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Abstract

New collaborative contexts like open platforms represent a growing area in which the institutions are questioned and, in some cases, challenged (de-institutionalized) as part of a process that drives market innovation, allowing for ecosystem self-adjustment. This research investigates the underlying processes of change and evolution linked to innovation in the arts crowdfunding ecosystem context from an institutional point of view and connects the de-institutionalization process with the capability of a system to rely on the actors to make it possible for the ecosystem to evolve and create new institutions as a result of the interplay and institutional work. This paper addresses a gap in innovation emergence in service ecosystems, shedding light on the role of the de-institutionalization process as a path for inducing disruption relying on actors' co-creation to make the system adjust and evolve through the emergence of new network practices.

Keywords	institutions, multi-sided platforms, innovation ecosystems, crowdfunding
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Introduction

The open innovation perspective proposed by Chesborough (2003) has triggered the emergence of new theoretical approaches to marketing theory. These approaches can address the increasingly complex entrepreneurial reality, in which platform business models are growing with heterogeneous structures (Fehrer et al., 2018; Srinivasan, 2021). In this context, service-dominant (SD) logic provides a theoretical framework to explain new, ever-evolving business models and thereby to make theoretical and empirical contributions that are adapted to these contexts, in which the rules of both players and markets have changed (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). From this perspective, institutions emerge as providing the fundamental rules or mechanisms of social order that govern the behavior of individuals within a community, and that form a key strategic factor for new business models, such as open platforms (Gonçalves, 2021; Zahra et al., 2023).

Recent research has highlighted the increasing importance of the blurring roles of actors from a processual perspective (Koskela-Huotari & Siltaloppi, 2020; Wieland et al., 2016), exchanging resources through interactions among players to make systems evolve (Fehrer et al., 2020; Hague et al., 2013). The current paper focuses on the important role of de-institutionalization, which is rooted in engaged multi-actors' work that results in rule-breaking through networking practices. In turn, such networking practices provoke processes that are necessary to make innovation emerge and ecosystems evolve and self-adjust, and prepare the path for co-creating new institutions and temporary renewed system equilibrium. Poepelbuss et al. (2024) referred to this process as "smart service innovation," and highlighted the recent call for research on this topic (Gustafsson et al., 2020; Vink et al., 2021). We study this phenomenon in the context of open multi-sided platform ecosystems, since these ecosystems meet the conditions for institutional work to take place (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Peters, 2016) and provide the context for institutions to evolve (Greenwood et al., 2017) due to their high degree of plasticity (Chandler et al., 2019; Fehrer & Nenonen, 2020; Fehrer et al., 2018; Medina-Molina et al., 2019; Nenonen, 2014; Zardini et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2024). Open platforms provide a more flexible space where non-institutionalized practices can evolve according to the requirements of the actors, making innovation possible as a result of engaged actors' work (Aksom, 2021; Skalen & Gummerus, 2023). We aim to respond to the following research question:

How do actors in open platforms trigger de-institutionalization challenges that result in network practices' innovation?

In seeking to answer this question, we develop a qualitative case study and use an inductive research approach, using the Gioia methodology (Gioia, 2013, 2021; Gummeson, 2017). The research context comprises an arts crowdfunding ecosystem, which exemplifies a service ecosystem due to its characteristics of inherent co-

production, exchange of service offerings, and value co-creation among diverse actors including artists, consumers, and investors. This context allows for the exploration of how interactions facilitate innovation and strengthen emotional bonds, making it a rich application scenario for studying ecosystems (Quero et al., 2017). The case study focuses on the well-known arts open platform Patreon, which is an exemplar in its category (Bonifacio et al., 2021; Regner, 2021). Innovative platforms can challenge normative and cognitive institutions (Edvardsson et al., 2014; Scott, 2008), thus affecting organizations and developing innovative network practices as a result of actors' work (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020). Open multi-sided network platforms (Fehrer et al., 2018; Quero & Mele, 2022) provide the context for the continuous enactment of new practices relying on institutions' changes and networks of actors working in ecosystems (Klimas & Czakon, 2022; Skalen & Gummerus, 2022). Such platforms are jointly responsible for the de-institutionalization process, as well as the subsequent creation of new institutions (Giesler, 2008; Giesler & Fisher, 2017).

The theoretical framework of this research is SD logic, due to its capability to understand complex contexts characterized by a continuous process of change and evolution (Akaka et al., 2021; Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Vargo et al., 2023). While recently the role of institutions has had a growing leadership role in service literature (Edvardsson et al., 2014; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020; Koskela-Huotari & Vargo, 2016; Vargo et al., 2016; Wieland et al., 2016), the role of de-institutionalization has not received sufficient recognition to date (Fehrer et al., 2020; Quero et al., 2020). The present research thus represents a contribution framed on the eleventh fundamental premise of SD logic and its institutional and ecosystem framework (Vargo et al., 2022) by shedding light on the de-institutionalization process in connection with system evolution and innovation. The paper introduces exploratory research propositions to guide the investigation. These propositions are not rigid hypotheses, but serve as sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954) that help frame our inquiry. They are flexible and evolve as insights from the grounded theory approach emerge, aligning with the inductive methodology.

We start with the theoretical approach, that considers the role of de-institutionalization in connection with the role of actors as disruptors in open platforms and sheds light on the influence of de-institutionalization on value co-creation in the platform business models and networking practices that arise as the natural way to make this institutional work visible. Then, the research process and the Gioia methodology, as the appropriate driver to connect qualitative data with the theoretical approach, are described. Next, the results are explained and findings together with contributions to theory and practice are discussed. Finally, the paper concludes with comments on limitations and future research.

Theoretical frame

Literature review process

To ensure comprehensive coverage of the relevant literature, a literature review was conducted. The review process followed a systematic approach to ensure transparency and rigor (Grewal et al., 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The search was conducted using the academic databases Web of Science and Scopus. The search terms included combinations of “de-institutionalization,” “institutionalization,” “innovation ecosystems,” “crowdfunding,” and “platform ecosystems.” These terms were selected based on their relevance to the research question and the theoretical framework of the study.

Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles published between 1990 and August 2024 that examined de-institutionalization processes, platform ecosystems, and institutional work. Studies were excluded if they did not explicitly link institutional change with innovation, or if they focused solely on technical aspects of platforms.

