline, aijcast received additional gifts and grants to raise the fundraising total to $12,793. Marthame employed a multi-platform communication strategy using emails through MailChimp, Facebook posts (both on Marthame' personal page and the aijcast page), YouTube videos, other social media platforms, and printed materials sent through the U.S. Postal Service.

How was the organization and/or leader recruited for PAR?

Marthame and I have known each other as young, innovative leaders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for some time. In fall 2017, I led a seminar on digital fundraising and crowdfunding for a New Worshipping Communities group, of which Marthame is a part. In mid-February 2017, Marthame reached out to me via email, inviting me to discuss a crowdfunding push aijcast was launching. Marthame sent me their initial crowdfunding pitch and other materials, and we discussed during a Feb 23, 2017 phone call possible modifications to the campaign, best practices in crowdfunding and digital fundraising, and giving rhetoric. In the course of the conversation I shared my IRB materials and the Research Covenant. Then we discussed the nature of PAR and its ethical and research framework.

Composition Practices

How was the platform, topic, and goal of the campaign selected?

The aijcast campaign goal reflected the funding Marthame required to get aijcast off the ground and operating as a functional podcast long-term. Given his background in web development, and not wanting to lose any money to fees charged by crowdfunding websites, Marthame opted to build a crowdfunding page into the existing aijcast website. This included an image of a thermometer to measure progress toward the goal, as well as giving levels and rewards for donations of a certain amount. For example, a donor giving $50 received an aijcast t-shirt. Other gift levels included autographed CDs, books, and prints from artists featured on the podcast. The page also listed what donations would help accomplish by matching aijcast's fundraising needs with levels of giving, such as "$100 will buy one microphone, $250 will take care of our postage costs, and $1,000 will cover all the productions costs for one episode" ("Aijcast/Fundraising").

While the nature of the aijcast podcast is necessarily collaborative, the crowdfunding campaign itself was managed almost entirely by Marthame. Several people and organizations support Marthame's ministry, including a leadership coach provided by his denomination, his network of artist colleagues, and ministry contacts (myself included). Many of these individuals contributed to the campaign and/or shared it on social media. While some new mission starts, like aijcast, have organized leadership teams, Marthame intentionally employed a different approach. Initially, he remarked, his fundraising strategy emphasized getting direction from potential donors. But his coach advised him, "Look, they trust you. What does your gut tell you to do? And so trust your gut and just, just do it" (Sanders, *Marthame Post Campaign Interview*). Marthame took the advice, reflecting, "and I think it was the right decision" (Sanders, *Marthame Post Campaign Interview*).

Figure 5, below, is a screen capture in the midst of the campaign. Note the traditional crowdfunding qualities: clear goal, connections between giving levels and specific outcomes, and the thermometer as a measure of progress towards the goal.

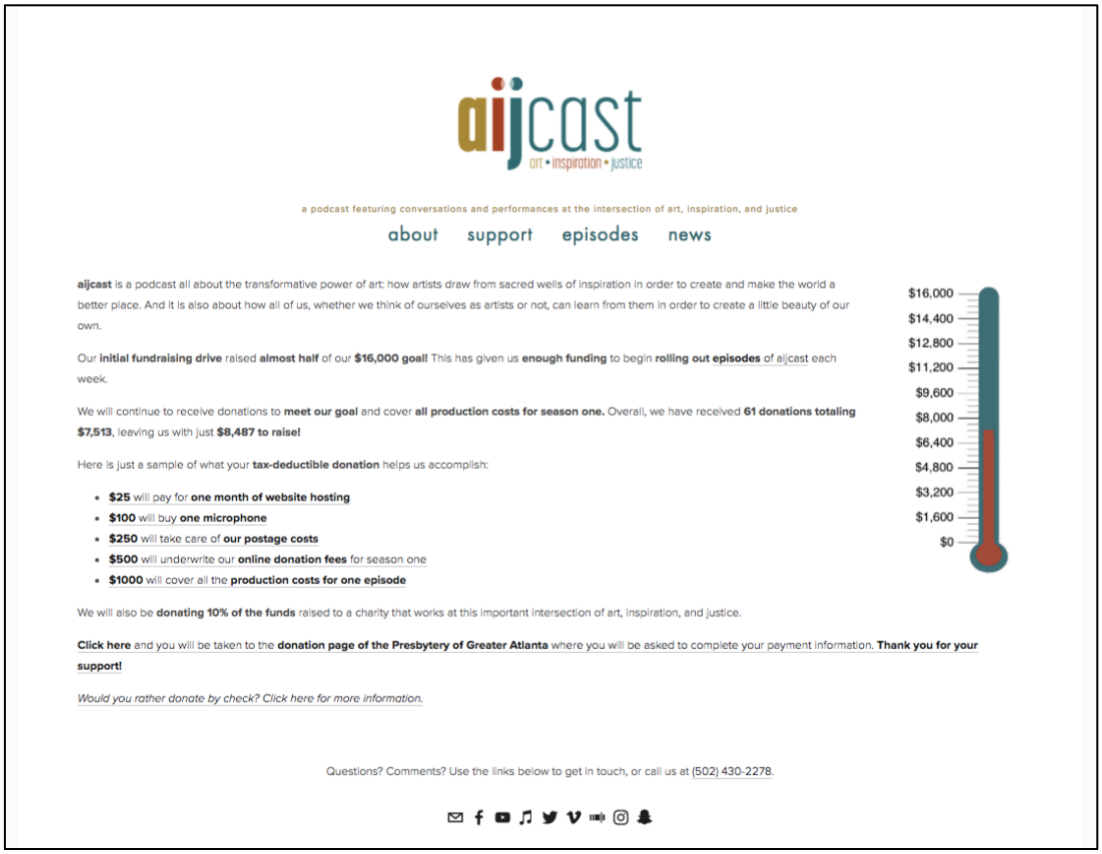

Figure 5. aijcast Crowdfunding Campaign Screen Capture.
Note: ("aijcast/Fundraising")

Who participated in the composition process? What were their roles?

After launching the campaign himself, Marthame reached out to me for feedback after what he felt like was a slow start (the campaign had lagged at 15% of the total). In our initial February 23, 2017 conversation, I noted that the appeal page lacked much specificity regarding where donations would go, what gifts would help accomplish, and what, ultimately, was at stake for the campaign. In discussing these topics, Marthame easily shared a strong vision and inspiring story—leaning on the conversations and relationship, with artists he had already experienced—and noted that the campaign was not yet communicating that vision effectively. Marthame made plans to record and share videos related to the campaign that revealed his vision for aijcast, thanked those who had already given, and invited others to support the campaign.

Noting his confessed “snobbery” related to high production values for such videos, our conversation led Marthame to admit than an authentic and relatable tone was more important than video picture and production quality. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, Marthame seemed to approach the video modality somewhat differently than the web-based text and images. He made plans to record and release a basic video soon and did so the next day, February 24, 2017. To support his work writing his pitch, I referenced and shared by email a slide from the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving that suggested a good Case Statement is an opportunity to “capture the heart, spirit and mind of the reader…is inspirational, ignite a passionate interest in your work,” and “create a zest, exuberance and a certain element of surprise to engage the reader” (Brown). Finally, while Marthame had hoped a videographer might partner with the campaign, plans to do so did not pan out.

How did the campaign launch and what communication practices were employed after launch?

The aijcast campaign launched in early January 2017 and raised $2,400 through its first six weeks. After the PAR partnership began, the website revised, and the videos shared, the campaign raised over $5,000 in the remaining six weeks (not including a $5,000 grant). To accompany the launch, Marthame employed a threefold approach to communications: 1) social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), 2) email (MailChimp, approximately 200 email addresses in database), and 3) U.S. Postal Service (80 packets sent).

While aijcast is always willing to accept donations, the crowdfunding campaign concluded March 31, 2017, the same day the first episode of the podcast was released. Marthame recorded three videos pitching the campaign, uploaded them to YouTube, and shared them on the aijcast Facebook page as well as his personal page (Feb 25, Mar 19, Mar 25). Marthame also shared links, memes, or other campaign related invitations to give on the aijcast Facebook page every few days. Five emails were sent to the MailChimp list from February 22 to March 29.

How did the campaign approach audience and/or audience awareness?

Marthame noted that, generally speaking, he thinks about audience and communication often due to his work balancing the promotion of aijcast to new audiences with the faith-related aspects of his work and funding. The crowdfunding campaign, though it was a more specific act of promotion and invitation to giving, proceeded in accordance with Marthame's usual approach. This approach included an openness to those who might be done with religion or have no religious affiliation whatsoever, as well as a freedom to address religion and faith when it seemed authentic. Just like when preaching he adheres to the maxim, "don't try to get the fullness of the gospel every time you get in the pulpit," Marthame's approach to imagining an aijcast audience emphasized a willingness that the podcast would appeal to those to whom the show would appeal. In other words, he eschewed targeting any narrow demographic with a pinpointed message (Sanders, *Marthame Post Campaign Interview*). Instead, he was aware that an audience was surely out there who would appreciate the conversation concerning—and his open, questioning posture towards—arts, inspiration, and justice.

Outcomes and Participant Reflections

How did the crowdfunders assess their completed campaign?

While the campaign raised only about 50% of his initial goal (not including the $5,000 grant), Marthame generally expressed positive feelings about the success of the campaign. He also noted several learnings. First, originally, Marthame got sidetracked by the technical aspects of the crowdfunding process (building the website, selecting the reward gifts, etc.) and neglected some of the mission, vision, and storytelling aspects of the genre. Marthame noted, "I started the fundraising process way too early," before he had an opportunity to clearly communicate the "impact of the ministry" (Sanders, *Marthame Post Campaign Interview*). Since episode one of the podcast was not yet released, it was difficult to inspire gifts by pointing to the impact of the show. Second, Marthame described how the campaign helped him discover several inaccurate assumptions about his intended audience. For example, he added a section on the website that defined a podcast and showed users how to listen to one. "I guess it was both discouraging and encouraging, and also just kind of a nice reality check" to find that "people still aren't aware how far this technology can go" (Sanders, *Marthame Post Campaign Interview*). Finally, Marthame noted how much work goes into a crowdfunding campaign: "They take a hell of a lot of work" (Sanders, *Marthame Post Campaign Interview*). While the crowdfunding campaign was worthwhile in his view, Marthame also noted that crowdfunding by its nature does not provide "sustainable" funding to a project like a podcast. Like grant money, the funds certainly help, but they are not a solution to ongoing funding support.

Case Study 2: Intertwine Northeast

Overview

What is the organization?

Based in the Northeast neighborhood of Minneapolis, Minnesota, Intertwine Northeast is a developing spiritual community, supported by multiple partners in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Describing Intertwine, as shown below, is a difficult task both because the venture is in the early stages of development, and because the organization also claims the value of always being in process. The organization's tagline reads, "We create space to hear one another's stories" (Intertwine, *Intertwine Northeast*). Their values, identified on their website include: "made of and moved by story; always in process; committed to compassion"

(Intertwine, *Intertwine Northeast*). The group hosts events that strengthen neighborhood partnerships, draw out people's stories, and explore "the questions of what it means to 'be human' and 'how do we do this well?'" (Intertwine, *Intertwine Northeast*). The community has no formal membership status, though does track participants and friends. In 2016, events were attended by approximately 25 people on average, and by early 2018 gatherings had at least doubled in average size after their "Launch 2.0" in December 2017. The Intertwine Facebook page, as of December 11, 2017, was liked by 756 people (*Intertwine Northeast Facebook Page*). The organization is committed to non-hierarchical leadership structures and employs two leaders, Mike who might be thought of as the "pastor," but who identifies as a "Thinker/Speaker/Entrepreneur" and Louisa, a part-time musician and community developer.

What was the crowdfunding goal? Was it reached? Are other metrics important and/or available?

Intertwine conducted two crowdfunding campaigns during my PAR partnership, one launched October 19, 2016 and the other following just over a year later, November 28, 2017. The first campaign was conducted on Generosity.com and raised $5,258 through the platform. An additional sum of approximately $3,700 was received via the organization's PayPal account or through individuals and collections at partner congregations. While the Generosity campaign recognized giving levels and included rewards (e.g. arts-related gifts, life coaching, etc.), the campaign itself was for general operating funds and little clarity was given related to the specifics of the $30,000 goal. Beyond finances, the campaign sought also to raise the profile of Intertwine in the community and associate the brand of the startup community with crowdfunding, as opposed to practices of a "traditional" ELCA congregation. The second campaign with a $10,000 goal raised $4,340 from 20 people. Similar to the first, the second campaign supported general operating funds, though the community—and leaders—possessed a clearer identity of the mission in 2017 than existed in 2016.

Table 9. Intertwine Northeast Campaign Data

Campaign Launch	Name	Purpose	Location	Goal	Total Raised	Total Backers	Length
1) Oct 2016	Intertwine Northeast	Faith community launch funds	Minneapolis, MN	$30,000	$5,258 via Generosity; $3,700 via PayPal or partner church	40	8 months open, approx. 3 months of campaign emphasis
2) Nov 2017	Intertwine Northeast	Operating funds	Minneapolis, MN	$10,000	$4,340 via Generosity; $5,250 from a supportive family who saw the campaign and gave via other means	20	3 months

How was the organization and/or leader recruited for PAR?

Over ten years ago, I was classmates in college with Mike's brother, and as a faculty person at the Lutheran seminary in town, I had heard good things about Mike's efforts launching Intertwine. Mike graduated from Luther Seminary before I joined the faculty. We have many mutual friends and first had coffee in early 2016 as a way of getting to know each other soon after I moved to the area. At that point, Mike asked if I might meet with his leadership team to discuss their broader fundraising strategy. On April 21, 2016 I met Mike, Louisa, and another team member at a coffee shop to discuss Intertwine's fundraising plans. It became clear that the team planned for crowdfunding to be part of that broader strategy, and at that time I shared with them my IRB documents and discussed the nature of my research. Over the subsequent 22 months, I met with Mike a half-dozen times, exchanged scores of emails, and also saw him on campus from time to time. Louisa joined for some meetings, as did Intertwine leadership team members, but Mike remained my main contact.

Composition Practices

How was the platform, topic, and goal of the campaign selected?

