Public Cultural Crowdfunding: A New Approach to Engage Individuals in Local History Appreciation and Creation

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Abstract:

Under China's active construction of the inclusive non-basic public cultural service system and the special highlight on social participation in cultural service supply, social forces and public cultural institutions, such as public libraries, museums and galleries, have begun to organize public cultural crowdfunding activities to meet people's high-quality cultural needs while completing their mission of local historical inheritance. As an innovative attempt made by Chinese public cultural institutions and the government in the inclusive non-basic public cultural service construction, how public cultural crowdfunding works and what influences people's intention to participate in these activities deserve attention in the research and practice field. After data is collected on the Cultural Jiading Cloud Platform, descriptive analysis is conducted on these crowdfunding activities' frequency, themes and initiators. Regression analysis is adopted to analyze the impact factors of the public's intention to participate in these activities. The results indicate that the cultural crowdfunded activity duration, success criteria on the minimum participant number and maximum participant limit positively impact the actual participant number. Besides, crowdfunding prices illustrate a significantly negative impact on the public's intention to participate in public cultural crowdfunding. Such findings not only illustrate the significant role of government subsidies in the development of inclusive non-basic public cultural services including public cultural crowdfunding, but also indicate that public cultural institutions, activity initiators and the government can attract more participants and thus achieve their historical inheritance functions by highlighting the concept of the inclusive non-basic public cultural services, organizing more long-term and general skill training activities, appropriately increasing the minimum participants required, setting more reasonable prices and providing more subsidies.

Keywords: Public culture, Cultural crowdfunding, Historical inheritance, Culture cloud platform.

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1 Introduction

The participation of social forces has become a strategic direction for the high-quality development of public cultural services in China. The "Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of a Modern Public Cultural Service System", released in November 2010, first proposed the policy requirement that public cultural service organizations should adhere to the government leadership while encouraging the active participation of social forces. The "Opinions on Promoting the High-Quality Development of Public Cultural Services", released in March 2021, further proposes to deepen the reform of the public cultural system and mechanism, expand social participation, and form an open, diverse, and dynamic public cultural service supply system in China.

However, there is still a significant gap in the spontaneous supply of public cultural services in China's market. According to the policy documents including the "14th Five Year Plan for Public Services", the Chinese government has begun to promote the concept of inclusive non-basic public cultural services and supported public cultural institutions and social forces to organize high-quality public cultural activities through government funding and other means, to meet the diverse, multi-level, and multifaceted spiritual and cultural needs of the people.

As an innovative attempt in the inclusive non-basic public cultural service construction, public cultural crowdfunding refers to an innovative supply mode of public cultural services that gathers government, enterprises, organizations and the public through cloud-based platforms to complete financing activities for public cultural products and services (Li, 2022). With modern ICTs such as digitization and networking, public cultural crowdfunding has strengthened the interaction between the public cultural service providers and the public and stimulated the comprehensive transformation and upgrading of public cultural content and activities by providing the latest, most attractive, and the highest-quality public cultural services.

One significant difference between public cultural crowdfunding and traditional public cultural activities is that people must pay certain fees before participation. As there are certain subsidies from the government, the prices of public cultural crowdfunded activities are always lower than those from the market. In this case, the stimulus for participating in such activities may also indicate differences from public or commercial cultural activities analyzed in previous research. Considering the critical progress made by the Chinese government in the inclusive non-basic public cultural service construction, how public cultural crowdfunding works and what influences people's intention for participation deserve attention in the research and practice field.

Little international research has been conducted to analyze cultural crowdfunding or China's inclusive non-basic public cultural service construction (Rykkja et al., 2020). Even in China, only several studies have been conducted to define the key term "inclusive non-basic public cultural service" and summarize the attempts made by local governments to organize inclusive non-basic public cultural activities (Li, 2022; Nie et al., 2023; Zhang & Wang, 2022). Considering the innovation public cultural crowdfunding has made with ICTs such as the cultural cloud-based platforms, this paper contributes to the research and practice field by first analyzing the key characteristics of public cultural crowdfunding and the impact factors of the public's intention to participate in these activities. Therefore, the research questions of this paper are as follows: (a) What are the public cultural crowdfunding's key characteristics such

as activity frequency, themes and initiators? (b) What impact the public's intention to participate in public cultural crowdfunding?