The search continued until data saturation was reached; this was defined as the point at which no new themes emerged from the articles reviewed. In total, 55 articles were initially identified; after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 32 were selected for final analysis.

The researchers coded the articles using NVivo software to ensure a systematic and reliable analysis. This process provided the foundation for deriving the key concepts and theoretical insights discussed in the manuscript.

De-institutionalization

Since the early 1990s, institutional theory has gained momentum in the social sciences, mainly in organizational, sociological, and service research literature (Aksom, 2021; Currie & Swanson, 2009; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020). A recent body of work has brought together the concepts of institutionalization and de-institutionalization, and highlighted the need for research on not only stability or change, but the process involved in moving from one to the other (Haak et al., 2020; Polese et al., 2021; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

De-institutionalization is a complex process in which established institutions (i.e., norms, rules, practices) within the ecosystem begin to erode or lose legitimacy, providing space for innovation (i.e., new practices, new institutional arrangements). This process is vital in understanding how markets and systems evolve. The erosion of institutionalized practices can occur when they lose their original meaning, are displaced by new practices, or face challenges that undermine their foundational pillars. De-institutionalization thus plays a dual role: it impacts on the stability of existing institutions while simultaneously paving the way for the emergence of new practices and innovations.

Understanding de-institutionalization requires in-depth exploration of its various forms and the conditions that leads to its occurrence. For example, cognitive, normative, or regulatory changes within an ecosystem can initiate shifts, disrupting traditional practices and facilitating the creation of new institutional form. This disruption, often

referred as “institutional work,” involves actors actively engaging in the process of breaking, maintaining, or altering existing norms. Moreover, de-institutionalization is inherently linked to broader processes of “institutional change” and “institutional disruption,” which involve the interplay of actors in a dynamic, ongoing struggle to reshape the ecosystem.

Before delving further into the mechanisms and implications of de-institutionalization, it is important to synthesize key conceptualizations from literature. Table 1 provides an overview of these conceptualizations, including the notions of institutional erosion, disruption, and phase transition, and highlights their relevance to this research. By compiling these definitions, the table serves as a foundation for analyzing how open platform ecosystems evolve through the active work of their actors.

The scope of mapping the concepts in Table 1 was defined through a rigorous and systematic process: first, we conducted an extensive literature review, encompassing seminal works, recent studies, and key theoretical contributions. The framework development was then based on these theoretical foundations. We collected new works until saturation was reached and no new information emerged. At this point, we considered the process to be complete.

Table 1: Conceptualizations for de-institutionalization/disruption and its process

Concept	Main ideas giving value to the concept	Literature
De-institutionalization	Erosion of practices.	Oliver (1992, p. 563)
	Delegitimizing of practices.	Oliver (1992, p. 564)
	Changes because practices lose their original meaning.	Maguire and Hardy (2009, p. 150)
	New practices displace new ones or are abandoned.	Davis et al. (1994, p. 549)
	Pillars that once held practices in place lose “their grip”.	Ahmadijan and Robinson (2001)
	“De-institutionalization and institutionalization form the two versions of lifecycles in which practices emerge and erode, and form a broader conceptual picture to understand institutional change”.	Haak et al. (2020, p. 255)
Institutional disruption	“Attacking or undermining the mechanisms that lead members to comply with institutions”.	Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 235)
Institutional work	Breaking rules as a result of purposive action.	Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 215)
	We invite examinations of all manner of institutional work – maintenance and reproduction, creation and change, disruption and de-institutionalization.	Creed, Taylor and Hudson (2020, p. 430).
Institutional change	Changes in institutions result from the enactment of practices developed by actor’s with different positions in the network.	Wieland et al. (2016, p. 218)
Inhabited institution’s approach	“This constitutes a key opportunity for service scholars to better understand how actors can build reflexivity to enable institutional change in service organizations and other collectives”.	Koskela-Huotari et al. (2020, p. 393)
Phase transition	“A phase transition of a service ecosystem is a large-scale step change which occurs when external environmental disturbances and internal interactions dislodge the ecosystem from a state of stability, into de-institutionalization and then re-institutionalization, when it then achieves a new stable state. The new state is characterized by the emergence of new institutional arrangements and value that provide order and organization to the interactions of the service ecosystem”.	Polese et al. (2021, p. 29)

Building on theory, and combining Scott's (1987, 1995, 2008) institutionalization approach with neo-institutional approaches developed with reference to SD logic (Gonçales & Silva, 2021; Edvardsson et al., 2014; Edvardsson et al., 2018; Vargo & Lusch, 2016) and institutional work (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), this paper conceptualizes de-institutionalization as *changes that take place in regulative, normative, and/or cognitive institutions that enable the enactment of practices of a wide array of actors in an ecosystem, resulting in the disruption of original institutions and the creation of new ones*. De-institutionalization is framed from a systemic perspective (Chandler et al., 2019; Edvardsson et al., 2018; Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Recent literature has focused on de-institutionalization as part of a general process related to an emergence and phase transition and has called for research to provide theoretical and empirical support on this topic (Aksom, 2020; Polese et al., 2021; Sarno et al., 2024). From this perspective, the de-institutionalization process is not merely the breakdown of established practices, but a pivotal mechanism for driving ecosystem evolution and fostering innovation. Table 1 anchors this understanding by compiling relevant conceptualizations, allowing us to explore the ways in which de-institutionalization influences the emergence of new practices within platform ecosystems.

Actors as disruptors in open platforms

There is a growing demand for research about open platform business models and how institutions change, making the systems evolve, according to their growing presence (Edvardsson et al., 2014; Scaringella & Raziwon, 2018; Srinivasan, 2021). Van Alstyne et al. (2016, p. 55) highlighted how “platform business bring together producers and consumers in high value exchanges.” According to Fehrer et al. (2018, p.552), “platforms function as market intermediaries and enable connection of various user groups which provide each other with network benefits. Platforms facilitate direct interactions between two (or more) distinct types of affiliated actors.” From the SD logic perspective, the processual view of actors (as opposed to the traditional static view) “replaces the centrality of the producer and customer roles predominating in the service literature with systemic view of interlinked, resource integrating actors engaged in collaborative value creation” (Koskela-Huotari & Siltaloppi, 2020, p. 438). According to the institutional perspective developed in this paper, institutions are considered “the keys to understanding human systems and social activity, such as value co-creation” (Vargo & Lush, 2016, p. 11) and in the context of a service ecosystem they are considered “the glue that enables and constrains value co-creation within the social systems” (Wieland et al., 2016). The de-institutionalization proposal will attract actors willing to collaborate in the solution, offering new institutions. From this perspective, in open contexts like platform business models, actors (i.e., owners, providers, producers, and consumers) have the capability to act as disruptors and propose changes to the system's institutions and enable phase transition or emergence to take place as a result (Polese et al., 2021). Our review of the

literature covering the agency of actors in open platform ecosystems leads to the first exploratory research proposition (ERP):