Prior to their first campaign launch, Intertwine received electronic gifts using the PayPal payment platform. For the crowdfunding campaign, however, they sought a more “traditional” method consistent with the crowdfunding genre, such as Kickstarter or Indiegogo. Since they sought a flexible campaign, however, they ruled out Kickstarter and quickly landed upon Generosity due to its recognizable branding, low fees, and its partnership with Indiegogo. The leadership team acknowledged that Generosity would not serve as a solution for all their digital giving needs (e.g. how to receive debit or credit card donations on site, how to solicit monthly digital donations), but the platform was deemed to fit the short-term crowdfunding need well, and without much discussion or debate. The Generosity campaign also allowed Intertwine leaders to design and manage their own giving page template, whereas the only way they could receive electronic gifts at the time was through the website of a partner congregation (serving as their fiscal agent), the backend of which they could not easily access. Later, the team revised their financial practices to accept electronic donations via their website using the payment processor Stripe.

Who participated in the composition process? What were their roles?

October 2016 Campaign: The composition process reflected the early stages of an organization valuing community leadership, but ultimately led by paid staff. In short, Mike composed much of the final copy for the page. The process began in conversation with the leadership team, and an intern, working with Intertwine as part of a community engagement requirement at a local university, roughed out an initial page. Mike then revised the content, noting, "I changed quite a bit. A lot of it was great, and I really am grateful for the work, but what I came to realize was that I didn't equip [the intern] about the clarity of our vision enough to communicate directly and powerfully" (Intertwine Leaders). Mike reflected that part of what he discovered about his own leadership, by way of the composing process, was the need for him to support the flourishing of other leaders in the community. This broader organizational reality was also reflected in the more specific task of composing a crowdfunding page. Overall, the Intertwine leaders took a somewhat informal approach to composing, seeking the input of each other while recognizing the buck stopped with Mike. Noting the challenge of communicating the aims of Intertwine, Mike appreciated that it had taken the organization more than two years to put together a compelling message that sufficiently communicated their values and aims, so summing things up on a single crowdfunding page was a complex, somewhat frustrating task. Even so, it also served as "a significant focusing task – it asked of us to sit down and put on paper our aims/learnings/intentions," Mike noted in correspondence. Alleviating the rhetorical frustration somewhat, however, was the utilization of Generosity's "Donation Levels" function that allowed the leaders to correlate certain monetary gift levels with a tangible community action. The Donation Level template also revealed a shift in the message.

At the launch of the page, the team populated the Donation Level boxes with gift levels that represented the needs of the community, such as $25 for hospitality and "the best coffee from Tiny Footprint," rental space, and costs related to administration and gatherings (Intertwine, "Intertwine Campaign One"). On December 16th, however, the page was updated to reflect more of a rewards structure, but also to exemplify the spirit of the community (see Figure 6). The updated levels included Intertwine branded stickers and apparel, as well as relational items, such as life coaching and coffee or dinner with leaders. Mike explained, the updated rewards "served two purposes: one was marketing and the other was community building" (Intertwine Leaders). In other words, the donation levels themselves helped the community describe the sort of actions and community it values. Ultimately, the composition process pushed the organization to new discoveries of itself and its developing community. Louisa summed it up, reflecting that the crowdfunding campaign "forced us to say, like, 'All right, let's get real about this, let's record a video, let's get in people's faces, let's get in people's newsfeeds more, let's toss money on a Facebook ad…and like, be more in" (Intertwine Leaders). It was another step in the process of describing the meaning of Intertwine.

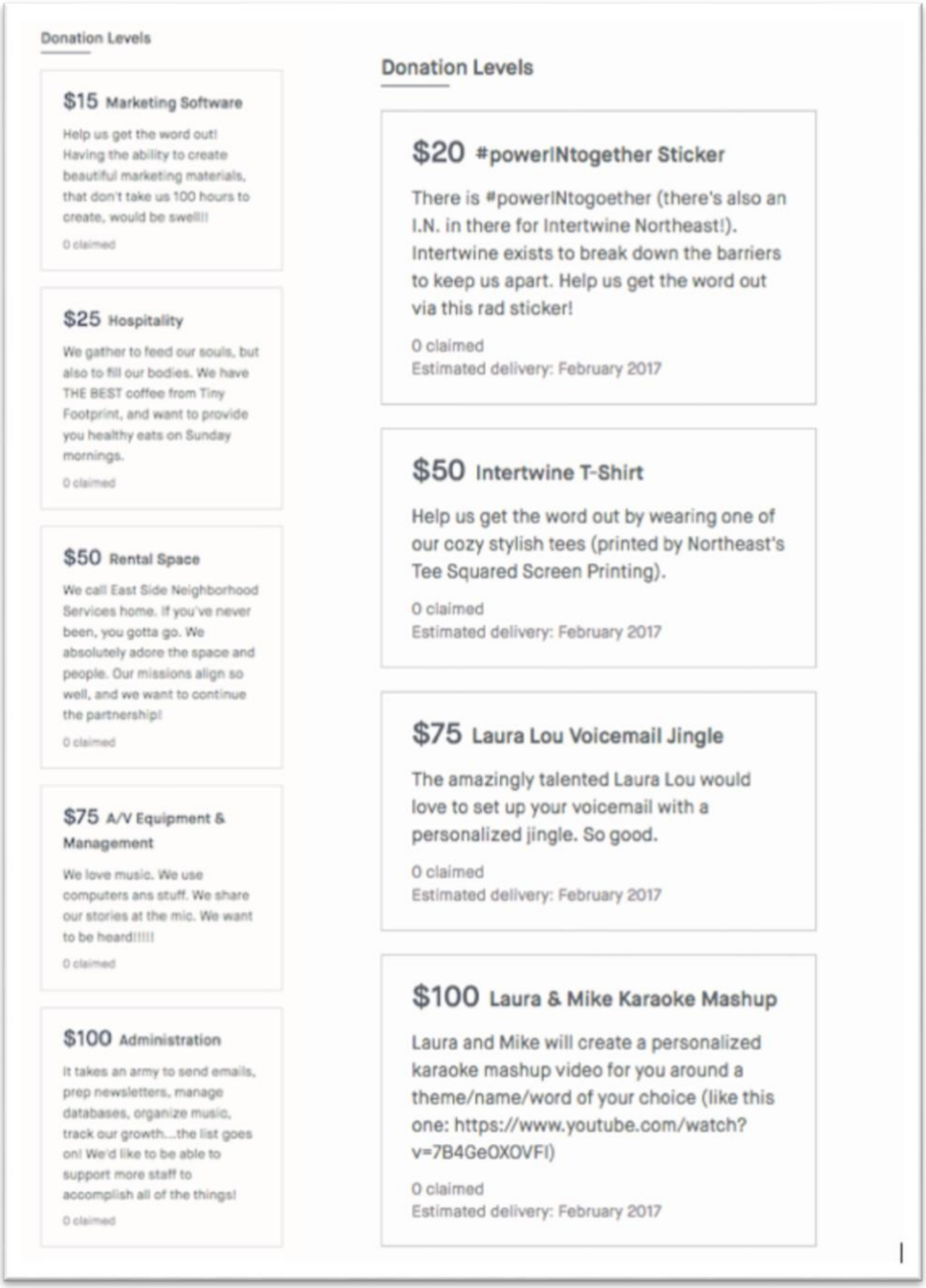

Figure 6. Intertwine Original Campaign Donation Levels (left) beside Updated Donation Levels (right)

November 2017 Campaign: The composition process for the second campaign was led by Mike, supported by team members and myself. In mid-November, I met socially with Mike for coffee and conversation about funding new congregations generally and the state of the church more broadly. In the course of our discussion, we also addressed crowdfunding and the possibility of Intertwine launching a second campaign to be live for the "giving season" of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and end-of-year donations. Mike particularly wrestled with the question of audience, sharing that emphasizing the honest openness and lack-of-definition about their community, and specifically their approach to God and God-related language, might alienate the "grandma gift." In other words, he feared a message that appealed to potential older donors active in Christian congregations might undercut their community's mission and scare off the very people to whom they hoped might find Intertwine appealing. Eventually, I raised the specter of a sort of "anti-crowdfunding campaign" message that would lean in to the audience question and acknowledge the complexities as part of the campaign. An anti-crowdfunding appeal would also admit it's hard to come up with reward levels and relate gifts to tangible things. Mike immediately took to the idea and soon after began writing a video script exploring the possibilities.

Mike later recorded the campaign video in his home basement with the help of a friend and Intertwine supporter. The original plan was to shoot footage at different points in the Northeast neighborhood, but production constraints led to the basement style in which a single character, Mike, explained the campaign and invited gifts.

How did the campaign launch and what communication practices were employed after launch?

October 2016 Campaign: The campaign launched October 19, 2016 and on the first day of the campaign six donors gave approximately $380. While these early contributions are a fairly small part of the over $5,000 eventually raised on the platform, interestingly the campaign was shared on Facebook at least 30 times on launch day and only 58 more times over the course of the next several months. Ten days into the campaign, it had not gathered much momentum, but Mike determinedly pitched the campaign on his own and Intertwine's Facebook pages. For example, on October 31, Halloween, Mike posted a video in which he makes a pitch to potential donors. In the text of the Facebook post, he wrote:

> SCARRRRYYYYYY!!!!!!
>
> A world without Intertwine Northeast, that is.
>
> Enjoy my Nazgul impression and donate to our crowdfunding campaign: https://www.generosity.com/community-f…/intertwine-northeast.
>
> Help us create this community that's creating safe-brave spaces for our shared humanity to be remembered and lived into powerfully!
>
> And thanks! #powerINtogether #HappyHalloween (Rusert, "Scary! A World without Intertwine")

As of 2:45 p.m. the next day, the Facebook video had 171 views. This exemplifies a common occurrence for Mike and the team: their shares about the campaign on Facebook garnered remarkable viewing statistics, but these shares did not convert to substantial giving. For example, on December 18, 2017, Mike posted a video of himself celebrating a phone call he received in which he learned of a forthcoming $1,000 gift. Responding to a dare from the donor, Mike then recorded a thank you video of himself, shirtless and wearing shorts with his snow boots, making a snow angel during a below-zero-degree Minnesota winter afternoon. According to Facebook, that video drew "1.7k views" over the next two days. Yet, funding levels on the campaign itself changed very slightly during the spike in Facebook video views.

Throughout the campaign, Mike sent occasional email updates and solicitation invitations to the Intertwine email list. He updated his own Facebook page, as well as Intertwine's, with both highlights of Intertwine events and progress related to the campaign. Before Christmas, they launched a “14 days of Power IN Together” effort, in which posts highlighted the community’s accomplishments and events. They also added a campaign video, on about December 16, that had been long-delayed in production. The video described the community and featured shots of Mike, gatherings, and other promotional materials. Overall, Intertwine leaders largely employed social media campaign promotion practices to invite those in their networks and the fledging Intertwine community to give. Many of these practices reflected the spirit and developing personality of the community itself.

November 2017 Campaign: The second campaign, “Intertwine Northeast Community” launched the afternoon of November 28, 2017, informally known as “Giving Tuesday,” a day celebrating gifts to non-profits following Thanksgiving Day, Black Friday and Cyber Monday. The campaign language focused on reaching a “larger audience” as the community began to host more regular gatherings. After launch, Mike shared the campaign using social media, including the Intertwine Facebook Page, as well as Facebook groups, through emails, and on Instagram and Twitter. In Figure 7, below, I have included a screen shot of a Facebook post announcing the campaign. Note how it references Giving Tuesday. The image, though it appears still in the screen shot, is from the accompanying campaign video. The campaign received a few hundred dollars in gifts on the first day, and by December 3, the total hit $1,750 from 12 people and 26 Facebook shares. Mike encouraged sharing by members on social media, and over the holidays, for Intertwiners to invite their friends and family to give. He told them at the time, “It was perfect. And you know…easy. You’re going into the holiday, like you’re going to be around these family, just share it” (Intertwine Main Leader). Later, however, he reported, “A few people did that. Um, very few though. I was kind of surprised” (Intertwine Main Leader). The campaign page was updated twice during the course of the campaign with stories of gatherings, pictures of group members, and messages indicating what gifts would help support. Ultimately, as the calendar turned to mid-January and donations slowed, it became clear the goal of $10,000 would not be reached. At the close of the campaign, 20 people had given a total of $4,340. Additionally, however, a family who had seen the campaign online and become aware of the latest Intertwine funding push donated $5,250 outside of the Generosity page.

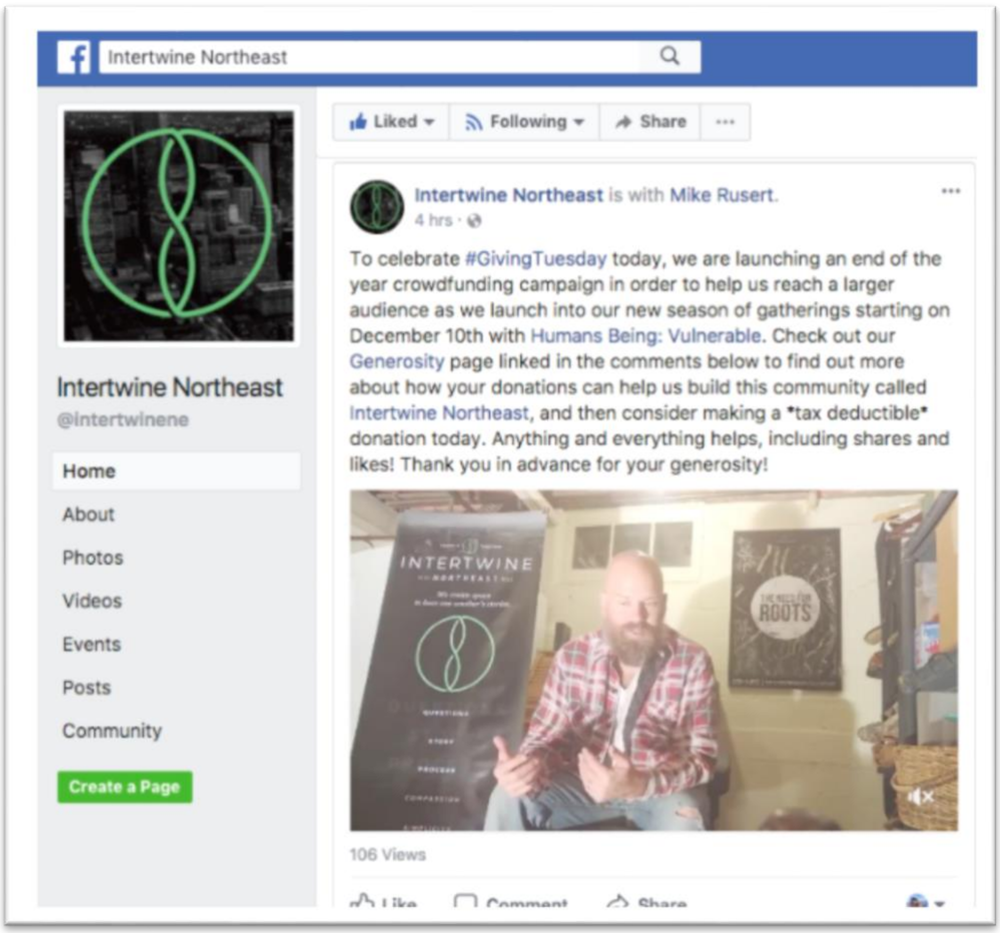

Figure 7. Intertwine Campaign Two, Facebook Announcement

How did the campaign approach audience and/or audience awareness?