2 Data Collection

"Cultural Jiading Cloud" was built by Shanghai public cultural institutions in 2014 for cultural resource exhibitions and activity announcements under China's construction of the national digital smart public cultural service system. Since its operation, public cultural institutions in Jiading District including Jiading Public Library, Jiading Museum and Jiading Gallery have begun to release cultural activity information and provide ticket booking links through the platform. Most importantly, a special column was designed for public cultural crowdfunding in 2017, when Jiading public cultural institutions became the first in the country to organize and manage public cultural crowdfunding activities and release activity details on the platform. In the cultural crowdfunding column, the platform has recorded many details including the crowdfunded activity name, form, content, venue, initiator, crowdfunding price, success criteria on the minimum participant number, maximum participant limit, enrollment, crowdfunding start/end time and activity announcement/start time. Additional statistics such as user comments, web browsing times and the "likes" (which means people show great interest in the activity and will pay continuous attention to related crowdfunding activities) number have also been recorded and shown on the platform webpage, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Details about a Public Cultural Crowdfunding Activity on "Cultural Jiading Cloud"
Source:http://www.whjd.sh.cn/frontCrowdfunding/frontCrowdfundingDetail.do?id=877ba08b59384d17ba392feed28d5f9e (translated by Microsoft Edge Translator)

In this case, this paper selected the cultural crowdfunding activities on the "Cultural Jiading Cloud" platform as the research sample and collected the related data of activities held since 2017 with the Octopus Data Collector on April 15th, 2023. Missing and repeated data was deleted before 601 pieces of cultural crowdfunding information were obtained.

3 Public Cultural Crowdfunding Activity Frequency

The annual number of public cultural crowdfunding activities on "Cultural Jiading Cloud" is analyzed first, as shown in Figure 2. Since the establishment of the cultural crowdfunding column in 2017, the number of public cultural crowdfunding activities has increased continuously for three years, reaching about 11 on average each month in 2019. As the public could not participate in offline cultural crowdfunding activities during major public health emergencies such as COVID-19, public cultural crowdfunding witnessed a cliff decline in number since 2020 and remained at an average frequency of about 6 per month in 2021 and 2022. In 2023, however, this number increased again and topped more than 20 monthly.
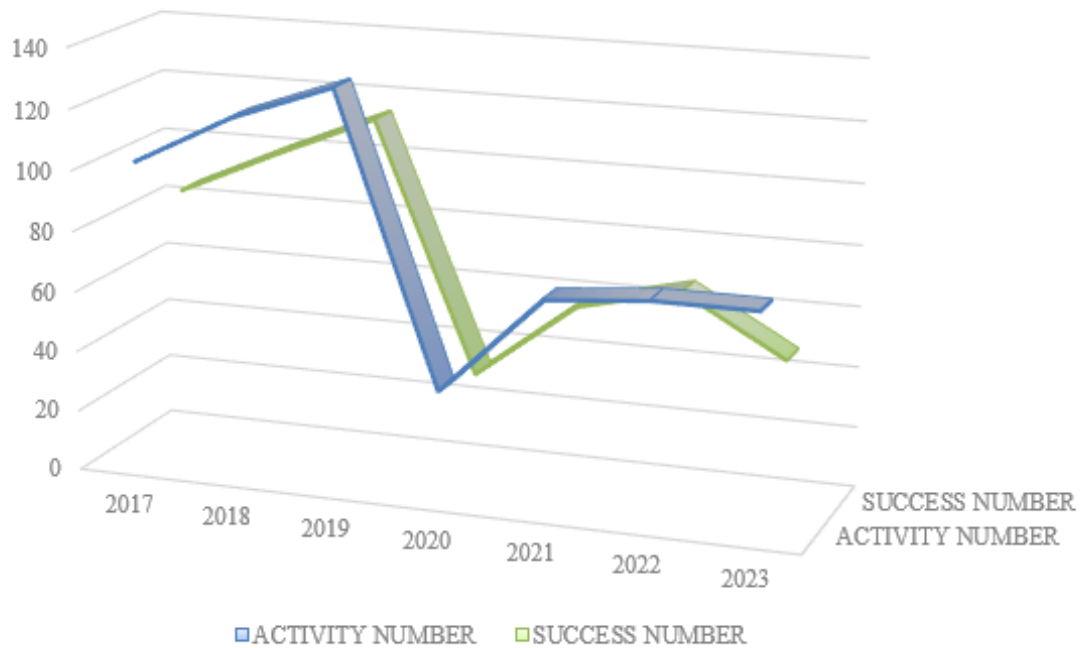
Figure 2 Public Cultural Crowdfunding Activity Numbers Each Year