ERP 1. *Any actor in an open platform ecosystem may identify a system failure and initiate de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization efforts to achieve stability.*

Recent literature has highlighted the need to for research on the importance of institutions in ecosystems, particularly using an SD logic approach (Gonçalves, 2021; Vargo et al., 2023). Platform business models offer new and varied ways of connecting several actors simultaneously (Fehrer et al., 2018; Srinivasan, 2021), and research into each actor's individual and collective agency in connection with institutions is urgently needed (Ferreira et al., 2015; Haack et al., 2019).

De-institutionalization and value co-creation in platform business models

The development of the concept and content of the platform business model in the literature has not received the recognition appropriate to its growing presence in markets. Framed on the sharing economy side, Hamari et al. (2016, p. 2048) referred to such platforms as “peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services,” while Michalke et al. (2022) considered them “engagement platforms.” Fehrer et al. (2018) placed focus on the varying degrees of openness, identifying three layers: the platform user layer, the platform infrastructure layer, and the platform provider layer. In the same sense, Srinivassan (2021) considered that platform business models have a differentiated structure that allows for a nuanced understanding of each firm's architecture as unique to the firm. They made an interesting distinction between single and multi-sided platforms, considering that the latter has network effects, conceptualized as “the value one set of users attach to the other set of users in the platform” (p. 4). In this context, institutions arise as a key influence regarding resources' connection and as influencing actor interaction (Koskela-Huotari & Siltaloppi, 2020); in this vein, as Fehrer et al. (2018, p. 558) posited, “the disruption of existing institutions [...] accelerates the development of positive network effects.” Osorno (2020) emphasized the need for research into the innovation that occurs in open platforms, specifically that by users and communities. This echo calls from Poeppelbuss et al. (2024), Danatzis et al. (2022) and Abhari et al. (2022).

This paper adopts the SD logic ecosystem perspective to analyze how institutions can be purposefully managed by actors, building on the neglected aspect of institutions identified by Koskela-Huotari et al. (2020) and, and bridging a gap in the literature connecting the de-institutionalization process with innovation in open platform ecosystems.

Literature demanding research into this type of business model fits with the theoretical demand for the characteristics that require actors' connection for value co-creation to take place. In this context, the second ERP is as follows:

ERP 2. Open multi-sided platform ecosystems may foster innovation through dynamic interactions and connections among actors.

This proposition aims to explore the potential link between actor interactions and innovation within platform ecosystems. Because it is exploratory, it serves to guide future research in uncovering how the networking practices of various actors can contribute to innovation, while remaining open to new interpretations from the data.

Networking practices

In the SD logic approach, context is a key factor in the appropriate understanding of how value is created (Chandler and Vargo, 2011). The present paper relates to a very specific context, crowdfunding, which has a group of rules and norms that configure a specific ecosystem (Quero & Mele, 2022; Quero et al., 2020; Shneor et al., 2021; Dorfletner et al., 2018; Quero et al., 2017). Vargo et al. (2016, p. 1) noted, "Importantly, a service-ecosystem view broadens the scope of innovation to include the social structures (i.e., institutions) that guide and are guided by the actions and interactions among multiple actors". Korkman et al. (2010) have pioneered establishing the link between value co-creation and practices. This paper follows the conceptualization of the practice-based approach developed by Mele and Russo-Spena (2015, p. 43), in which:

the unit of analysis is the field of practices that joins the individual and the collective, as well as the human and technological dimensions. Practice is not simply an action or a process; it is a way of doing that is embedded in a context of interlinked elements.

Practices have multiple definitions, and are often described as a set of activities, routines, resources, and artifacts that market actors perform in their value co-creating processes (Mele et al., 2017). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 219) posited that the "practice perspective highlights the creative and knowledgeable work of actors which may or may not achieve its desired ends and which interacts with existing social and technological structures in unintended and unexpected ways".

The systemic perspective adopted by SD logic theory highlights the role of practices (which are guided by institutions) as a result of the joint work of multiple actors. This perspective has been extensively adopted in the literature as a way to connect value co-creation with the emergence of innovation in ecosystems (Skalen & Gummerus,

2022). In this same perspective, Wieland et al. (2016, p. 214) conceptualized value co-creation practices as “consisting of sets of overlapping and interlinked bundles of integrative, normalizing and representational practices through which actors make sense of an integrate public, private and market-facing resources”.

Our exploration of the capability of open platform ecosystems to connect actors and facilitate networking practices and innovation leads to the third ERP:

ERP 3. Value co-creation within open platforms might trigger new networking practices that contribute to innovation in the ecosystem.

This proposition sets out to explore the relationship between value co-creation and the emergence of innovative practices. It provides a guiding framework that will be refined through the inductive analysis of data, acknowledging that the outcomes of value co-creation may vary across different platform ecosystems. This idea aligns with the open innovation perspective (Chesborough & Appleyard, 2007) and has been reinforced in recent works that have highlighted the need to address the innovation issue from an ecosystem multi-actor perspective (Edvardson et al., 2018; Helkkula et al., 2018; Klimas & Czakom, 2022). In this context, Gohoungodji and Amara (2022) highlighted the need for research into innovation in the creative industries. Recent literature has put increasing focus on actors' interaction to trigger innovation thorough value co-creation (Fehrer et al., 2020; Fehrer & Nenonen, 2020; Peters, 2016; Storbacka et al., 2019; Storbacka et al., 2016).