Given their efforts to build a new faith community, Intertwine leaders were always acutely aware of questions of audience in their communications. The crowdfunding campaigns made this awareness even more pressing as they sought to fundraise from multiple audiences within and beyond the church, while also appealing to potential new community members. For example, a veteran church planter and supporter of Intertwine, Greg Meyer, coaches Mike on his leadership with Intertwine. In a fundraising meeting I attended, Greg noted that much of the language and community-building millennials are attracted to is self-defeating when it comes to raising money. "The language we're temped to use undermines us," Greg explained, arguing that the millennial audience is disinclined to give—and join—a community understood as Christian, and especially one that leads by asking for money. Mike agreed, noting that in his experience community members were drawn to language he used to describe his vision of a "post-church church" as it framed the community around a new, developing reality. And yet, Greg, Mike, and Louisa also acknowledged a challenge underlying all their language practices: they were seeking to describe a community both *already* in their minds and *not yet* existing, so the balance of describing the reality of those who do attend and the hope for what new audiences might join represented a constant struggle. How could they find language that aptly described the current reality while leaving enough room for potential new community members to shape Intertwine in ways the leaders had not yet imagined?

As the leaders began to imagine the first campaign, Mike noted four groups as part of a potential audience for fundraising: existing faith communities/churches, community partners, Northeast neighbors, and the small group of participating Intertwiners. Ultimately, their first campaign appealed in some ways to each of these groups, but not in any remarkable extent that brought in enough donations to reach their goal. In early October, on their Instagram feeds leaders invited their followers to "find ten friends to commit to giving $10 each" to the crowdfunding campaign, but such invitations were not taken up.

The second campaign sought, in theory at least, to play with this audience conundrum. When Mike and I talked in mid-November, he was drawn to the rhetorical opportunity of leaning-in to the audience paradox, honestly claiming that for some of those who are committed to the traditional church what they are doing with Intertwine may make them nervous and not inspired to give. Yet, at the same time, Mike was aware that if he tried to seem too much like church—therefore appealing to traditional religious givers—then he might scare off just the sort of people they were creating the community to welcome. In the video, Mike says "the ask" is for multiple audiences: "We think the community, Intertwine, that we're creating has integrity both for the hymn-singer who's supporting us from afar and also the person who connects with Intertwine and is done with all the he's and hims of religion" (Intertwine Northeast, *Intertwine Generosity Crowdfund 2017*). Additionally, later Mike pointed out the complexity of "being tied to an institution (ELCA) and feeling responsible to some of its guidelines/commitments, while functioning in a different paradigm that challenges or works outside of those guidelines/commitments" (Rusert, *Case Study for Your Feedback*). In sum, for Intertwine, asking for money in crowdfunding campaigns functioned as an exaggerated symptom of the broader challenge of creating a new community and finding the appropriate language to appeal to an imagined audience. This reality will be expanded upon in Assertion 1 (Chapter 5), but for now it is important to note that the campaigns themselves included multiple purposes such as *both* asking for money *and* defining the mission of the organization.

Outcomes and Participant Reflections

How did the crowdfunders assess their completed campaign?

Reflecting on the first campaign, Mike identified one of his big takeaways as helping him come to the personal realization that people were willing to listen to him as he described the vision for Intertwine. Significantly, the "campaign aided the discovery of that vision, for sure," Mike explained, and though they did not reach their financial goal, they learned from the inaugural process more about their own ability, their potential funders, and the challenge of describing their hopes for a community not yet existing. By the second campaign, Mike felt a clearer understanding of how to express Intertwine's mission, but still noted the complexities of language and how constructing an invitation to give pushes those complicated questions. "I don't even know if Intertwine's a church, you know? …I mean, I know what it is to me, but I know that it's not church to everybody, even in the community" (Intertwine Main Leader).

When we met to discuss the second campaign, Mike had several points of discovery he wished to share. First, the opportunity to ask for gifts via crowdfunding and his realization of who was giving allowed him to realize the face-to-face relationships and invitations to give he was neglecting. Mike discussed how, by relying on the "tool" of crowdfunding, he discovered donors were people "who either knew of Intertwine or who were connected already with Intertwine" (Intertwine Main Leader). The general public did not give, nor did many beyond either Intertwine's relatively small network or Mike's social and professional network. "So that just tells me…I need to be tapping into those [opportunities]. I need to be asking them to give in other ways" (Intertwine Northeast, *Intertwine Generosity Crowdfund 2017*). Later, responding to a draft of this case study Mike wrote, "My own need to confidently ask for support is something that has become very clear through all this" (Rusert, *Case Study for Your Feedback*). In other words, the process of asking for gifts online via crowdfunding highlighted face-to-face leadership strategies he was neglecting, or at least, new emphases he could take up in the future.

Second, after two campaigns Mike was willing to acknowledge crowdfunding may not be a good fundraising strategy for reaching established, older Lutherans who might, in theory, be supportive of donating to help start a new faith community. While he was careful with his language in the campaign video, seeking not to turnoff potential givers from the established church, he discovered how difficult it is to get into the social media feed of these donors. Jokingly, we agreed the challenge was that there is no Facebook group, "Mainline Christians who feel bad that their grandchildren don't go to church." But even if there was such a group, Mike later accepted they would be unlikely to give to crowdfunding generally, and even less likely to give to his campaign particularly. In a way, then, this discovery is one related to audience, that in Mike's experience, crowdfunding is a platform that leads to gifts from people already part of an existing network, or otherwise closely associated with the campaign.

Finally, Mike noted a general sense of positivity about the campaign and what it helped him discover about his community, fundraising, and communicating the Intertwine vision. Looking back, he said he would advise others to "plan more; prepare more," but counted the $4,340 raised a success, particularly when accompanied by the broader awareness, new donor lists developed, and positive "buzz" created online.

Case Study 3: Wintergarden Presbyterian Church

Overview

What is the organization?

Wintergarden Presbyterian Church in Port Charlotte, Florida, was established in the 1990s as a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). A small congregation of approximately 30 members, congregational activity reflects the nature of its south Florida location with average winter worship attendance in the winter ranging in the mid 50s, but dwindling in the summer months to the high 20s. While the congregation is active in mission and outreach, it has struggled to maintain sufficient funds for operating costs, and specified gifts have been relied on for building maintenance. The current pastor, Devon Beisser Andrews, has served the congregation since 2014, though on a very part-time basis. Under Devon's leadership the congregation has seen growth in both membership and annual giving.

What was the crowdfunding goal? Was it reached? Are other metrics important and/or available?

Table 10. Wintergarden Campaign Data

Campaign Launch	**Name**	**Purpose**	**Location**	**Goal**	**Total Raised**	**Total Backers**	**Length**
Nov 10, 2017	Wintergarden Presbyterian Church	Food and/or feeding ministries	Port Charlotte, FL	$3,660	$505	5 online (others in offering plate)	4 months open, approx. 2 months of campaign emphasis

On November 10, 2017, the congregation launched the campaign "Help Us Feed MORE People in Port Charlotte, FL" on the crowdfunding site YouCaring.org (Andrews, "Feed More People"). The goal of $3,660 represented approximately how much it would cost to fund the food-related ministries of the congregation for a year. The campaign received four gifts in the two weeks after publishing and failed to gain further momentum or support. During the Christmas Eve worship service, Devon described the campaign and invited gifts by traditional methods of receiving cash and checks in a passed offering plate. $255 was collected and, eventually, added to the campaign total. At its close, the campaign received $505 gifts in total, approximately 14% of the published goal. It was shared 43 times on Facebook according to the YouCaring metrics. Roughly concurrent to the campaign, the congregation received a $5,000 grant from the Blessing Grants program of Peace River Presbytery.

How was the organization and/or leader recruited for PAR?

Having attended the same seminary in the mid 2000s, I have counted Devon a colleague for quite some time, though our paths most often cross online rather than in person. In February 2017, I received a Facebook message from Devon with a few questions about church stewardship related to crowdfunding and the potential congregational use of the cryptocurrency Bitcoin. I responded briefly, attaching my "Crowdfunding for Congregations and Faith-related Non-profits" guidebook and indicating I would be open for further conversation generally, but also more particularly if the congregation she served was interested in launching a crowdfunding campaign and learning more about participatory action research. A few weeks later, Devon responded, and we exchanged a few emails. However, the conversation went quiet until late summer. I spoke with Devon on the phone August 2, 2017, during which time we explored the congregational context. Having shared copies of IRB documents electronically, I discussed the nature of action research and this particular project. We discovered that in late September we would be attending the same stewardship leadership conference and agreed to meet in person at that time. Over the next few weeks we kept in touch via email and occasional text messages.

Composition Practices

How was the platform, topic, and goal of the campaign selected?

In our early correspondence Devon noted that, though building maintenance and achieving a healthier bank balance were her big-picture financial goals for the congregation, such a focus would not make up an appealing crowdfunding pitch due to the more insular, non-specific nature of these aims. I agreed, noting SMART design principles as perhaps helpful for decision-making (Copeland, *Crowdfunding for Congregations and Faith-Related Non-Profits* 14–15). During a conversation Devon led with a leadership committee, the possible crowdfunding theme of food, hospitality, and "feeding people" surfaced. One member, according to Devon said, "Well, we like to eat and we like to feed people. That's what we do!" And everyone around the table was like, yeah, that really is what we do. Everything has gone around food for us" (Andrews, *Post Campaign*). Devon described this realization as both unifying and clarifying, and soon the group coalesced around the theme of feeding people. By emphasizing their ministry of feeding beyond their own doors, such as meals served at the local Homeless Coalition, the group thought the theme might draw in potential donors in ways a building maintenance-based campaign would not. Devon selected the YouCaring platform due to the site aesthetics, anticipated ease of use, and lack of fees.

Who participated in the composition process? What were their roles?

Following a church work day, Devon gathered several congregation members around a table to discuss their ministry of hospitality and feeding people. She shared photos of the many times they gathered around food while making an audio recording. Devon used this audio as part of the track for a campaign video, a draft of which she shared with me. I suggested a few minor changes, such as making a more explicit "ask" at the conclusion of the video. Upon seeing a draft of the campaign page itself, I also suggested language changes that were intended to craft a tighter pitch that also described the change that would take place if the congregation met their goal. The pictures for the final video were selected by a church elder who had also been instrumental in selecting the theme. In sum, Devon was the lead designer and chief implementer of the campaign with input from congregational leaders and me.

How did the campaign launch and what communication practices were employed after launch?

Upon launch, Devon contributed to the campaign and shared it on her personal Facebook page as well as the congregation's Facebook account. In the days that followed, she also blogged about the campaign. While Devon encouraged congregational leaders to give to the campaign, it soon became clear they simply did not know how to do so. Devon said, upon reflection that it turned out, "I bet you not one person in the congregation has ever given to crowdfunding, to a crowdfunding campaign" (Andrews, *Post Campaign*). Attempting to fill this knowledge gap with training, Devon held an informal technology learning session with the congregation. The session provided much entertainment for all, especially around the issue of which Facebook page to share birthday wishes—one's own or the person with the birthday. Some members shared they were reluctant to use any electronic giving options, crowdfunding or otherwise, due to security fears related to sharing financial data online. Of those who ultimately gave online to the campaign, all were previously in Devon's network of friends and colleagues. Even with the Facebook training, few members ended up sharing a link to the campaign when they returned home. No church member gave to the campaign using the YouCaring page.