There are also significant differences in the average number of public cultural crowdfunding activities and the average proportion of successful activities each month, as shown in Figure 3. Public cultural crowdfunding activities were most frequently held in July, followed by November and March. Contrarily, there were the fewest activities in February, followed by January and December. Although only a small proportion of public cultural crowdfunding activities were held in January, the proportion of successful activities that month was the highest at 95.45%. The proportion of successful activities in November ranked 2nd at 92.13%. In comparison, less than 80.00% of public cultural crowdfunding activities were successfully held in April, July, and August.

Figure 3 Public Cultural Crowdfunding Activity Average Numbers Each Month

4 Public Cultural Crowdfunding Activity Theme and Initiator

What are the characteristics and themes of public cultural activities organized through public crowdfunding? This paper has constructed a word cloud for the public cultural crowdfunding activities on "Cultural Jiading Cloud" after translating the 601 public cultural crowdfunding activity titles into English, as shown in Figure 4. Similar to other traditional cultural activities, most public cultural crowdfunding activities are classes, training, courses or parent-child activities, with the main participants being children and their parents. Besides, do-it-yourself (DIY) activities also compensate for a high pro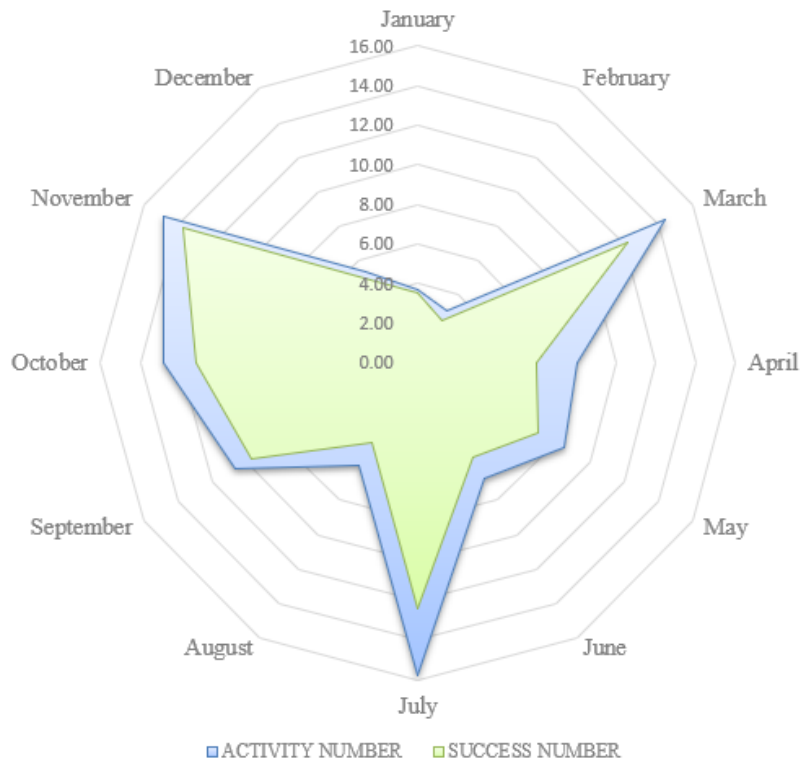portion of public cultural crowdfunding activities in the Jiading District. In these activities, participants can learn traditional and modern Chinese culture and local history through making fans, ceramics and other Chinese historical and cultural products while improving their cultural literacy and sense of identity in the prolonged local history.

Regarding activity themes, most public cultural crowdfunding activities are about painting and dance, followed by calligraphy, ceramic art, musical instrument and performance. Equal attention has been paid to traditional Chinese cultural items such as cursive script, ethnic dance, traditional Chinese painting, and cultural content from countries and regions worldwide including social dance, guitar and violin. Through these interesting and meaningful activities, participants can experience the Chinese and global cultural essence and local history to improve their cultural literacy while establishing an inclusive and multicultural vision.