Research process

A qualitative approach was chosen to explore dynamics within open platform ecosystems, and grounded theory was identified as the most suitable methodology for this research endeavor. Grounded theory provides a systematic and flexible means of exploring complex phenomena, and thereby allows theory to emerge from the data. In this study, grounded theory facilitates an iterative examination of how de-institutionalization processes can result in innovation. While grounded theory is inherently inductive, it can incorporate exploratory research propositions as sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954; Gilliland et al., 2013). The ERPs serve as initial guides for our investigation, providing a focal point without constraining the inductive exploration of themes and patterns. This approach allows us to refine our understanding based on the data, ensuring that the propositions evolve through iterative analysis. In this way, the research remains open to new insights, staying true to grounded theory's core principle of building theory from the ground up. Unlike more deductive qualitative methods, such as content analysis, grounded theory's inductive flexibility is essential for comprehensively capturing the multifaceted nature of platform ecosystems.

The study follows the Gioia methodology, an inductive approach in which theory emerges from the data. In line with this, the ERPs act as guiding tools for our inquiry. These propositions are flexible and evolve as the data analysis progresses, serving to stimulate further exploration of emerging themes without constraining the inductive process. The exploratory research propositions were developed from the literature as starting points to sensitive the inquiry, not as formal hypotheses to be tested deductively (Gioia, 2012; Magnani & Gioia, 2022). We aim to shed light on a social phenomenon and its dynamics. This emerging and complex context requires the use of a qualitative data collection method in order to develop the required in-depth knowledge (Gummesson, 2017; Lindgreen et al., 2020; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). In the SD logic approach, context is a key factor in obtaining understanding of how value is created (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Osorno, 2020; Vargo et al., 2023). The choice of the arts context and digitalization of the market as activators of the arising of institutions that resulted in a systemic failure, that is, the creator's economic recognition (Edvardsson et al., 2014; Quero et al., 2022), accounts for the demand in the literature to connect to de-institutionalization in order "to support the realization of fair value (i.e., fair payment) from service exchange for all actors" (Fehrer et al., 2018, p. 559). Specifically, we consider the crowdfunding context, which entails certain rules and norms that configure a specific ecosystem (Fehrer & Nenonen, 2020; Quero & Mele, 2022; Quero et al., 2017). We focus on a single case study (Patreon), as this enables in-depth analysis of a service ecosystem as a unit (Baron et al., 2018; Beverland, 2018; Otto & Jarke, 2019). From this perspective, Lindgreen et al. (2020, p. A7) posited, "By using a case study method, researchers can make a holistic view and explore social processes in rich and complex detail." The qualitative approach focused on investigating de-institutionalization as a process performed by actors (Storbacka, 2016; Wieland et al., 2016), and proceeded according to ERPs.

Case studies can be used to create theoretical constructs, propositions and mid-range theory from case-based empirical evidence (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Johnston et al., 1999). When a research topic is underexplored, a case study (and case theory) is a good option (Aal et al., 2016; Baron et al., 2018; Gummesson, 2017), as it allows in-depth knowledge to be gathered regarding the phenomenon and the context in question (Edvardsson et al., 2014).

The research process comprised three steps:

Step 1. Data collection:

- a. Netnographic research allowed for the identification of resources (see Appendix I, Table 1). This information confirmed that Patreon had the characteristics to be considered as a single case study. Its presence in prior academic papers (Bonifacio et al., 2021; Mixon et al., 2017; Regner, 2021; Sanyoura & Anderson, 2022) and non-academic sources (e.g., Patreon was listed on the CBN 50 Disruptor 2021) further confirmed the unique characteristics of this platform.
- b. Primary data were considered necessary based on the theory (from which the ERPs were derived) and netnographic research. This first involved the manager's perspective, according to Nenonen et al.'s

(2017) suggestion of “building theory with managers.” Second, a group of senior expert academics tested and helped to shape the theoretical approach (see Appendix 2). In the final stage, in-depth interviews with a consumer, a creator, and an arts management consultant (one interview with each) were conducted to enhance our understanding of the ecosystem perspective (see Appendixes for detailed information about the experts). The complexity of the subject matter led us to design an open-ended questionnaire, which was administered either via face-to-face or email interview (in the latter case, any doubts were clarified through multiple emails before the final response was provided). The aim was for respondents to answer without haste and to provide thoughtful responses that reflected their perspective on the topic at hand (Dillman, 2007).

Step 2. Data analysis and coding procedure:

- a. The coding procedure was conducted in three stages, and the Gioia methodology guided the data analysis to develop grounded insights into actor information. The stages were as follows:
 - I. First-order coding: The coding began with a line-by-line analysis of the interview transcripts to identify key sentences and concepts related to new practices, innovation emergence, and actor interaction. This process was informed by the participants’ language to ensure that the codes were grounded in the data. One researcher generated the initial list of first-order concepts.
 - II. Second-order themes: The first-order codes were then grouped into second-order themes based on their conceptual similarity and relevance to ERPs.
 - III. Aggregate dimensions: The second-order themes were synthesized into aggregate dimensions to obtain a higher-level understanding of innovation and new-practice emergence in arts crowdfunding ecosystems. This process led to the identification of key dimensions, such as “actors’ identification of system failures,” “actors’ initiation of de-institutionalization,” “actors’ efforts to reach stability,” and “actors’ value co-creation triggering new networking practices,” among others.