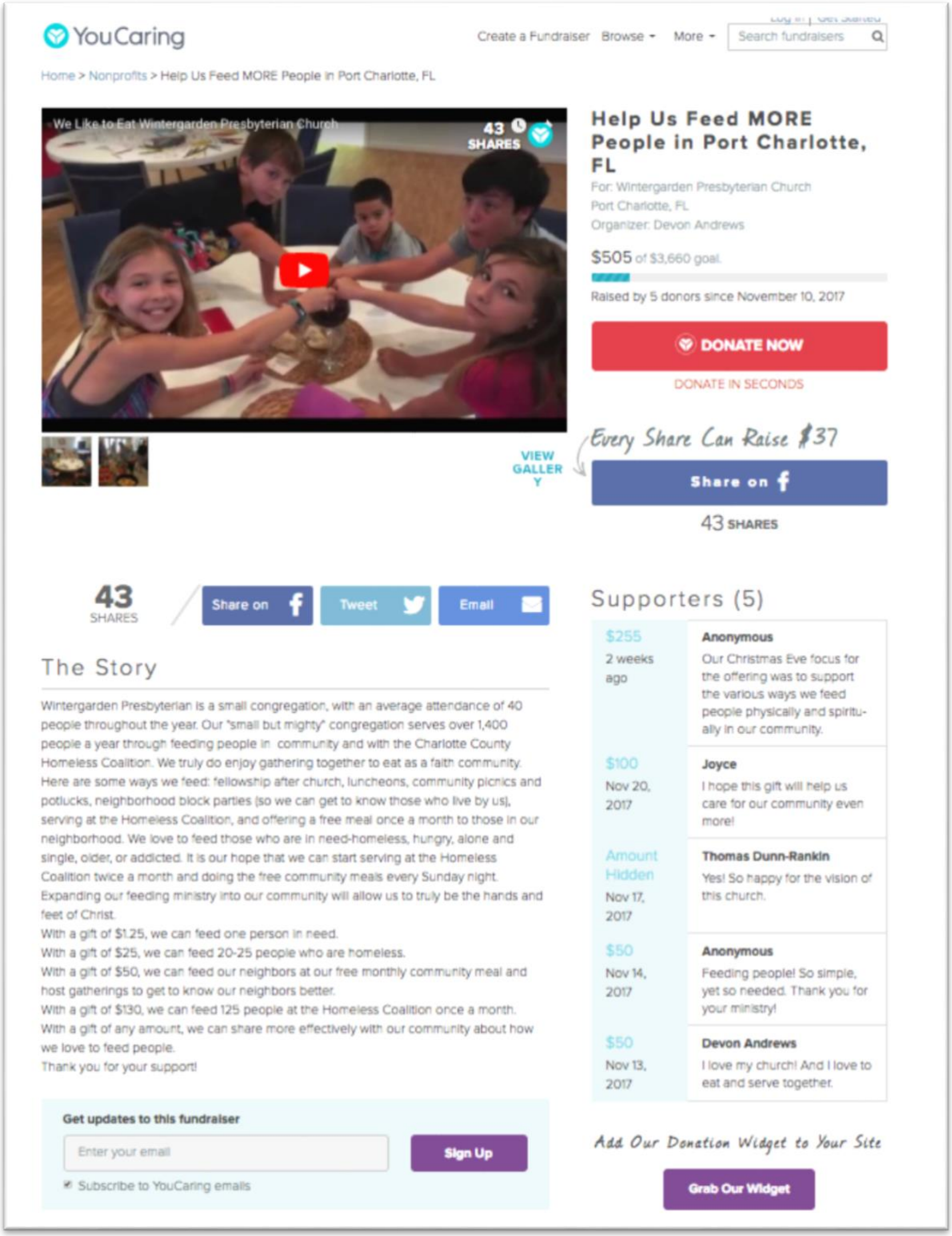

Figure 8. Wintergarden Campaign Image Capture

How did the campaign approach audience and/or audience awareness?

Related to audience, Devon had to navigate two distinct audiences: the congregation and those beyond the congregation interested in food justice. In the realm of the congregation, Devon led education related to the nature of crowdfunding, social media, and technology more broadly. Most of the members of the congregation had little prior knowledge of crowdfunding, for instance, with the exception of the youth. The campaign was composed, therefore, in a way that sought to appeal to an audience with affinity for congregations working on food justice and hospitality. Comments submitted by those who gave to the campaign seem to support this strategy: “I hope this gift will help us care for our community even more!” and “Yes! So happy for the vision of this church” (Andrews, “Feed More People”).

Some particular composition decisions stand out in their attempt to reach potential donors. For example, while the YouCaring template does not include gift levels matched with giving levels, Devon did add language tying gifts to impact:

> With a gift of $1.25, we can feed one person in need.
>
> With a gift of $25, we can feed 20-25 people who are homeless.
>
> With a gift of $50, we can feed our neighbors at our free monthly community meal and host gatherings to get to know our neighbors better.
>
> With a gift of $130, we can feed 125 people at the Homeless Coalition once a month. (Andrews, “Feed More People”)

Further, in developing the video Devon was aware, from the beginning, of the potential power of the trove of pictures of the congregation eating that had been captured over the years. She hoped, that by adding audio and an invitation to give to the picture, a potential funder might decide to give thanks to the connection supported by the images. Interestingly, Devon contacted the

Homeless Coalition asking for further pictures of the non-profit's mission in action, but the Coalition declined to send photos for privacy reasons. They were, however, pleased to hear about the campaign. These composition practices noted, however, the campaign did not target a specific audience (e.g. Homeless Coalition funders) and failed to gain traction beyond, or within, Devon's connections.

Outcomes and Participant Reflections

How did the crowdfunders assess their completed campaign?

Devon noted that, "we said from the beginning, if we get a hundred dollars, that's great. That's more than we had" (Andrews, *Post Campaign*). Given this low bar for financial gifts, Devon described the campaign in positive terms. Even though the campaign goal was not reached, the feeding ministry will still go on. The roughly $500 collected will feed dozens of people, and the related $5,000 grant awarded by Peace River Presbytery also helped the congregation feel empowered to continue the ministry of food and hospitality.

Further, though, Devon pointed to outcomes of the campaign beyond the financial, saying "I feel it was successful. And, a big part of it was because of the conversations that came from it" (Andrews, *Post Campaign*). Through the process of deciding upon a campaign theme, and then discussing that theme with the congregation, Devon commented that "we have come to know our story, in a way, even more" (Andrews, *Post Campaign*). Current ministry goals, for instance, include discernment related to ways to feed more people in their community.

Upon reading an earlier version of this case study, Devon commented, "it really made me remember how I pushed the leadership to give online, share, and support [the campaign]. And they didn't" (Andrews, *Seeking Your Feedback*). Therefore, she reflected, "it causes me to re-evaluate those conversations and those expectations" (Andrews, *Seeking Your Feedback*). Devon noted that this reality raises the question of whether such an expectation was reasonable in the first place, and/or whether the crowdfunding platform is just a better fit for givers with more comfort and savvy with digital technologies.

Finally, in addition to illuminating how important the feeding ministry is to the congregation, the campaign and its supported pieces also surfaced areas for Devon's pastoral leadership to focus in the coming months. For example, she was struck by the low degree of comfort many members have with Facebook and other technologies and intends to offer further support and conversation around social media. Further, the crowdfunding campaign marked another opportunity to discuss money and fundraising in a positive light among the congregation. Devon will seek to build upon the positivity associated with fundraising for their feeding ministry to host conversations on planned giving and estate gifts in the months to come.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS SUMMARY, INTERPRETATION, AND CONTRIBUTIONS

"Mixed methods research can enable you to address broader or more complicated research questions than case studies alone," writes Yin (67). Though this work is grounded in action research, the case study and rhetorical methods also employed surface some worthwhile results including, and beyond, naming more sophisticated questions. What follows, therefore, is a breakdown of results in three areas. Each area includes contributions to the literature unique to the theory considered. First, I employ case study methods to approach RQ1, creating an explanatory action matrix as well as several audience-related assertions. As a refresher, RQ1 reads, *As faith-related crowdfunders consider their campaign's potential audience and existing supporters, how do they plan, launch, and manage their campaigns to raise support?* Second, I rely on rhetorical insights and coding methods to surface four assertions pertaining to multimodality and RQ2. RQ2 asks, *As faith-related crowdfunders launch and manage their campaign's page and the related public messaging, what is the nature of their use of the multimodal, rhetorical possibilities of the crowdfunding genre?* Finally, with an appreciation for action research itself and its ability to solicit deeper questions, I summarize a new set of questions related to case statement rhetoric and faith-related fundraising.

Audience Awareness (RQ1)

Several audience-related results surfaced when working data from the three case studies. While these results are interrelated, I will present them serially for ease of understanding.

First, through a process of writing analytic memos and seeking patterns from case description write-ups (a fuller discussion of the matrix development process is above in Chapter 3), I developed the *explanatory action matrix* below (Figure 9). As Miles and Huberman suggest, the mark of a successful *explanatory action matrix* is whether it "is a *helpful* one that will give you reasonable answers to the questions you are asking—or suggest promising new ways to lay out the data to get answers" (240). Accordingly, Figure 9 illustrates the process the crowdfunders experienced as they considered audience amidst their plans to initiate and manage their campaigns. Such a visualization of the *process* crowders experience as they considered their rhetorical choices is a unique contribution to the literature. Initially, all nine PAR partners with whom I connected and shared my IRB materials expressed the **desire** to crowdfund. In fact, most were not just desirous but enthusiastic and optimistic about the crowdfunding enterprise. This desire was multifaceted, but much of it was indeed related to their view that crowdfunding would prove successful in raising needed funds in support of their organization. This potential to raise funds served as a driving force in their decision making, but it was never the sole reason they expressed interest in crowdfunding. They also saw crowdfunding as an opportunity to expand the reach of their organization beyond their existing footprint. This reach expansion was related to the potential of gathering more funds, but it was certainly not limited to this vision. It was understood that the missions of the organizations would be furthered by connecting with new audiences whether or not all these audiences donated.

The next period of crowdfunding processes included what I describe, broadly speaking, as **struggle**. The struggle came in different forms (e.g. inability to select crowdfunding topic; lack of team support; unanticipated organizational roadblocks; insufficient time and energy to pursue project; discomfort with fees; etc.) Interestingly, these struggles were included in all nine campaigns, including the three that persevered to launch stage. The data suggest that the leaders of the organizations who did launch campaigns were willing to release a product that they knew was imperfect. They were open to making modifications after launch, and/or they accepted that any launched campaign was more likely to raise funds than an unlaunched one, and they pursued crowdfunding even while appreciating their page and methods would be imperfect.

What were the campaign **outcomes**? Given that no campaign reached its full crowdfunding goal, it is noteworthy that all three PAR partners of launched campaigns described the campaign positively and embraced them as a success. Clearly, then, they understood "success" more broadly than just financial. Outcomes can be summarized around three foci. First, crowdfunders did appreciate the actual **dollars raised**. As Devon reflected, "[Our team] had fun with it. And that was worth it all. And, we said from the beginning, if we get a hundred dollars, that's great. That's more than we had" (Andrews, *Post Campaign*). Similarly, Marthame felt affirmed by his community, surmising that the dollars raised meant that people trusted him and wanted him to go ahead with producing the podcast, even though aijcast fell short of the goal.

Second, the process of crowdfunding helped to clarify the **missions** of the organizations in a way previously not fully appreciated. Crowdfunding "helped solidify [our mission] for us, and for me…it's changed what I'm reading and what I'm researching—looking now at hospitality in food…so for me it's transitioned how we look at outreach in a way that focused around truly feeding people" (Andrews, *Post Campaign*). Rhetorically speaking, it is noteworthy that while the crowdfunders did not originally express an intended purpose of clarifying their mission by way of the crowdfunding process, it became a common, noted appreciation. This finding recalls multimodal theory's appreciation of the composition process as work towards a goal by tackling a series of communicative problems to be solved. Interestingly, the process of crowdfunding solved a problem—mission clarity and expression—yet, surprisingly, a problem the crowdfunders were not aware they possessed. Indeed, they would not have listed *clarifying* *mission* on Shipka's statement of goals and choices, though the composition process led to new realizations, self-understanding, and renewed language concerning the organizations' missions.

Third, the crowdfunding process and lessons learned along the way helped set a stronger foundation for improved fundraising in the future. Crowdfunders noted that, with their newly developed clarity of mission and understanding of their communities, the process of crowdfunding led to self-discoveries, which ultimately would support stronger fundraising actions in the future whether crowdfunding or otherwise. Overall, then, crowdfunding—and the PAR process—helped leaders gain a deeper appreciation for several aspects of their organizational leadership and fundraising environment.

This deeper appreciation came in several forms by the crowdfunders. They all expressed, in a variety of ways, a new appreciation of their existing audience. Interestingly, in nearly all cases this audience pre-existed crowdfunding. I have come to refer to this phenomenon as the *audience paradox*, that by seeking to appeal to new audiences via crowdfunding the organizations actually discovered more about their own existing audiences. For example, Devon discovered that the Wintergarden congregation is not particularly comfortable with social media, and that many desire to develop digital skills that help foster relationships with others. From a leadership point of view, she also came to understand that regular givers, like members of the church session, while vocally supportive of crowdfunding did not possess wherewithal to contribute online. Others, like Marthame, discovered people in his network, such as college classmates and colleagues in the improv community, who already knew and supported his work and were willing to give if asked. Finally, as prefaced above, leaders gained a deeper appreciation for their own mission and more comfort with the appropriate language to describe that mission to potential donors.

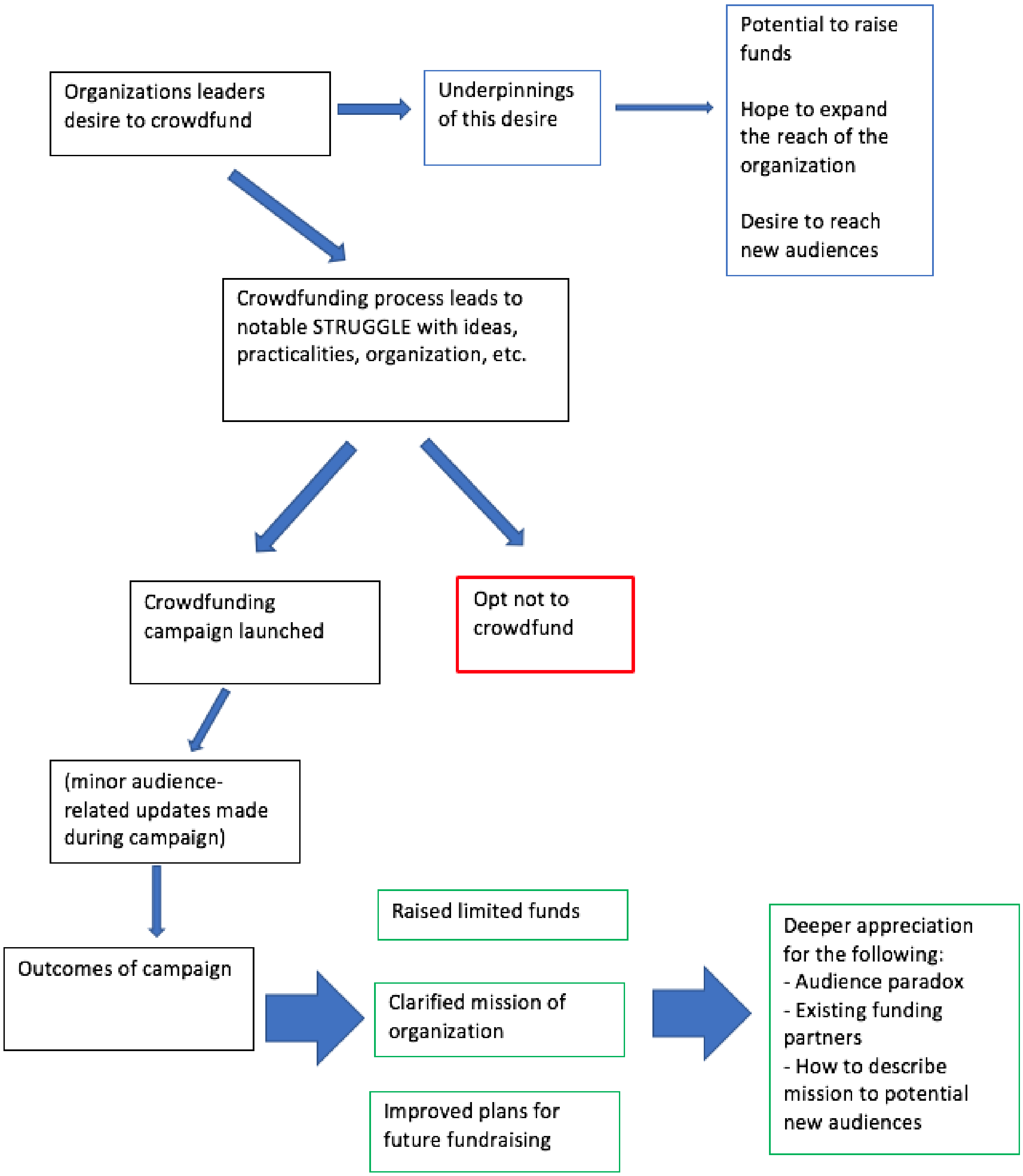

Figure 9. Explanatory Action Matrix

Interpretation of Results (RQ1)