Figure 4 Public Cultural Crowdfunding Word Cloud

Who is willing to organize and initiate a public cultural crowdfunding activity? This paper has also constructed a word cloud for the public cultural crowdfunding activity initiators on "Cultural Jiading Cloud" after translating the initiator introduction section in each activity detail into English, as shown in Figure 5. Most initiators of public cultural crowdfunding activities are teachers from universities, colleges and academies and professionals or members in cultural and art associations in the community. Many of them are of high reputation and have won professional awards or prizes in their expertise filed such as calligraphy, performance, painting and vocal music. They have rich experience communicating with children or organizing parent-child activities, the most popular section of public cultural activities and services in China nowadays. More interestingly, however, few public cultural crowdfunding activities are initiated or organized jointly by multiple people or professional associations and organizations.
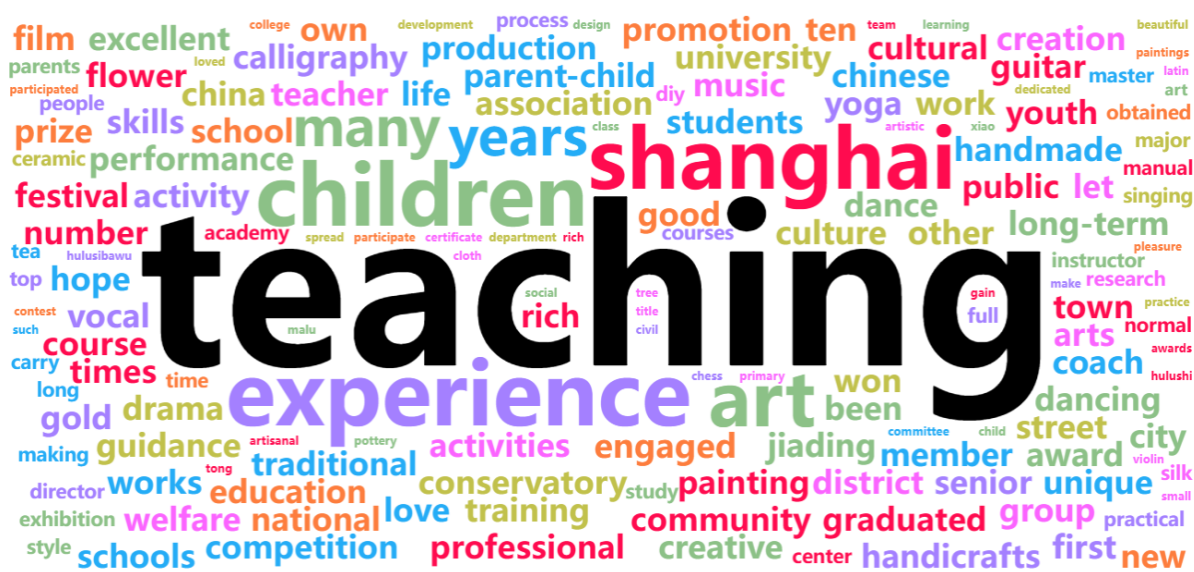

Figure 5 Public Cultural Crowdfunding Initiator Word Cloud

5 Impact Factors of Public's Participation Intention

5.1 Hypothesis Development

What will impact the public's intention and willingness to participate in these public cultural crowdfunding activities? This paper has proposed a series of assumptions before conducting regression analysis to testify them based on the data obtained on the "Cultural Jiading Cloud".

The public cultural crowdfunded activity duration will affect the public's participation intention. According to a survey on user satisfaction with the public cultural activities on the "Foshan Culture Cloud", the public prefers to participate in longer-term public cultural activities than short-term ones. If public cultural crowdfunded activities are held for a more extended period after they have met the success criteria on minimum participants, the public will find it easier to arrange their schedules and, therefore, will express a stronger willingness and intention to participate in them. Therefore, this paper proposes that public cultural crowdfunded activity duration positively impacts the public's participation intention (H1).