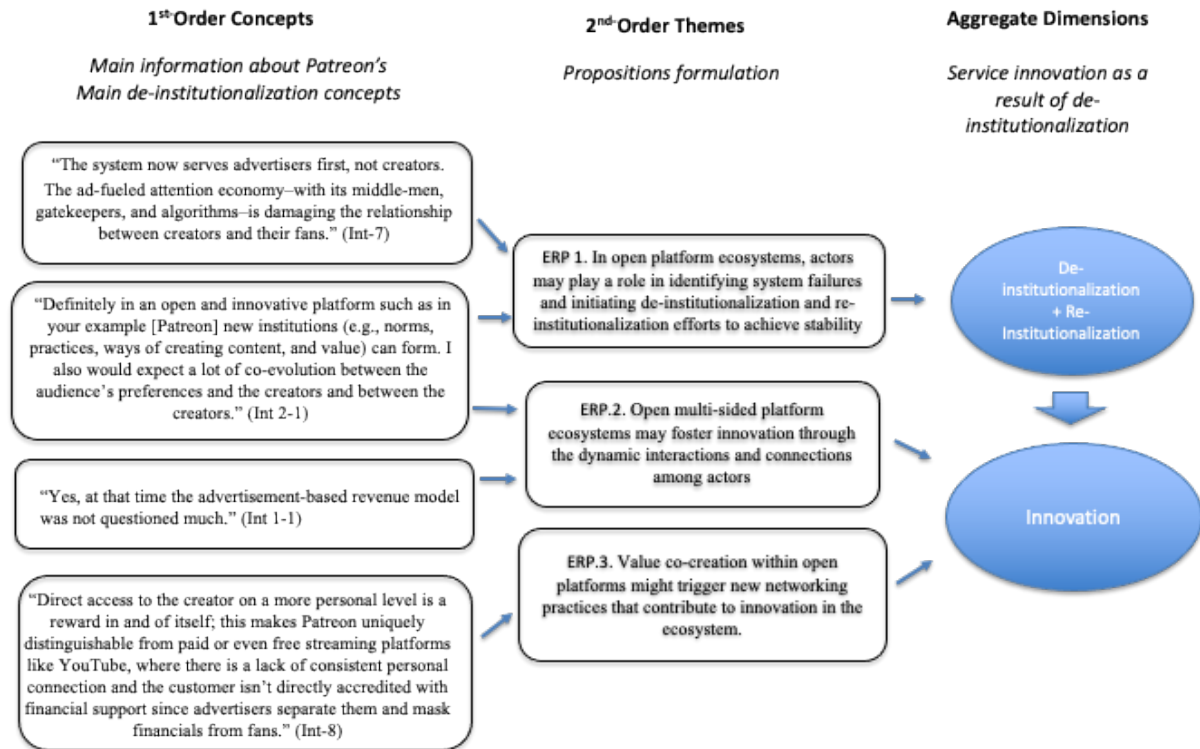
Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, which was determined when no first-order concepts or second-order themes emerged. This indicated that the data adequately captured the range of experiences related to de-institutionalization and innovation practice emergence in the arts crowdfunding ecosystem context.

Figure 1 represents the data structure, capturing the key dimensions and dynamics of the studied phenomenon and providing a visual representation of the relationships between the concepts and themes (Gioia et al., 2013).

Step 3. Traceability and replicability:

To enhance the study’s traceability, all data sources are included, including interviews, videos, and other information used in the process.

Figure 1. Data structure.



Patreon case study

The arts industry, in general, and music, in particular, have gone through a continuous changing process starting with the vinyl industry evolving to the CD, MP3, Apple digitalization, and distribution of music on platforms such as Spotify. This last stage is linked to consumption on open platforms like YouTube, which provide a place where artists can create content and build relationships with clients. However, there may be an unequal return for artists, who are not able to generate enough income to give stability to their work. In this context, in 2013, musician Jack Conte and his old college roommate Sam Yam established Patreon to enable a more reliable and sustainable way for creators to generate income. Patreon's model is similar to crowdfunding but has one important difference—it does not have a unique objective that the artist will receive support. Its focus is on allowing a creator to continue their practice, rather than supporting them simply for reward. Patreon adopts the shape of an open platform business model. At the core of its disruption model are two ideas: the creator is paid without any advertiser influence, and the creator builds a relationship with their audience. That offer the conditions for actor's interactions and these, among other values, have been adopted by the arts market with great warmth. With a total of 270,935 creators with estimated monthly payouts of \$23,751,583 (Graphtreon, 2024).

Findings

The present paper brings to the fore the capability of one actor to identify a system failure and propose changes (de-institutionalization) that attract other actors who share the same perspective about the institution or institutional arrangements that come to be questioned and work for a re-institutionalization, reaching the development of new institutional arrangements developed by the actors' work.

The ERPs evolved through grounded theory analysis. The findings illuminate the process of de-institutionalization in platform innovation, providing valuable insights into how actors drive this change. The ERPs were intended as guiding tools and were shaped by the inductive process, reflecting the dynamic nature of the phenomena under investigation. The revised ERP 1 is as follows:

ERP 1. In open platform ecosystems, actors may play a role in identifying system failures and initiating de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization efforts to achieve stability.

The data analysis reveals that actors within open platform ecosystems often identify system failures, suggesting their active role in de-institutionalization processes. For instance, interviews with platform creators and users indicate that certain actors recognize mismatches between current institutional norms and the evolving needs of the ecosystem. These findings refine our understanding of ERP 1, showing that while some actors are indeed key to initiating changes, the process is highly context-dependent. This evolving insight reflects the flexible nature of the proposition, highlighting that not all actors may have the capacity or willingness to engage in de-institutionalization efforts. Thus, the data do not confirm the proposition but enable us to explore the conditions under which actors can influence systemic change within platform ecosystems.

Open platform ecosystems (like Patreon) can be considered an ecosystem. SD logic has identified the service ecosystem as the unit of analysis for value co-creation. A service ecosystem is defined as “relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value co-creation through service exchange” (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, p.161). The empirical approach offers testimony of how Patreon can be considered an ecosystem. Furthermore, following Fehrer et al. (2018, p. 552) it would be an “open network that enables connection of various user groups which provide each other with network benefits”. Personal interviews and documentation on Patreon highlight the need to break free (de-institutionalize) around two main areas:

- a) Free art consumption based on influence of advertisers and algorithms.

“The advertiser as a stakeholder in the ecosystem, on the concept of the platform, I think, is ultimately detrimental to the long-term success of the creative art.” (D-4-2)

“Social media platforms have become the ultimate content discovery tools. But the organic reach on these platforms has kept decreasing to largely become a pay-to-play situation. As a result, creators are forced to create content to feed the latest algorithm coming between them and their audience.” (Int-7)

b) Art as a result of connection with the audience.

“Patreon offers creators a chance to connect directly with their loyal fans through the platform and get a sustainable income through membership. The Internet has offered massive opportunities for creators. It has democratized access to distribution, ideas and audiences.” (Int-7)

“There has never been a better time for creation and never more platforms to share it. However, today creators and their fans feel that they are stuck in an unrewarding experience having to play by someone else’s rules. At Patreon we recognize that true creation takes all forms and are creating a space where they can all come to life and flourish. We power creators to create worlds they love and that their members love being a part of. We provide the tools to build and manage their own expressions and turn their relationship with fans into memberships, giving fans a deeper connection and creators a more inspired and fulfilling experience.” (Int-7)

“Patreon introduced a cultural shift in how creators are viewed, from indiscriminate and inconsistent artists being content with accolades and “exposure” that may possibly further their career with a connection to a company that they could monetize with “eventually”, to a consumer-direct business model offering both artists and fans a reason to be consistent and intentional in both creation and support.”(Int-8)

ERP 2. Open multi-sided platform ecosystems may foster innovation through the dynamic interactions and connections among actors.