I expect that when most people think of crowdfunding they imagine a website, a crowdfunding page/template that invites donations for a cause. This study, supported by the long-term nature of PAR research and the partnerships it provides, gives insight into the work behind the crowdfunding page itself. Such a long-term project working with actual crowdfunders resulted in several meaningful contributions to the field. In fact, these results suggest that there may be something about the nature of crowdfunding that veils the complicated realities of the composition process. I have named this phenomenon crowdfunding's **hidden friction** for faith-related non-profits and congregations. While leaders intuitively know fundraising will require careful work and planning, the leaders in my study underestimated the challenge of launching a campaign. The reality became apparent in my review of my field notes and commitment to being open to discoveries in my process of analytic memo writing and my eventual work of matrix development. For several organizations, the steps required of crowdfunding—getting a goal, selecting the platform, composing text, finding images, filming a video, etc. slowed their ideation process to the point of stalling out completely. Further, from a rhetorical point of view, I suggest this phenomenon may be exacerbated by the crowdfunding genre, as crowdfunding platforms seek to amplify the successful campaigns, the same ones that are more likely to be seen on social media by non-profit leaders. The launched "final product" crowdfunding page that receives noteworthy hits and funding tends to look reasonably high-quality, and the crowdfunding template enhances readability, usability, and aesthetics. What that page does not easily communicate, however, is the process behind the production, the *hidden friction* of non-profit crowdfunding. For two-thirds of my partners, this *hidden friction* was coarse enough for them not to pursue crowdfunding.

Another phenomenon discovered in the study is that of the *audience paradox*, or the fact that their hopes in crowdfunding's potential was to discover a novel, broader audience for funding and to which their organization might appeal. At the outset of their work, the perceived promise of crowdfunding for my partners was the untapped, "out there" audience beyond their reach using more traditional funding methods. Paradoxically, however, the search for a broader, new audience uncovered supporters already in the network of the leaders. Mike, for instance, reflected that the process of asking for gifts from *anyone* online helped him realize he actually should be spending more of his time and energy asking for gifts from *particular people* with whom he already had a relationship, and that such invitations to give would best occur *in person*. In general, the leaders composed their campaigns with a longing for audiences beyond their current close network of support, hoping though that their existing networks would help spread the word and draw others to their campaign. Far from going viral, however, this strategy led to few gifts beyond known networks. Upon reflection, crowdfunders came to new realizations about their existing networks and still lacked much insight about how to expand beyond them, except further appreciation of the challenge of doing so via crowdfunding. These findings serve as confirmation for Ethan Mollick's audience-aware advice to crowdfunders (see Ch 2): 1) build campaigns with the interests of *existing communities* in mind, 2) given this already-existing interested group, crowdfund towards innovations the group desires. The challenge, of course, is that Mollick is not a rhetorician and his crowdfunding scholarship emphasizes for-profit crowdfunding. Yet, this study finds an organic rhetorical wisdom to his counsel. The notion of *audience paradox* highlights audience awareness theories, particularly the recent embrace of Henry Jenkins' work in participatory culture. With Lunsford and Ede, this project affirms the import when composers imagine potential audiences as would-be donors, interactors, sharers, content writers, and more. Even while crowdfunding audience response remains difficult to predict, the hope for future crowdfunding campaigns to reach an entirely new audience, while admirable, seems unsupported by these findings. As the crowdfunders themselves came to appreciate, their experiences raise the question for future campaigns: how might crowdfunders target, more narrowly, the *existing*/*inner* networks of their organizations? And relatedly, if a campaign were designed to appeal to an existing set of supporters, would these supporters/audience embrace the potential for participatory digital interactions, sharing, donating, and more?

Additionally, work on audience awareness rises two further points of significance. First, recall that in chapter two, I discussed David Beard's scholarship considering communicating with the audience, built upon the framework of Lunsford and Ede as well as Henry Jenkins. Beard emphasizes the unpredictable nature of composition in the digital age. Even when writers consider audiences appropriately, the reactions and interactions among the audiences are highly unpredictable and uncertain. Beard notes, "For the act of writing or speech to become a conversation, there must be the possibility of a response" (97). Indeed, quite neatly, crowdfunding allows for a direct *response* to the composition of a page in the form of a donation to the campaign. Yet, given the uncertainty of the process, a response of the reader might instead be to ignore the campaign, or even develop a negative view of the organization because of the campaign's message. Recall, for example, that the Wintergarden Presbyterian Church campaign received no gifts from the members of the congregation, though most knew of its existence. My research suggests that, in crowdfunding campaigns with the goal of raising funds, a common response to the crowdfunding page and related messaging is *not* to give. Though Beard's work tends to focus on positive responses and the way that audiences might interact and potentially become co-creators with authors, these campaigns studied showed that dozens, or even hundreds of people may view a crowdfunding message—as audience—and yet a very small portion of them react by donating. Rather than coalescing to produce new texts, audiences may produce no texts. Audiences, in a sense, *respond* in the negative. As Beard puts it, “We must understand that, once let loose in the world, any response to our text is possible. This includes responses that are contrary to our intentions or desires” (102). In this case of this project, a common response to the crowdfunding text was no gift at all.

Second, given the shifting awareness of audience and the potential to compose anticipating audience interaction, I have come to view crowdfunding page composition with a new layer complexity. Leaning on Jenkins’ notion of participatory culture, and the interactivity of composition surfaced by Beard, Lunsford, and Ede, the process of crowdfunding page composition surfaces the desire of a response. But, what of the text itself? As the shift to composition for digital environments has occurred, notions of fixed text have shifted. Conventionally, scholars have tended to consider the text itself as the emphasis of production. Then, the audience may respond to any given text created in interactive, participatory ways. In our digital age, the process of composition becomes a more collaborative act. Lunsford and Ede suggest “as writers and audience merge and shift places in online environments, participating in both brief and extended collaborations, it is more obvious than ever that writers seldom, if ever, write alone” (“Among the Audience” 45). This project builds upon such concepts to shift notion of the crowdfunding text itself. The text produced in the form of a crowdfunding page, though it may be “published,” is not in fact the final text. A crowdfunding text can only become complete when engaged by an audience.

Crowdfunding campaigns are texts in search of an audience. When crowdfunders produce a crowdfunding text—a crowdfunding page, for example—they are inviting the audience to create, together, a new production, that of a completed campaign with a fundraising goal met. Lunsford and Ede allow for such realities without writing of crowdfunding specifically when they note, "participatory communications challenge conventional understandings of both authorship and audience, even as they provide an opportunity for anyone and everyone to become both author and audience, writer and reader" ("Among the Audience" 53). A crowdfunding page text is merely a means to an end of the completed campaign text. But that completed text can only be produced by an audience response. In other words, as crowdfunders anticipate their audience, they compose a text that, for the purpose of their ultimate goal, is incomplete. The actual text—a *completed* campaign—sought by crowdfunders can only be composed in partnership with an interactive audience. With this understanding, both the audience negotiation and textual production process becomes an ongoing venture only finished with the support, response, and co-creation by donation from the audience.

Finally, returning to the notion of *hidden friction*, though the concept surfaced in relationship to RQ2 and its focus on process and audience, I also more expansively appreciate its relationship with multimodality. Indeed, *hidden friction* serves as a sort of bridge concept from audience awareness to multimodal concerns due to the breadth and depth of the challenges associated with crowdfunding composition. As explored below, multimodal theory seeks to acknowledge composition as multi-part, complex, and always shifting as a result of complicated relationships with both objects/technologies and human actions/experiences. Indeed, frictions occurred related to issues of audience awareness, for certain, but these realities cannot be neatly disentangled from the multimodal nature—not to mention, social nature—of the crowdfunding composition process. Some particular claims can be made, however, regarding the particularity of the invitation to give and their multimodal character.

Multimodal Invitation to Give (RQ2)

The analysis process described above led to four assertions related to the multimodal rhetoric supported by the crowdfunding pages and their crowdfunders. I prefer the language of "assertion" here to "theory" due to the local, particular nature of the study. Each assertion relates, in one way or another, to the use of the rhetorical multimodal possibilities of the crowdfunding campaigns. In other words, the research question pushed me to draw out distinctions between different modes and communication patterns present in the pages and associated rhetoric. Such findings build on some of my previous work in multimodal faith-related crowdfunding and offer new contributions to field.

While a fuller description of my coding methods and analytic tactics is found in Chapter 3, I will briefly summarize the process as follows. I employed a process of coding and reflective analytic memo writing. I coded using a strategy of Initial Coding to develop a Start List of codes, then pursued a Descriptive Coding approach after sensing the wisdom of topical organization. I proceeded to Subcode, or second-order tag. For digital images and videos, I pursued Saldaña's strategy of generating "language-based data that *accompany* the visual data" (57). These analytic memos (see Appendix C and D) presented "holistic impressions" that led me to compare and contrast across modes, seeing patterns in the data. When a potential assertion arose, I cross-checked across the cases to ensure reliability. Finally, note that all these assertations apply *across all cases*. The replication design of the study seeks more reliable results by only including findings common to all three crowdfunding organizations. Next, I present four assertions developed from the analysis. I will first describe the assertions. Then, in the following section, I will interpret their significance.

Assertion 1: The Discrepant Rhetoric of Mission *Already* Accomplished

The videos, images, and text presented all communicate the mission of the organization. In fact, this emphasis on mission, which I understand to be how the values of the organizations are lived out in action (praxis), is notably consistent across all the modalities. Different, however, is the sense of organizational mission communication as it relates to the need for gifts to the campaign.

In each of the three organizations' campaigns, the crowdfunders use videos as a way to communicate the mission and accomplishments of the organization. In fact, these videos often highlight particular aspects of the mission that they deem particularly impressive. Yet by doing so, the videos end up serving as *discrepant rhetoric*. By discrepant rhetoric, I mean to suggest the videos surface a discordance between the existing laudable mission of the organizations and the need for funds. They tell the stories of mission accomplished, of lives changed, and tend to neglect messaging that communicates direct need. To put it plainly, after watching a video one might think, "Wow, this seems like a fab organization with an inspiring mission accomplishing great things. I'm glad they exist!" Rather than, "This is an organization with strong mission *potential* if only *I give* so that their mission can *become a reality*." Contrastingly, while the textual rhetoric of the pages also noted organization mission, the messaging did not lead to much discrepant rhetoric because it tended to emphasize the new possibilities that gifts might accomplish.

Concerning the text, the mission tended to be communicated less powerfully—e.g. with fewer stories, personal testimony, moving images—and the textual rhetoric of the pages listed suggested dollar amount for donations. Often, the text also listed what those donations might help accomplish, such as in the case of Wintergarden, “With a gift of $50, we can feed our neighbors at our free monthly community meal and host gatherings to get to know our neighbors better” (Andrews, “Feed More People”). The pages’ textual accounts of contributions made by supporters also gave the sense that a need existed, that they were filling it, and that they sought others to join them.

This discordant video rhetoric is both present in the sense of the videos in their totality, as well as in particular examples. In fact, each of the campaigns included a video with specific instances of such discordance. In one of Interwine’s campaign videos, Mike says, “The reality is we already have everything we need” (Rusert, *Intertwine: Generosity Page*). Mike’s intention was likely to bolster the sense that Intertwine was healthy, full of life, and rich in community. Yet, the statement undermines the expressed campaign need for monetary gifts. Similarly, in the Wintergarden video Devon leads a conversation among church members about their love of eating together and serving others through food ministry. One of the members, agreeing with the point that the congregation eats together more than most churches, makes the historical point, “We always have [eaten together] right from the beginning.” Devon responds, “And so I think we’re going to keep eating…and we’ll keep feeding. And not only will we fill people with a physical meal, but spiritually as well” (Devon Ducheneau). Devon’s agreement with the member subtly contradicts the invitational aim of the video. If they will continue to feed people—declarative statement—then a potential donor would reasonably wonder why more gifts are required. Finally, in the last crowdfunding-related video by Marthame, posted on the very last day of the aijcast fund drive, he notes they are (significantly) short of their goal, thanks those who have given, and says, “We have raised enough that we are going to start rolling out episodes today” (Sanders, *Last Day of Fundraising, First Day of Podcasting - YouTube*). This will likely not come as a surprise to followers of the campaign because in each previous video he has already shared a moving moment that surfaced during the taping of an episode. Each video gives a sense that the public dissemination of the stories/podcast is forthcoming definitively. Thus, again, the videos—and the final one in particular—present a discrepant rhetoric suggesting the mission is already being accomplished well, yet gifts are still required.