The public cultural crowdfunding activity's success criteria on the minimum participant number and the maximum participant limit will affect the public's willingness to participate in them. If the two numbers are so high that the public believes the goal cannot be achieved, they will probably not participate in such crowdfunding activities. However, if the minimum participant numbers are too low, the public will assume the crowdfunding to be successful even without their contributions, thus not participating in such activities either. Within an appropriate range, an increase in the two numbers will stimulate the public's enthusiasm and motivate them to join in the crowdfunding to guarantee that the crowdfunding activities can be held successfully. On the "Cultural Jiading Cloud", most success criteria on the minimum participant number and the maximum participant limit in public cultural crowdfunding activities are within the appropriate range of 20 to 50. An appropriate increase in the two numbers will probably stimulate the public's participation willingness. Therefore, this paper proposes that the success criteria on the minimum participant number positively impacts the public's participation intention (H2); the maximum participant limit positively impacts the public's participation intention (H3).

The crowdfunding price for participation is another primary concern in the public's decision to participate in a public cultural crowdfunding activity. Although the government has provided certain subsidies to make the prices of crowdfunding activities always lower than those provided by the market, most traditional public cultural activities provided by public institutions in China are free of charge, and people are used to participating in public cultural activities without payment. As the public can choose between traditional free public cultural activities and public cultural crowdfunding activities, those sensitive to prices and highlighting the publicity of public services may develop resistance towards the new type of public cultural activities. Therefore, this paper proposes that the crowdfunding price negatively impacts the public's participation intention (H4).

The public's attention toward public cultural crowdfunding activities may also influence their participation behaviors. The web browsing times, likes, and user comments of a public cultural crowdfunding activity can reflect the degree of attention the public has paid to it. Due to the widespread peer referrals, the public is likelier to choose those highly regarded activities to engage in social communications while improving their cultural and historical literacy.

Therefore, this paper proposes that web browsing times positively impact the public's participation intention (H5); the number of likes positively impacts the public's participation intention (H6); the number of user comments positively impacts the public's participation intention (H7).

In this case, this paper has constructed a public cultural crowdfunding activity participation intention impact model with the cultural crowdfunded activity duration (AD), success criteria on the minimum participant number (SP), the maximum participant limit (MP), crowdfunding price (CP), web browsing times (WN), "likes" number (LN), and user comments (CN) as the independent variables and the actual participant number (PN) as the dependent variable, as shown in Figure 6.

5.2 Correlation and Regression Analysis

As the necessary data is obtained from the official website of the "Cultural Jiading Cloud", the reliability and validity of the research can be guaranteed. In this case, the Spearman correlation is conducted first to analyze the correlations among variables, as shown in Table 1. The dependent variable actual participant number is significantly correlated with all the independent variables at 0.01 level.

Table 1 Spearman Correlation Summary

	AD	SP	MP	LN	WN	CN	CP
AD							
SP	.477**						
MP	.512**	.793**					
LN	.228**	.287**	.319**				
WN	.529**	.529**	.644**	.392**			
CN	.351**	.393**	.437**	.408**	.473**		
CP	.886**	.465**	.536**	.234**	.538**	.373**	
PN	.407**	.595**	.586**	.285**	.563**	.447**	.321**

** $p \leq 0.01$

Regression analysis is conducted thereafter to analyze the impact factors of the actual participant number of public cultural crowdfunding activities, as shown in Table 2. The model is of good fit without collinearity and can explain 54.8% of the dependent variable. Specifically, activity duration, success criteria on the minimum participant number and the maximum participant limit significantly positively impact the actual participant number of public cultural crowdfunding activities, while crowdfunding price illustrates a significantly negative impact on it. However, the impacts of browsing times, "likes" number and user comments are not accepted at the 0.01 level. In this case, hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4 are established, while H5, H6 and H7 not.

Table 2 Linear Regression Summary

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	p	VIF	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F
	B	S.E.	Beta						
Constant	-1.023	0.631	-	-1.621	0.106	-			F=104.627 p=0.000
AD	0.104	0.015	0.382	7.107	0.000	3.826	.553	.548	
SP	0.52	0.088	0.274	5.903	0.000	2.846			

MP	0.383	0.049	0.388	7.837	0.000	3.254
CP	-0.015	0.003	-0.293	-5.473	0.000	3.806
LN	0.236	0.201	0.036	1.174	0.241	1.223
WN	0.001	0.001	0.058	1.561	0.119	1.844
CN	-0.012	0.035	-0.01	-0.353	0.724	1.15