The analysis suggests that actor connections in open platform ecosystems can indeed foster innovation, though the degree and nature of this innovation vary depending on the context. For example, the case study of Patreon illustrates how multi-actor collaboration can lead to new practices and solutions that drive ecosystem evolution. However, the data also reveal instances in which actor connections do not necessarily result in innovation, emphasizing the

variability of outcomes. These insights refine ERP 2, indicating that while actor interactions have the potential to foster innovation, they are influenced by factors such as platform design, governance, and actor engagement. This inductive exploration underscores the proposition's flexibility, as it guides the investigation into the diverse ways actor connections may—or may not—lead to innovation in different platform ecosystems.

Patreon makes a continuous effort to connect actors (and resources) to their network. Usually, artists combine all the platforms in their Patreon space (YouTube, Spotify, Twitch, Discord, etc.). The platform fosters these kinds of connections, being conscientious of the need to be an open connected platform.

“We’re starting to integrate with other platforms, like Crowdfunder, like Discords. Now you can... when you go into Discord, you can have a patron-only chat room on Discord.” (D-4-2)

“Patreon sets out to be a champion of a new creative economy. A new model where creators have the power to control their careers and build the next generation of creative businesses. Where fans are encouraged to be more than followers and become active participants in the work they love. Where creativity and the people who drive our culture forward are finally valued.” (D-4-2).

These perspectives are in line with the literature that highlights the non-hierarchical linkages among actors as one of the main characteristics of the sharing economy, making it possible to challenge established rules (de-institutionalization) and quickly connect actors sharing the same goal or ideas. The greater the capability for connection, the better the resources managed and the ecosystem quality.

ERP 3. Value co-creation within open platforms might trigger new networking practices that contribute to innovation in the ecosystem.

The findings support the idea that value co-creation in open platforms can stimulate new networking practices, though this process is multi-faceted. For instance, evidence from interviews shows that creators and consumers co-create value through collaborative activities, leading to the emergence of new interaction patterns within the ecosystem. However, the data also suggests that the outcomes of value co-creation are not always innovative; some practices may reinforce existing structures rather than disrupt them. These results provide a nuanced understanding of ERP 3, indicating that value co-creation might contribute to innovation, but its impact is shaped by factors such as platform governance, actor goals, and the broader market environment. This discussion emphasizes the exploratory nature of the proposition, acknowledging that the relationship between value co-creation and innovation is complex and context-specific. If the de-institutionalization process and the consequent re-institutionalization highlight the active role of one individual actor to identify a system failure and propose the system changes and evolution, the open platform relies

on value co-creation to make it possible for network practices to take place and produce innovation results. Some quotations highlight the resource density that emerges in open contexts like Patreon:

“On Patreon, creators feel valued because they can do what they love and their fans find value, because they find on Patreon what they love. Typically, creators and fans build meaningful connections with each other on the platform through the membership model, which can go as far as creators asking their fans to participate in the creative process (e.g., early listening sessions of an album in the making, polls on subjects for future art pieces, topics’ brainstorm for an upcoming podcast). The platform isn’t a one-way stream where creators play the active part in constantly giving and fans being passive spectators—many of the communities are very dynamic and open forums with lots of direct communication between creator and fan.” (Int-7)

“There is a high degree of feedback and communication between artists and their supporters. Thus, there is the potential for changes being requested and artists responding to the feedback. Goals of the supporters are not necessarily always aligned among themselves and with the creator.” (Int-1-1)

Discussion

Before delving into the theoretical contributions, it is important to reflect on the key insights derived from our findings and what they reveal regarding the role of the actors and their ability to drive de-institutionalization in connection with innovation emergence in arts open platform ecosystems. The present paper highlights the need for research in three specific areas in the context of open platform ecosystems:

1. De-institutionalization: New business models like open platforms put the focus on actors with the ability to break free from institutions and the capability of the system to integrate actors’ resources to re-institutionalize communities. Theory has addressed the topic of institutions, but not specifically the agency of actors to break rules and drive system change.
2. The theory and findings of the present research provide new insights into open multi-sided platforms and their configuration, which enables them to foster innovation through heterogeneous actors’ interactions. This perspective, which considers the need to manage innovation from a new perspective, in which its actor’s interactions the engine for ecosystem evolution and self-adjust.
3. Open platform ecosystems are dynamic in nature. This has important implications regarding how to trigger new practices that contribute to innovation and how to avoid practices with negative consequences.

These insights provide a foundational understanding of how actor engagement unfolds within microfinance ecosystems, and underscores the importance of aligning resources, adapting engagement strategies, and fostering value co-creation. This understanding serves as a prelude to the theoretical contributions discussed in the following section.

Theoretical contributions

The present paper uses institutions as the lens to study innovation emergence in service ecosystems. Following Gonçalves (2021), we adopt the SD logic perspective due to its capability to explain complex contexts in which actors' interactions enable resource exchange and system evolution (Michalke et al., 2022; Poeppelbuss et al., 2024). Three main contributions are made in connection with further research suggested in the literature. First, the paper focuses on the institutional processes (de-institutionalization–institutionalization) as two connected processes intimately connected with emergence and innovation in ecosystems (Haak et al., 2020; Polese et al., 2021). Some authors refer to this process as institutional work, and describe it as the process of “maintaining, disrupting and altering institutions” (Vargo et al., 2025, p. 63). Koskela-Huotari et al. (2020) called for research in this topic, considering that service scholars had given less attention to this area. Furthermore, Polese et al. (2021) highlighted the need for empirical case study evidence of this process. The present paper builds on the neglected area of “institutions as inhabited by actors” that represents a conceptual shift “from seeing institutions as something ‘out there’ and external to actors, to institutions as inhabited and created by actor collectives ‘doing things together’” (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020, p. 383). In the same direction, Wieland et al. (2016, p. 221) demanded, as a priority in the research agenda, the (re)formation as an institutional change process, emphasizing that the “maintenance, disruption and change of institutions is always a co-creation process in which actors try to resolve the nested contradictions and inconsistencies that are foundational to all institutional arrangements.” They called for both conceptual and empirical investigations of the linkages between the levels of the ecosystem: micro, meso, and macro. This paper's research was framed in this theoretical approach and ERP 1 was formulated in order to capture a single actor's ability to change institutions in an ecosystem, resulting in re-institutionalization and the attraction of other actors that share the same perspective. The results represent one more step ahead towards the key role of the actor in both identifying failures and making proposals to trigger institutional change.