Assertion 2: Videos of Crowdfunders Rather than Potential Impact of Crowdfunding

In comparison with the textual rhetoric, the video messages contain a much more personal, relational style of communication. While the textual rhetoric tends to be informational with a matter-of-fact tone, the videos allow for personal storytelling in which the crowdfunding organizers share self-revealing reflections and affecting moments. The video presentations therefore provide for an invitation to give that displays the crowdfunder’s personality and invites the potential donor into a *sense of relationship* with the crowdfunder. A clear example of this is an Intertwine video posted on the day prior to Thanksgiving Day, the day Mike and others describe as the most popular day of the year for visiting bars. Mike invites the audience to drink less that evening and donate what would have been half their bar tab to Intertwine. This would benefit the organization, and he quips, also minimize hangovers and allow bar patrons to be in a better state of health to face the difficult conversations with families he expects will take place on Thanksgiving Day. Plus, they would feel the warm glow of giving. The video is in a style that Mike often uses—informal confessional selfie using what is likely a cellphone camera—and it receives over 650 views on Facebook. It feels hip, relational, personal, and timely. Yet, the video speaks very little, if at all, to anything the potential gifts might help accomplish. A potential donor viewing the video may feel connected to Mike, but unclear how a financial gift would do anything to change the organization of Intertwine.

This pattern of first person, relational invitations to give financially set after first-person revelations of significance to the crowdfunder is present across the campaigns. This invitational style, however, rarely includes an explicit connection to what the financial gifts would help accomplish. They do not clarify or quantify potential impact. The pages' textual rhetoric, in the references to dollar amounts of gifts and other financial connections, makes the potential impact of gifts clearer and more emphasized. At the extreme, these videos therefore allow for the sense of a viewer to reflect with a sense of, "Powerful story Mike/Devon/Marthame, and I'm glad it affected you and I feel more connected to you thanks to your testimony. Yet, if I click through and give $50, I'm still not totally sure what that money would do." Interestingly, I was not particularly aware of this difference in the midst of the campaigns, perhaps because we considered the crowdfunding page as a more holistic piece of rhetoric than thinking about it in parts. It is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to render a judgement as to the exact effects of such a video approach. Perhaps it is beneficial to build personal rapport via video and use specificities of gift accomplishments via text. The pattern, however, is clear: the textual mode of the crowdfunding pages emphasize potential impact of gifts while the crowdfunders use the video mode to deliver personal reflections that neglect strong connection to gift impact.

Assertion 3: Data Driven-Text, Community-Oriented Images

Much of the textual rhetoric of the pages served to deliver facts about the organizations that introduced their mission to the reader. These statements often included "About Us" descriptions with lists of organizational aims and statements that address commonly asked questions (e.g. for Intertwine, is this organization a church?; for aijcast, is my gift tax-deductible?). The textual descriptions stand in contrast to the images employed by the campaigns. The images tended to emphasize community and social connections with people. For example, aijcast images often consisted of art from the artists featured on the podcast. These images, such as CD covers, prints, and book covers, showed a connection to the community the podcast seeks to support. The image below (Figure 10) from the Wintergarden campaign serves as another example. Without a caption or textual description, the interpretation of the image is entirely left up to the viewer. In the context of the campaign, however, it serves to show the community that might be supported by gifts to the campaign. Encircled together, gathered round food, and smiling for the photographer, the unknown group gives a sense of togetherness and connection. The vast majority of still images used in the campaigns support a similar message—images featuring multiple people, gathered together in what looks like a common cause. The textual rhetoric functioned in an important way by giving the reader information about the organization that helped establish the basics—mission, context, status, etc. The images associated with the campaign then displayed what this mission looks like in practice. In doing so, the theme of community, connection, and togetherness were prominent.

Figure 10. Wintergarden Campaign Image: Community
Note. (Andrews, “Feed More People”)

Assertion 4: Invitation to Give Typology

The crowdfunding process itself creates a kairotic moment for giving. To an extent, therefore, everything related to the page is a type of invitation to give. After all, the point of a crowdfunding campaign is to ask for and receive financial gifts. The way this invitation is made, however, subtly differs according to mode (see also Assertion 2). In this typology, *invitational ask rhetoric* includes an ask that uses action verbs which invite the donor to give and/or directly connect how financial gifts lead to a stated action. On the other hand, *declarative ask rhetoric* uses statements about a perceived need or note that, indeed, a campaign in progress allows for gifts to be received. Declarative ask rhetoric is more subtle and indirect. It acknowledges the realities of the campaign without directly addressing the potential donor. In comparison, invitational ask rhetoric is stronger and more direct. It invites the audience to *do something* and connects a potential gift to a fairly specific outcome or impact. The chart below (Table 11) illustrates the different forms of invitations. **Generally, the invitations in text on the crowdfunding pages are much more likely to employ an *invitational ask rhetoric* while videos are more apt to employ *declarative ask rhetoric*.** Note, interestingly, that not all of the videos included in the campaigns include an invitation to give at all, though every campaign did include a video with some form of ask. Further, this typology relates to the language spoken in the videos and not the visual or other forms of rhetoric associated with the videography. As shown below, the typology is present across all three campaigns. In the left column, I have listed invitational ask rhetoric along declarative ask rhetoric on the right. Common occurrences or types found in the category are listed in *italics* with examples below. The parenthetical notations identify from which campaign the example is drawn.

Table 11. Invitation to Give Typology, Examples

Invitational Ask Rhetoric (Textual)	**Declarative Ask Rhetoric (Video)**
Action verb calling for money "Help us feed more people in Port Charlotte, Florida." (Andrews, "Feed More People") "Support us with a financial gift." (Intertwine, "Intertwine Campaign One") "Select your donation amount below." ("Aijcast/Fundraising") "Help fund the art, music, dialogues, and centering practices that help us embody what we're learning." (Intertwine, "Intertwine Campaign Two")	*Statement of giving fact or conditional phrase* "If you can contribute to support that, I would be grateful. Aijcast.com has all the information on how to make your tax-deductible donation" (Sanders, *Aijcast Update - YouTube*) "If you have been waiting to give, might I suggest not so much of the waiting and more so much of the giving." (Sanders, *Final 12 Days* 12) "We would like to feed more and more people each and every day in our community so that no one is hungry physically or spiritually." (Devon Ducheneau)
Language names specific dollar amounts and the impact/outcome of such a gift $20 "Hospitality Matters" "…Help us cover the cost of providing some sustenance at our gatherings, including the delicious and carbon-negative Tiny Footprint Coffee." (Intertwine, "Intertwine Campaign Two") "With a gift of $130, we can feed 125 people at the Homeless Coalition once a month." (Andrews, "Feed More People") "$250 will take care of our postage costs." ("Aijcast/Fundraising")	*General support statements and personal declarations* "I would love your support because I think the world is a scary place without places like this…" (Intertwine Northeast, *A World without Intertwine - Scary Thought*) "And that is why I think you should support Intertwine Northeast." (Intertwine Northeast, *Laura's Story*) "I hope you will partner with me in this endeavor, aijcast.com." (Sanders, *Aijcast: Art Heals - YouTube*) "We are making this ask of $10,000 because we want to grow it." (Intertwine, "Intertwine Campaign Two")

Interpretation of Results (RQ2)

Crowdfunding campaign pages employ multiple modes of communication. The genre anticipates a main video, images, textual descriptions of the organization, notations of where funds might go and how much is requested, as well as other rhetorical qualities such as bolding, color, responsiveness, etc. While not all of these qualities are able to be modified by crowdfunders, the main options of entering text, images, and videos are up to the discretion of the crowdfunder. My analysis finds differing qualities/foci of rhetoric depending on the different modes of communication.

Multimodal Theory

As Jody Shipka's work in multimodal theory suggests, composition is a process that works to identify and address communicative problems, a dynamic process of more than the sum of its parts. Interestingly, then, when the parts of crowdfunding campaigns are separated and analyzed by mode, dissimilarities become clear. Some—perhaps many—of these dissimilarities may be irrelevant to the fundraising-related outcomes of the campaigns. After all, Shipka's work reminds scholars to consider the *whole,* and for potential donors, it is likely that a consideration of the entire campaign message overcomes the particularities. Even so, however, particularities matter, especially when money is on the line. Notably, then, any rhetoric that might suggest mixed messages seems particularly important. The *discrepant rhetoric* found in the videos of these campaigns highlights the challenge of fundraising for an existing organization with an ongoing mission. The goals of the campaigns all served to continue the ongoing work of the organizations, essentially serving as additional dollars for general funding schemes. Logically, therefore, in the campaign videos crowdfunders highlighted the already-existing efforts and mission-related accomplishments of the organizations. This video rhetoric may have undermined the broader aims of the campaign. This discovery reveals the challenge of multimodal composition. Indeed, multimodal theories of composition expand the meaning further.

English professor and multimodal theory scholar Jody Shipka requires her composition students to address in a “Statement of Goals and Choices (SOGC)” how, why, and under what conditions students made their rhetorical selections (*Made Whole* 113). Shipka tries to surface “how the assortments of mediational means students employ in their work provide for, and take shape from, the tasks they encounter” (*Made Whole* 113–14). Crowdfunding page composition, of course, does not require SOGC of its authors. Perhaps, though, such reflections—or at least the detailed reflective consideration of how modes of communication interact with rhetorical choices—might have alerted the crowders to the discrepant nature of the videos.

Before I transition away from Shipka, however, I must also note another possibility. My working assumption of *discrepant rhetoric* (or my assertion that videos surface a discordance between the existing laudable mission of the organizations and their need for funds) is that *discrepant rhetoric* presents a conflict between the presumed *need* associated with a crowdfunding campaign and the story of mission already—and continuing to be—accomplished. Significantly, employing Shipka’s methodology might allow for the possibility of crowdfunders to claim **multiple goals for a single campaign**. In other words, the goal of a video might in fact be to claim no sense of need and instead affirm mission accomplishments. At the same time in another part of the single crowdfunding campaign, composers could claim somewhat different goals. Perhaps, for example, the text could emphasize a particular felt need of the organization. Images could have another separate goal—that of communicating organizational values or connections to a specific cultural location. Indeed the options are endless. As an act of fundraising rhetoric, I would argue that a strategy of largely consistent messaging communicating across all modes would prove most successful. The fact that the campaigns that were part of this study did not reach their fundraising goals may be used to support such an argument, though this fact is hardly convincing. Ultimately, this study's discovery of discrepant rhetoric highlights the danger—and opportunity—when multiple modes of crowdfunding pages employ different messages.

Genre Theory

In the earlier discussion of genre theory, I introduced the work of Gallagher, who building upon Arola, considers the extent to which a web-based template becomes part of the rhetorical situation for composers. Gallagher ultimately argues that one cannot extricate the template from the rhetorical situation. Instead, he concludes with an openness, claiming digital rhetorical situations "require constant attention. They are never solved, but in the process of being solved" (10). In other words, though "templates can be restrictive, they also present new possibilities for textual meaning" (10). In relation to this study, therefore, when fundraisers engage the rhetorical situation of crowdfunding, the template becomes folded into their rhetorical choices. Interestingly, several assertions above draw out distinctions between the modes of discourse present in the crowdfunding campaigns. These results raise the question as to what extent the template itself affected the crowdfunders' rhetorical choices. For example, assertion four finds that, generally, the invitations to give in the text of the pages are much more likely to employ *invitational ask rhetoric* while the videos are more likely to use *declarative ask rhetoric*. With Gallagher and Arola, it would seem possible, therefore, to make a connection between the templated restrictions and genre expectations of crowdfunding textual composition and the *invitational ask rhetoric* outcome. In other words, the template's participation in the rhetorical action of invitation seems to have affected the type of ask. Similarly, something about the video invitation—and, perhaps, the more open-ended nature of the video form—seems to have led to a more *declarative* stance. Even so, I choose this language cautiously aware that genre theorists appreciate the complexity of contemporary rhetorical acts, especially as such acts interact with our layered, ever-deepening digital realities. Though no crowdfunder claimed it specifically, it certainly may be the case that their life experiences witnessing and making face-to-face invitations to give in the setting of Christian worshiping communities affected the way they delivered their video invitations. In other words, just as the template provided form, so might have their life experiences. Indeed, these possibilities reflect Levinson and Yates' "bottom-up" approach to genre associations, making space for social realities and genre ecologies. When an ordained minister stands before a camera and invites a community to give, certainly the speaker may engage, consciously or unconsciously, other ecologies of religious giving invitations.

Similarly, issues of template and genre surface in regard to Assertion 4 above which found variant communication approaches to the text and images of the campaigns. While the images emphasized community and social connections, the textual rhetoric focused on more data-driven basics of the organizations, such as their mission, location, and status. Given Gallagher and Arola's work on web-based templates, it is reasonable to consider that the crowdfunding textual template may drive writers to a more data-driven informational approach. Similarly, the community and relational orientation of the images may be a function of the creativity allowed by the possibility to post any photo to the site. On the other hand, image selections may also have been driven by a sense of the genre—the notion that crowdfunding campaigns do best when they feel relational, for example. It seems as if these options/possibilities cannot be teased apart, at least Gallagher would concur. Yet, a further comment is warranted.

The caution of Arola's work—the one that Gallagher takes up—is the danger associated with composition when rhetorical decisions "become the invention of the template" (12). Arola calls for, therefore, ways to "change the shape of our students' discursive consciousness and rhetorical awareness" (12). While this caution is surely warranted, this study also raises the alternative possibility. Namely, *what if adhering to and being shaped by the crowdfunding template drives crowdfunders to more successful financial outcomes?* To use an extreme example to make a point, consider the notion that a mediocre fundraising pitch might become more persuasive—and raises more funds—when subjected to the templating of crowdfunding. What if, say, a blasé spoken request for a $500 kitchen sink repair for a non-profit might became a dazzling fundraising pitch when beset with the requirements of the crowdfunding template? In some ways, my PAR partners spoke to these possibilities when they all claimed that the act of crowdfunding helped hone their own understanding of both their organizational mission and fundraising goals. What remains unclear, however, is to what extent the *template* and/or *genre* factored into this deeper understanding process, or whether it was simply the process of *any* organized invitation to give.