6 Discussion

The increase in public cultural crowdfunded activity duration will positively impact the actual participant number of public cultural crowdfunding activities. Such a finding is consistent with our previous research on user preferences for public cultural activity duration that the public prefers public cultural activities that are long-termed or held continuously. This paper further compares different types of public cultural crowdfunding activities and finds that almost all long-term activities are continuous training courses where participants can learn specific useful skills such as ethnic dance and calligraphy. In this case, this paper has reinforced previous findings by holding that the public is more willing to participate in cultural training courses to learn useful skills and improve their cultural literacy than other forms of public cultural activities such as exhibitions and one-time lectures. Considering this, public cultural crowdfunding initiators should organize more long-term and skill training activities and invite field experts to attract more stable participants.

Besides the crowdfunded activity duration, the increases in success criteria on the minimum participant number and the maximum participant limit can also positively impact the actual participant number of public cultural crowdfunding activities. Such a finding has once again proved that the public prefers to participate in challenging tasks in which they see the value of their efforts as their contribution becomes crucial to the final result. This paper further compares different types of public cultural crowdfunding activities and finds that activities with the highest success criteria on the minimum participant number and the maximum participant limit are vocal and dance training courses for the general public. In this case, public cultural crowdfunding initiators should organize more general training programs, reasonably expand the maximum participant limit and set challenging criteria on the minimum participant number to stimulate public willingness and enthusiasm for participation, thereby enhancing the influence and reach of each public cultural crowdfunding activity.

Crowdfunding price is another vital impact factor of the actual participant number of public cultural crowdfunding activities. This paper has conducted a small-scale interview and found that most Chinese people believe that publicity and free of charge should be the main distinguishments of public cultural services provided by public institutions from cultural services provided by the market. Besides, they are used to participating in public cultural activities that are free of charge and have many other choices to improve cultural literacy and get professional training courses besides participating in public cultural crowdfunding activities. Some interviewees also think the prices for public cultural crowdfunding activities are high and beyond their acceptance rate. Such a finding illustrates the significant role of public government subsidies in developing the newly inclusive non-basic public cultural services including public cultural crowdfunding activities in China. In this case, both the public cultural crowdfunding activity initiators and the government should highlight the concept of inclusive non-basic public cultural services and set more reasonable prices or provide more subsidies to guarantee the equal right of the general public to enjoy public cultural services.

7 Conclusion

Public cultural crowdfunding indicates an innovative attempt and critical progress made by the Jiading District's public cultural and historical institutions and the government in constructing China's inclusive non-basic public cultural service system to satisfy the public's high-level, diversified and personalized cultural needs. This paper has introduced this new type of public cultural activity to the research field by analyzing its characteristics such as activity frequency, themes and initiators. Besides, three factors including the public cultural crowdfunded activity duration, success criteria on the minimum participant number and maximum participant limit are found to positively impact the actual participant number in public cultural crowdfunding activities, while crowdfunding prices illustrate a significantly negative impact. Such findings not only illustrate the significant role of public government subsidies in the development of inclusive non-basic public cultural services including public cultural crowdfunding activities, but also indicate that public cultural institutions, activity initiators and the government can jointly attract more participants in public cultural crowdfunding activities and thus achieve their historical inheritance functions by highlighting the inclusive non-basic public cultural service concept, organizing more long-term and general skill training activities, appropriately expanding the maximum participant limit, setting challenging criteria on the minimum participant number, setting more reasonable prices and providing more subsidies.

There are also some limitations of this paper that should be acknowledged. First, this paper has only collected the data from the "Cultural Jiading Cloud" while ignoring the significant role of user's experience and their inner states, which can be obtained by surveys. Future research can analyze the public cultural crowdfunding from a comprehensive perspective and include the factors of users' inner states such as perceived pleasure into the impact system of the public's intention to participate in these activities. Besides, this paper sets the actual participant number of each public cultural crowdfunding activity as the independent variable because it is the only data that can be obtained from the platform to represent the crowdfunding result. Future research can choose more reasonable variables to make the findings more convincing. At last, although the public's attention has not been found to significantly impact the actual participant number of each public cultural crowdfunding activity, this paper has to acknowledge that such a result might probably be due to the fact that nearly half of the total activities have no user comments or "likes". Future research should analyze the public's attention from other channels such as surveys to overcome this limitation.

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