In the second stage, the present paper also represents a contribution in respect of platform business models. Rohn et al. (2021) highlighted that “little systematic knowledge exists on why platform-based business models often outperform traditional pipeline business models”. This is related to Fehrer et al. (2018), who demanded improvement of the theoretical support to understand platform business model logic. The growing contributions to platform business

models are still heterogeneous and spread in different areas of research, without connection among them. This paper connects the “institutions and inhabited by actors” perspective with the capability of one actor to de-institutionalize and build an ecosystem in which actors co-create value, resulting in construction of new institutions and development of new practices, thus facilitating innovation. ERP 2 was formulated to consider the ecosystem capability of platform business models to attract actors and thereby co-create value based on shared commitments. The results respond to calls to explore actors’ ability to drive innovation through dynamic interactions, provided the platform offers open and multi-sided conditions that facilitate the process.

Third, the paper built on Skalen and Gummerus (2022) to propose that value co-creation in actors’ connections in ecosystems can facilitate innovation. Although it has been proposed that some institutions would be eliminated in this process, this study found that, in some cases (like Patreon) institutions are the “glue” that allow for actors’ connections with the same aim and that make actor interaction and value co-creation through network practices possible. From this perspective, ERP 3 focuses on networking practices that emerge as a result of value co-creation and innovation in the ecosystem.

The theoretical contribution is framed on mid-range theory, as it is context-specific. The contribution is based on open network platforms (Fehrer et al., 2018; Quero & Mele, 2022) and bridges the gap to connect de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization (Giesler, 2008; Giesler & Fisher, 2017) with innovation in open systems, as demanded in the literature (Chandler et al., 2019; Poelese et al., 2022).

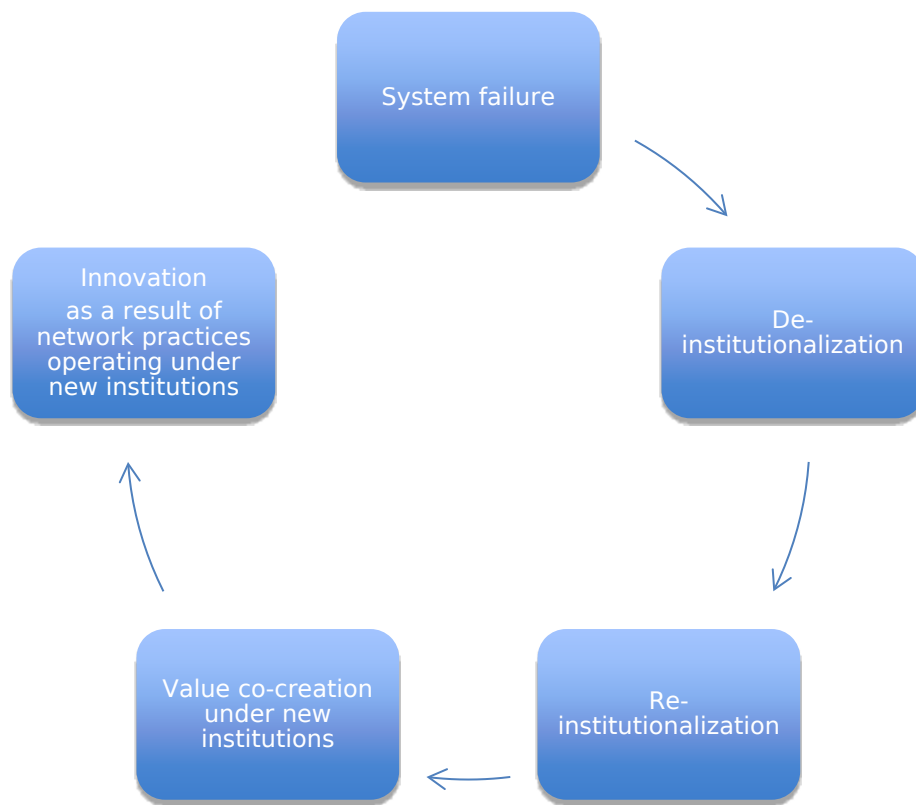
Implications for practice

The present work offers enhanced understanding of the open multi-sided platforms context. The study provides comprehensive insights into the dynamics within service-led ecosystems, particularly how heterogeneous engaged actors challenge institutions, triggering a process of de-institutionalization followed by the emergence of new institutions, driving innovation and system evolution. The results can help platform managers and designers to manage innovation from an institutional perspective.

The ERPs developed using the SD logic lense result in a change of perspective, which Skalen et al. (2015, pp.140) recognized as a “shift in focus away from product, process, and organizational innovation toward the foundational elements comprising these innovation types.” The arts industry is in a continuous process of change and innovation (Skalen & Gummerus, 2023; Gohoungodji, 2022; Quero et al., 2020). Arts production, consumption, and commercialization has been strongly re-designed in the open contexts offered by the Internet and new business models. The ERPs combine the theoretical grounding with the empirical case study perspective in order to design strategies from an ecosystem perspective. When there is system equilibrium, all actors have the agency to make the system

change and evolve. Figure 2 represents the importance of institutions in the ecosystem, and the need to facilitate actors' confluence to drive their interactions and the ecosystem's self-adjustment. From this perspective, the actors can be responsible for triggering de-institutionalization and institutionalization, enabling the emergence of new practices as a result of actors' efforts to achieve network stability.

Figure 2: De-institutionalization as the seed for innovation



Source: The authors

Open platforms can use this research to guide the management of resources so as to obtain the best benefit for the system, and drive system evolution, challenging institutions and developing new ones. The propositions that result from the case study converge in three strategic perspectives:

1. Open multi-sided platforms can be seen as an ecosystem in which a community of heterogeneous actors has the agency to challenge institutions that do not fit their needs in the present context, and to propose new ones. The evidence we provide based on the Patreon case can offer useful information to other open multi-sided platforms operating in the arts sector. Being aware of the benefits of contexts in which actors can challenge

existing institutions and develop new ones opens a wide range of opportunities to implement this idea in specific platforms.