Frustratingly, these possibilities are raised by the study, but not settled due to the nature of the research. Indeed, Gallagher himself allows for a necessary ongoing wondering. Yet it seems important to discover how genre and template affect an invitation to give. This study does not and cannot show *why* these invitations to give vary by mode, but it does show *that* and *how* they vary. It remains noteworthy that in a single genre—the crowdfunding page—invitations to give vary discernably.

“More Sophisticated Questions”

While this project has identified some specific findings shown above, it has also surfaced more questions. Indeed, as Herr and Anderson suggest, solid action research often leads to “more sophisticated questions” (107). In fact, some action researchers might question the findings above as inconsistent with the field. The multi-method nature of this study produced, logically, several sets of results. In this final results section, however, I unpack a set of questions related to crowdfunding and case statement rhetoric. Indeed, as Rainer Maria Rilke has put it, sometimes quandaries call for us to “be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the *questions themselves* [emphasis in original]” (31).

Christian Giving Rhetoric

There is a sense, amongst the praxis-oriented leaders in the field of Christian giving and stewardship, that the church is always behind the curve. Indeed, this sense is not misplaced. Presenters from the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving, the leading academic center on the study of U.S. religious giving, frequently cite the rise of charitable giving *beyond* the church amidst the struggles of church-related giving to tread water (Spas). Amidst this search for growth and relevancy, it is not surprising that religious giving leaders have their eye out for technological advancements in giving. A finding, then, as well as a more sophisticated question arises: **what factors are at play behind the initial excitement of religious organizations towards the potential of crowdfunding?** Interestingly, as shown above, a minority of groups initially curious about crowdfunding and other digitally-mediated campaigns actually followed through to launch. Yet, they initially showed great interest and sensed strong possibilities of the genre. Is this draw due to the pull of technology as providing the next great thing? Is this draw an outgrowth of lingering doubt or disappointment with their typical religious giving methods? Is this draw related to keeping up with the Joneses or, in this case, keeping up with the secular non-profits? Or, is this draw, more simply, just a longing for something, anything else? While this project does not tease out these possibilities, it does raise the topic. Note that, while these questions might have been claimed prior to the study, they now are imbued with more sophistication since the study shows the drop off in interest and follow-through as the process develops (see Figure 9. Explanatory Action Matrix).

Further, this question may be deepened by the possibilities suggested by Christian giving rhetoric. For example, Kerry Alys Robinson's assertion that stewardship include both current resources as well as the "potential at hand" gives Christian organizations an opportunity to see their work on secular fundraising platforms as deeply connected to their faith (34). Relatedly, I am aware that many of these crowdfunders have been shaped—consciously or not—by years of the lived experience of being part of fundraising (also called "stewardship") campaigns in their congregations. While these experiences did not rise to the surface in this study, they may certainly have been engaged by the crowdfunders on a more subconscious level. Relatedly, Henri Nouwen's work arguing for a ministry and/or spirituality of fundraising serves as an increasingly solid foundation for the actions of many Christian fundraisers. While it is difficult to know for certain, their openness to crowdfund may have been influenced by an embrace of Nouwen's approach to money and the church. For example, the crowdfunders expressed no worry that they might be judged by fellow Christians due to their campaigns. In fact, they embraced the work as consistent with their vocational understanding as Christian leaders.

These thoughts lead to another process-related question, one of a more rhetorical nature. As discussed above, the templated quality of the crowdfunding genre surely played a role in composition. My more sophisticated question now is this: **would inserting a sort of best**

practice religious giving template into the composition process bring about more compelling invitations and, thus, more successful campaigns? In other words, if templates affect rhetorical action, what would a pro-religious giving template look like? I tiptoed into working this question by engaging my PAR partners with a PowerPoint slide highlighting the elements of a "good" case statement for a capital appeal (see Ch 2 section "Genre Theory"). While I presented this slide as a helpful point of consideration as crowdfunders developed their campaigns, I did not refer back to it often once the campaign had been drafted. I sense a potential in developing a rhetorical heuristic for faith-related crowdfunding campaigns. Such a heuristic might include some of Brown's case statement qualities, such as the following questions: does this campaign ignite passion; does the campaign create a "zest" or surprising engagement; does this campaign lay out a plan? A rhetorical heuristic for faith-related crowdfunding might expand upon case statement theory, however, and also include the following qualities: do all the modes of a campaign make a clear ask of the audience; does the campaign convey a sense that it can only be completed with the help of crowdfunding; does the campaign explain "why now" and/or engage the kairotic moment, etc.? In my experience with crowdfunders, the composition process included a long period of ideation and struggle. Yet, there was no real measuring stick for rhetorical questions of religious giving other than completing the template itself and, perhaps, a sense of consistency with the crowdfunding genre. Such a religious giving rhetorical template could serve as a helpful sort of checkpoint in the composition process, inviting reflection and revision.

Next, in this action research study I sought to embrace a cooperative and co-learning approach with my partners, working with crowdfunding teams but not deciding for them. I remain under the impression, at least, that this posture was both ethical and appropriate given my relationship with the groups and the research itself. Yet, I certainly grant the possibility that my partners had concerns and opted not to share them with me or my Advisor/Primary Investigator whose contact information was listed in the IRB materials. This potential notwithstanding, this process raises the more complicated, sophisticated question: **how would an expert consultant with a high-touch, determinative role affect the outcomes and composition processes of faith-related crowdfunding campaigns?** My relationship to the teams embraced collaboration, co-learning, and mutual benefits. I provided rhetorical feedback, engaged in ongoing conversations with leaders, and provided resources to the crowdfunders. I refrained, however, from composing pages myself or using a heavy-handed approach to revisions. I did not direct or micromanage. This approach noted, other postures are certainly possible and might lead to more "successful" campaigns, at least financially. Such campaigns might not provide the other benefits, including deeper self-understanding of organizational mission. More specifically, to use a hypothetical personal example, upon completion of this project I could conceivably develop a business as a paid, contracted consultant to faith-related organizations pondering crowdfunding campaigns. Indeed, similar consultants exist in the secular crowdfunding space, as well as in the religious giving industry (especially related to capital campaigns). If I were to pursue such a vocation, giving the learnings from this project, I would likely employ a more directive approach to "partnership" with organizations. To be clear, I did not pursue this project with any such motives, nor do I currently have plans to pursue crowdfunding consultancy for profit, yet the possibilities—from a perspective of asking curious questions—presents deeper, more sophisticated wonderings.

Finally, this study's emphasis on faith-related giving and audience raises a more sophisticated question in relation to audience awareness and crowdfunding planning. One of the outcomes of the campaigns included new insights and a refocusing of crowdfunders on their previously-existing audiences. While the campaigns were undertaken with a hope to expand well beyond their normal set of donors, the process of crowdfunding led the campaign organizers to reassess their existing donor network. Thus, the question arises as to what successes might have been possible had the original campaigns been focused, primarily, on the existing community of the organizations. On the one hand, this focus may have convinced the leaders not to crowdfund at all and, instead, pursue another fundraising strategy. On the other hand, a focus on the existing donor pool might have somehow grabbed their attention in a surprising way and led to further gifts. The correct balance between existing and potential audience remains a vexing question for faith-related crowdfunders. Additionally, as a surprising finding notable for a project of rhetoric and composition, it is noteworthy that the process of crowdfunding let Wintergarden leadership to plan literacy efforts, educating their members on the use of social media.

To conclude, this study and its action research approach may raise other “more sophisticated questions” as well. The four above on tech excitement levels, templated heuristics, coaching vs. consulting, and audience strike me, however, as particularly compelling.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In the preceding pages I have positioned this study within the literature, described its multi-method approach, shared the case studies of four crowdfunding campaigns of three faith-related organizations, and discussed results from the employ of case study, qualitative coding, and action research analysis. Before I move to reflect on the research process in this conclusion, I will summarize the results.

My first research question focused on the planning, launching, and managing of faith-related campaigns as the crowdfunders considered their campaign's potential audience and existing supporters. Given that no crowdfunding campaign expanded their audience to the extent that they reached the campaign goal, it is noteworthy that all three *PAR partners described the crowdfunding experience as positive and embraced them as successful*. Successes included, particularly, the fact that *the crowdfunding process helped organizations clarify and claim their mission*. Upon completion of the process, crowdfunders felt a renewed sense of their fundraising messages and audience for the future. While they did not seek to rely on crowdfunding, the *experience of crowdfunding built a strong foundation for other forms of fundraising in the future*.

The process of working with nine organizations on crowdfunding campaign discernment led to the development of an Explanatory Action Matrix describing the process of composition from ideation to launch to post-campaign reflections. The matrix noted that many organizations who desire to crowdfund notably struggle with the process, particularly in the area of deciding an appropriate campaign topic. This process identified new realities including:

- **audience paradox:** a concept noting that while crowdfunders sought to crowdfund partly on the basis that the mechanism would expand their audience of would-be donors, the actual experience of crowdfunding highlighted the import of their known, already-existing donor relationships.

- **Hidden friction:** though potential crowdfunders are drawn to the technology due to its perceived ease of use and smooth support of the fundraising process, the actual experience of pursuing crowdfunding surfaced significant underestimated challenges.

My second research question considered the rhetorical possibilities present in the multimodal nature of the crowdfunding pages themselves. I asked: *As faith-related crowdfunders launch and manage their campaign's and the related public messaging, what is the nature of their use of the multimodal, rhetorical possibilities of the crowdfunding genre?* The analytical process led to four key assertions:

1. **The Discrepant Rhetoric of Mission *Already* Accomplished**: crowdfunding videos suggested a discordance given the advertised need for funds alongside messaging noting mission already being sufficiently accomplished.
2. **Videos highlight *crowdfunders* rather than potential *impact* of crowdfunding**: the campaign videos contained more personal, relational messaging with crowdfunders themselves compared to the largely textual rhetoric that emphasized data, such as dollar figures and what, specifically, potential gifts would accomplish.
3. **Data-driven text, community-driven images**: the textual descriptions of the pages delivered a just-the-facts approach to the organizations and campaigns while campaign images emphasized community and social connections with people.
4. **Invitation to give typology**: generally, the invitations in the text on the crowdfunding pages are much more likely to employ what I classified as *invitational ask rhetoric* while the videos are more apt to employ *declarative ask rhetoric.* The former includes

action verbs inviting the donor, directly, to give and accomplish the mission. The latter is more subtle, indirectly acknowledging a campaign is occurring without addressing outcome.

Finally, embracing the possibility of action research leading to “more sophistical questions,” I raised several new, deeper questions arising from the study:

- What factors are at play behind the initial excitement of religious organizations towards the potential of crowdfunding?
- Would inserting a sort of best practice religious giving template into the composition process bring about more compelling invitations and, thus, more successful campaigns?
- How would an expert consultant with a high-touch, determinative role affect the outcomes and composition processes of faith-related crowdfunding campaigns?
- How might a focus on an organization’s existing audience support campaign effectiveness?

With these findings in mind, I now turn to the final task of considering the effects of action research and the questions the study poses for the future.

Assessing Effects of Action Research

To date, no other published crowdfunding studies have followed faith-related crowdfunders as they plan, compose, and launch their crowdfunding campaigns. The novel nature of this study, accordingly, presents a set of ethical challenges requiring reflection. First, we must note that action research readily acknowledges and invites engagement with a researcher’s bias. Herr and Anderson write, “As researchers we acknowledge that we all enter research with a perspective drawn from our own unique experiences, and so we articulate to the best of our ability these perspectives or biases and build a critical reflexivity into the research process" (73). Into my research process, therefore, I built in the practice of regularly writing analytic memos reflecting upon my own engagement with the research task. One bias I claimed and reflected upon throughout was my deep sense of wanting to avoid pushing crowdfunders to launch out of some sense of obligation to me and my research. Thankfully, one aspect of the study that alleviated these concerns somewhat was my practice of seeking out partners. At the outset of the study, I had anticipated perhaps needing to conduct a marketing campaign across the church to find potential partners. Thankfully, though, the action research partners arose organically through existing network relationships. Even so, this reality also presented the potential challenge of conducting research—even research focused on partnership—with existing colleagues and friends. I therefore proceeded with care, repeatedly explaining along the way that there was "no pressure" to crowdfund on my account. In a strange way I am heartened by the fact that only three of the nine potential PAR partners launched campaigns. This relatively small number of final follow-through cases may suggest I did not present any undue pressure on crowdfunders to launch. Even so, I acknowledge and claim the significant hopes I possessed to see at least some projects launch.

In addition to bias, action researchers must navigate their positionality. My position in relation to my action partners is multilayered and, given the longitude of the study, ever changing. Generally, I considered myself an insider in relationship to the organizations and partners, given our previous relationships. I shared insider status as a fellow Christian leader with the leaders in the organizations. Further, I also donated small monetary gifts to each of the campaigns, further cementing my status as an insider partner. Yet, in other ways I function(ed) as an outsider. For example, I listen to aijcast occasionally, but not often. I hang out in professional settings with Mike of Intertwine every few months and engage beyond our crowdfunding partnership, yet I am not an active member of the Intertwine community. I connect with Devon of Wintergarden from time to time on Facebook and see her at conferences, but I have never been to visit the congregation in person. One effect, interestingly, of this research together is that I feel a deeper bond with all three crowdfunders who launched campaigns. Indeed, the time we spent working together on the campaigns helped connect us further, and I do feel a stronger friendship with Devon, Mike, and Marthame. A related danger, therefore, would be the disruption of my relationship with any of the crowdfunding partners who decided not to launch campaigns. Thankfully, I do not sense any sort of awkwardness. Yet, it is certainly possible that my perception, given my limited self-knowledge, is off base.