2. System failures must be seen as an opportunity to change and evolve. As supported by the empirical approach and literature (Polese et al., 2021), De-institutionalizing is intimately connected to re-institutionalization, and recent literature has also linked it to emergence and phase transition. Breaking rules can be a good strategy if there is a critical mass willing to take part in the process.
3. Value co-creation can be a core strategy for driving engagement, improving resource density, and allowing new practices to emerge. In open platforms, value co-creation among actors is a primary asset; the platform is responsible for developing and managing such co-creation to achieve the maximum value from all actors involved. Managers must be aware of the importance of engaged actors in the platform and maximize their resources in order to ensure the best outcomes (Peters, 2016).
4. Open multisided platforms have to be aware of the value of “plasticity” for their business model and the strategic advantage of being managed as an ecosystem. This idea has important implications for the design of strategies that rely on actors to drive system change. Considering the challenge of institutionalized norms as a strategy and a path toward growth instead of a negative, destabilizing measure opens the possibility for the ecosystem to self-adjust and evolve.

Limitations and future research

The present paper analyzes open platforms, which is a very specific type of business model. Furthermore, it is based on the arts industry, using a single case study as empirical evidence. Although this kind of research requires case study (Gummesson, 2017), the contribution is framed on mid-range theory, as it is context-specific. Research in other sectors, different from the arts industry, and using other business models would improve knowledge regarding the connection between de-institutionalization, re-institutionalization, and innovation.

The use of grounded theory in marketing offers benefits, such as the ability to develop a deeper understanding of complex service interactions. However, it also presents limitations, including a higher potential for researcher bias. Additionally, the iterative nature of data collection and analysis can create challenges in maintaining consistency and rigor. Future research could benefit from splitting the sample, as this may enhance the richness of the data collected.

This paper opens a path for many necessary lines of future research. Apart from analyzing other sectors, the connection to innovation in the last stage of the study revealed two interesting lines of action: first, the plasticity of the system (Chandler et al., 2019; Nenonen et al., 2014) appears to have a very important role in the process. Second, literature has developed a wide typology of innovation as a result of value co-creation (i.e., Skalen & Gummerus, 2022; Wieland et al., 2016), and it would be necessary to obtain information that improves the knowledge in this sense. Both contributions would improve the capability of designing strategies according to the platform ecosystem and for other types of business models.

Data Availability Statement

This manuscript has associated data.

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APPENDIX I

Table I A. Source documents

Class of empirical data	Author	Year	Title	Code
Patreon resources	Patreon Blog 1	2020	https://blog.patreon.com/patreon-series-e-announcement . Accessed 12 January 2022	D1-1
	Graphtreon	2022	https://graphtreon.com/	D1-2
	Patreon_Blog 2	2022	https://blog.patreon.com/5-patreon-podcasters-breaking-the-mold	D1-3
Business, industry, and media articles	Weiner J (Wired)	2019	Jack Conte, Patreon, and the plight of the creative class. https://www.wired.com/story/jack-conte-patreon-plight-creative-class/ Accessed 16 March 2021	D2-1
	Gomez B	2019	Patreon CEO says the company's generous business model is not sustainable as it sees rapid growth. CNBC https://www.cnbc.com/2019/01/23/crowd-funding-platform-patreon-announces-it-will-pay-out-half-a-billion-dollars-to-content-creators-in-2019.html	D2-2
Academic resources	Bonifacio et al.	2021	Beyond fans: the relational labor and communication practices of creators on Patreon. <i>New media & Society</i>	D3-1
	Lee H	2021	Friends, not ATMS: parasocial relational work and the construction of intimacy by artists on Patreon. <i>Sociological Spectrum</i>	D3-2

	Regner T	2021	Crowdfunding a monthly income: an analysis of the membership platform Patreon. <i>Journal of Cultural Economics</i>	D3-3
Internet sources	The Verge	22 June 2021	https://www.theverge.com/22543655/patreon-ceo-decoder-interview-jack-conte	D4-1
	Vox (Recode Staff)	2017	Full transcript of Patreon founder and CEO Jack Conte on Recode Media https://www.vox.com/2017/8/17/16163786/transcript-patreon-founder-ceo-jack-conte-musician-arts-patronage-on-recode-media Accessed 2 December 2022	D4-2
	CNBC	2021	Disruptor 50 Patreon among the 50 disruptor companies in 2021. https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/25/these-are-the-2021-cnn-disruptor-50-companies.html	D4-3
Newspapers and Journals	Armental M	1 September 2020	The Wall Street Journal (USA) https://www.wsj.com/articles/patreon-tops-1-billion-valuation-as-pandemic-brings-a-surge-in-creators-to-platform-11599003623?curator=SportsREDEF Accessed December 2022	5-1
	Del Amo S	13 August 2021	El Pais (Spain) https://elpais.com/icon/empresa-y-futuro/2021-08-13/jack-conte-el-rey-del-micromecenazgo-en-internet-a-todo-el-mundo-se-le-deberia-meter-en-la-cabeza-que-el-contenido-de-calidad-debe-pagarse.html	D5-1
	The Economist	December 2018	Patreon, Kickstarters and the new patrons of the arts. <i>The Economist</i> . https://www.economist.com/christmas-specials/2018/12/18/patreon-kickstarter-and-the-new-patrons-of-the-arts Accessed December 2022	D5-2

APPENDIX 2 A. Personal interviews

Category	Description	Type of interview	Doc No.
Academic	Dr. Tobias Regner University of Jena (Germany)	E-mail Written questionnaire (2)	Int 1 – 1 /2
	Dr. Paavo Ritala LUT University (Finland)	E-mail Written questionnaire	Int 2 – 1 /2
	Dr. Ove Granstrand Chalmers University of Technology (Sweden)	E-mail Written questionnaire	Int 3
	Dr. Jennifer Chandler California State University, Fullerton (USA)	E-mail Videoconference	Int 5

Patreon (CEO)	Ms. Carla Borsoi (Head of marketing, Patreon USA, 2018)	E-mail Written questionnaire Videoconference	Int 6
	Ms. Ena Grossteibeck Head of Marketing Europe and UK 2021	E-mail Written questionnaire	Int 7
Creator	Ms. Hannah Lynn Art and Design www.HannahLynnArt.com	E-mail Written questionnaire	Int 8
Consumer	Mr. Marco Luzi (PhD Student) Patreon consumer	E-mail Written questionnaire	Int 9