Relatedly, the Research Covenant I used with my action partners served to mitigate potential deleterious effects of the research. In the covenant I clarified my goals and expectations of the action research relationship. I sensed that the covenant, and its non-scientific prose (e.g. I covenant to "as your partner, serve you with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love") helped to foster a feeling of mutual respect, collegiality, and good humor (Appendix A). Further, the language of "covenant" itself draws from a tradition of Christian rhetoric. Interestingly, crowdfunders did not mention the covenant later in the research process. In fact, the reality that I was conducting research came up fairly rarely, perhaps indicating the crowdfunders understood me to be functioning more as a partner and co-learner than a disconnected researcher. Additionally, the Research Covenant pushed me to "orient my work, and the ultimate dissemination of my research, towards social justice" (Appendix A). I also covenanted to work towards the success of the campaigns. Upon completing the data analysis, I now have a fuller understanding of where I may have partnered with a more hands-on approach. For example, while I did not sense the full extent of the discrepant rhetoric at the time of launch, I now appreciate how videos with a more not-yet-approach might have served the campaign goals more effectively. Yet, looking back, this also highlights the fact that I was not involved in the practicalities of script writing. To sum up, I feel comfortable with my PAR approach—and appreciate how the Research Covenant framed the process—even as I also lift up areas for improvement, especially with the hindsight of this writing project.

Further, while such supportive aims were always undergirding my research, I admit that in the day-in-day-out research processes I, in moments, could get more caught up in the nitty-gritty of research steps than a sense that I was helping to support social justice. I most sensed this tension during the process of coding. As I worked for multiple days in my home office with my laptop, documents, memos, folders, and white board, it felt difficult to feel a sense of connection between that important work of data analysis and the social justice aims of my PAR partnerships. Upon reflection later, I now see how the assertions developed from the coding and memoing process did indeed lead to helpful conclusions for my faith-related crowdfunding leadership/partnerships. And, in the future, I hope to keep these connections more front of mind as I research. Similarly, it was more difficult to keep these aims of social justice prominent in my consciousness during the writing of this manuscript. While this writing process, most definitely, is in support of the larger quest for crowdfunding knowledge and may have a tiny but positive benefit to other faith-related crowdfunders down the line, I found it challenging to associate every research, writing, and revision step with these efforts. Even so, the covenant—especially its calls for a broader, deeper research orientation than merely finishing my degree—helped to orient my work towards a greater north star than a mere dissertation composition process.

Finally, I feel called to reflect on action research effects with a blunter instrument, namely the simple question: *was I any help?* Or, put another way, did my partnership with the crowdfunders lead to positive crowdfunding outcomes beyond any potential research benefits. My sense, squarely, is that my partnership with the funders led to beneficial financial effects. Indeed, my continuous reflection upon my intended ethical stance through the project required such an orientation and, had it ever changed, I would have immediately shifted my practices. Yet, I must also acknowledge there is no way to test and/or confirm these sensibilities. Practically, I note that no action partner reached out to the contacts (e.g. advisor Kevin Brooks) provided in the IRB initial description of the study. No partner approached me with concerns about any unhelpful or unsupportive actions on my part. I believe our relational trust was strong enough to invite such a conversation had the crowdfunders sought one. Of course, I may have misread the situation. And if so, I would have been the last to realize it. While one can never be certain of the extent to which my engagement supported positive outcomes and prevented negative ones, I can at least rest in the general sense that crowdfunders reported their experiences crowdfunding as beneficial undertakings. While they did not hit their funding goals, together they raised nearly $18,000 from the campaign pages and over $36,000 in associated/adjacent campaign-related appeals. Money is a dangerous metric, but echoing Devon, that’s $36,000 more than nothing.

Generalizability, Transferability, and Limitations of the Study

Traditional notions of generalizability sought by positivist researchers do not fit action research well, so I must first clarify appropriate categories and understandings. Generalizability, sometimes referred to as external validity, addresses how research conclusions may be transferred to settings other than the study itself. Such notions have been challenged by action researchers because they may deemphasize or delegitimize the experience of the action research partner. Herr and Anderson, for example, lift up Robert Stake's notion of "naturalistic generalization" that emphasizes the "*direct* and *vicarious experience*" of participants (76). Swantz puts it more directly, "Practice verifies the success of action research and for the practitioner successful action suffices as criteria" (Swantz 43). Interestingly, when action research scholar Heinz Moser was invited to critique a famous long-term action research study, he developed a unique set of criteria for assessing validity: *transparency*, "which meant that all the participants were able to trace the whole process of PAR;" *compatibility* of aims, methods, and means; and finally that "the participant researcher should be able to claim that she knows the situation better than does any outside observer and that she has honestly set forth all the aspects she had become aware of" (Swantz 43). In the action research tradition, then, I must emphasize the positive outcomes claimed by the participants as sufficient and privilege their experience.

Clearly, the aims of this study were not to engage with a statistically relevant sample so that I might make claims about the general population. Instead, as Luker puts it, while I "cannot generalize *statistically*, I think we can generalize *logically*" (44). Logical generalizations in this case would emphasize the fact that this study was limited to engagement with nine organizations in total, eventually partnering with three who launched campaigns. All conclusions were built upon the use of replication logic, analyzing across all cases rather than cherry-picking any single experience. Commonalities of the three crowdfunding cases included their Christian faith orientation, their relatively small organization size, and that all campaigns engaged with their existing mission. It seems logical, therefore, that many of the conclusions reached may bear some similarity to campaigns of like organizations. That possibility, however, is not quite the point of action research. Indeed, the aims include development of "local knowledge" and embracing the hopes of the participants. Notably, my interventions also were aimed to support the teams. Along the way, I surely alerted them to realities that they may not have noticed otherwise, but my biases may also have blinded them to other possibilities.

Finally, to state a further audience-related reflection, I am aware that the audience of this dissertation is the academy, not future faith-related crowdfunders. But as I wrap-up the project, I am also drawn to ponder another audience, namely my partners in this research and potential faith-related crowdfunders in the future. Given my PAR framework, these feelings seem important to note. Considering for a moment, then, the social justice orientation of action research how *might* this study suggest transferable, actionable takeaways for crowdfunders? First, the Explanatory Action Matrix engages the entire process. The struggles it highlights, as well as the campaign outcomes noted, may be helpful for crowdfunders to consider. Second, an awareness of several of the assertions claimed may lead to more successful campaigns. For example, crowdfunders may seek to avoid discrepant rhetoric in their videos. More broadly, knowledge of discrepant rhetoric may push crowdfunders to pursue campaigns less aligned with existing work supported by regular operation funds. Third, the "more sophisticated questions" raised above may give potential crowdfunders opportunities for future experimentation. They may opt, for example, to engage a crowdfunding coach with a more high-touch approach. To summarize, while the audience of this project is not faith-related crowdfunders, it certainly should be noted that the academic style somewhat limits the potential positive effect of this study for future crowdfunders. Overall, the study is notedly limited, yet at the same time it contains significant potential for future crowdfunding scholarship and action.

Questions for Future Research

As an action researcher, the process of asking questions becomes a welcome refrain. How is my bias showing? Should I speak or stay quiet? Is it appropriate to intervene here? In which memo did I discover what? These questions are part and parcel of the practice. They also lead to further, richer questions of the field.

This study is among the first to journey with crowdfunders as they contemplate launching a campaign. This ideation is often behind-the-scenes and out of the sights of researchers. Yet, this study only focused upon, particularly, campaigns of faith-related organizations seeking donation-based campaigns. This raises the question for future researchers about similarities or differences in the practices of secular social justice organizations or, more broadly, other types of crowdfunding campaigns such as rewards-based models by for-profit entities.

Among the "more sophisticated questions" raised by this study, one considers the potential of a template or guide to help crowdfunders navigate the rhetorical process of developing their page. Indeed, I wonder how such a template might support rhetorical actions that alleviate some of the potentially unpersuasive aspects of campaigns. Future investigation and experimentation into this concept may potentially find ways that use of a template might facilitate crowdfunding best practices. But, what might those best practices be?

Further, as highlighted in Chapter 2, the field of circulation studies is beginning to expand traditional ways of teaching composition practices. Crowdfunding pages which, by their very nature, are meant to move through digital spaces provide rich potential for study. While this study found that organizers did not explicitly consider textual circulation as part of their composition practices, the crowdfunding pages—and the social media campaigns associated with them—certainly provide ample fodder for future circulation study considerations. Indeed, the fact that composers did not lift up circulation awareness as integral to their campaigns is noteworthy in itself. These questions may push study of crowdfunders' social media clout before launching a campaign. Are campaigns of fledgling organizations significantly hindered if they launch with few existing followers on social media platforms?

Finally, this study engaged the rhetorical notion of audience awareness throughout, particularly as crowdfunders imagined potential audiences beyond their existing networks. While the experience of crowdfunding led the organizations to refocus upon their existing relationships, I did not engage in any research with potential donors. Indeed, most crowdfunding scholarship analyzes pages by considering what *gifts were given* rather than connecting with the givers (or would-be givers) themselves. Further, though, this study raises the question of how audiences beyond crowdfunders' existing networks experienced these campaigns. We know they were not moved to give, but how if at all were they moved? Are there rhetorical possibilities that might help move them closer to giving?

Indeed, questions remain. Asking people for money is an ancient practice. Comparatively, digital crowdfunding is a relatively young, growing industry, that now empowers both fundraising frustrations and moving generosity. As organizations continue their crowdfunding for a cause, may they find willing donors, share moving stories, and facilitate just action for all.

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APPENDIX A: RESEARCH LETTER & COVENANT

NDSU **North Dakota State University**
Department of English: Rhetoric, Writing & Culture
Minard Hall
NDSU Dept. 2320
PO Box 6050
Fargo, ND 58108-6050
701.231.7147

Crowdfunding for a Cause

Dear Crowdfunding Team Member,

My name is Adam Copeland. I am a graduate student in *English: Rhetoric, Writing and Culture* at North Dakota State University (NDSU), and I am conducting a research project to better understand how leaders in congregations and/or non-profit organizations develop, launch, and complete digital crowdfunding campaigns. It is our hope that with this research we will learn more about how group practices and rhetorical decisions associated with faith-motived crowdfunding develop and succeed.

Because you are considering working with a congregation or non-profit on a crowdfunding campaign, you are invited to participate in this research project. You will be one of approximately 100 people joining in the participatory action research for this study. To view my approach to this research conducted in a spirit of partnership and co-learning, see the attached research covenant.

You may find it interesting and thought provoking to participate in the research process. If, however, you feel uncomfortable in any way during any session, you have the right to decline to participate, or to end the research process.

Some of our work together may be audio recorded. We will keep private all research records that identify you. When any research is transcribed, you will be given a pseudonym, and other potentially identifying information will be left out of the transcripts. In any written documents (including publications) regarding the study, only the pseudonym will be used.

Audio files will be stored in a password protected file on a computer that is only accessible to the principal investigator and co-investigators. Electronic copies of the interview transcripts will be saved and protected in the same fashion. After the data has been analyzed, the audio recordings will be deleted.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at 701-317-0567 and adam.copeland@ndsu.edu or contact my advisor at NDSU, Dr. Kevin Brooks, 701-231-7174, kevin.brooks@ndsu.edu.

You have rights as a research participant. If you have questions about your rights or complaints about this research, you may talk to me, my advisor, or contact the **NDSU Human Research Protection Program** at 701.231.8995, toll-free at 1-855-800-6717, by email at ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu, or by mail at: NDSU HRPP Office, NDSU Dept. 4000, P.O. Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050.

Thank you for your taking part in this participatory action research. If you wish to receive a copy of the results, please be in touch with me.

Crowdfunding for a Cause | Research Covenant

As a researcher, I (Adam J. Copeland) covenant to:

- Work *with* you and be present and available in the co-learning process as often as I can
- Never view you as objects of study, but as fellow collaborators and co-generators of knowledge
- Treat you with respect, approach our partnership with an ethical stance, and strive always to be worthy of your trust
- Ask good questions, model curiosity, and embody good humor
- Share my knowledge, research, and opinions about crowdfunding with you so that we might discover more together
- As your partner, serve you with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love
- Orient my work, and the ultimate dissemination of my research, towards social justice
- Do my part to support the success of your crowdfunding project

As a partner and participant in this participatory action research, I/we covenant to:

- Treat the team with respect, working together for the good of the whole
- Work alongside Adam, partnering with him as a co-learner, collaborator, and curious crowdfunding researcher
- Serve with good humor and an open spirit
- Share any concerns about the process with the team leader
- Do my part to support the success of our crowdfunding project

APPENDIX B: CASE STUDIES QUESTION-AND-ANSWER NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Case Study

Overview

What is the organization?

What was the crowdfunding goal? Was it reached? Are other metrics important and/or available?

How was the organization and/or leader recruited for PAR?

Composition Practices

How was the platform, topic, and goal of the campaign selected?

Who participated in the composition process? What were their roles?

How did the campaign launch and what communication practices were employed after launch?

How did the campaign approach audience and/or audience awareness?

Outcomes and Participant Reflections

How did the crowdfunders assess their completed campaign?

APPENDIX C: EXAMPLE OF IMAGE CODING STRATEGY

Figure C1. Question Mark
Note: (Intertwine, “Intertwine Campaign One”)

A group of around 20 mostly young adults stands outside in a rough circle around an artistic-seeming question mark set on the grass in the midst of them. The place itself is non-descript, but may be in an urban area due to the streetscape in the background. One person seems to be speaking (we know it’s Mike) and the others are listening, contemplating together, most with their back to the camera. Coloration is bright with shadows appearing on the grass. It looks like they are, literally, “gathering around questions” as Intertwine claims in their MISSION often. Suggests strong pull of COMMUNITY and also working through issues/questions together.

My caption for this picture: We *really* gather around questions.

APPENDIX D: EXAMPLE OF VIDEO CODING STRATEGY

Aijcast Video 3 – Art heals (Mar 28, 2017)

The camera—probably a laptop camera—captures Marthame's face at the center of the frame. He seems to be in a home office with religious art on the walls in the background behind him. He's dressed casually wearing a blue t-shirt. The announcement-style video alerts to the fact that the fundraising campaign is winding down and the podcast is about to launch. He shares THANKS to those who gave. He notes, subtly, that one can go to the website to give (INVITATION TO GIVE). Then launches into a STORY of an artist featured on the show. The story is billed as a "taste" of the MISSION of aijcast. Marthame invites watchers to "partner" with him in the endeavor after sharing the story of the PERSON/LEADER/PARTNER featured in an upcoming show. He ends with his usual refrain to create beauty of our own. The video goes by quickly and is an easy watch. I get a sense of Marthame's personality, though I'm not totally drawn in by the rhetoric somehow. The STORY is helpful yet feels almost put-on. Even so, it does communicate a sort of momentum to the project.

My caption for the video: Give because time is running out.