

How does innovation emerge in open platform ecosystems?

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.

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Introduction

The open innovation perspective proposed by Chesborough (2003, 2024) has triggered the emergence of new theoretical approaches to marketing theory, capable for managing the increasingly complex entrepreneurial reality, in which platform business models are growing with heterogenous structures (Srinivasan, 2021; Fehrer et al, 2018). In this context, the Service Dominant Logic provides a theoretical frame to the new ever-evolving business models, that need for theoretical and empirical contributions adapted to the new contexts and in which the rules of the players and the markets have changed (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). In this perspective, institutions emerge as the fundamental rules or mechanisms of social order that govern the behavior of individuals within a community, being considered a key strategic factor for new business models like open platforms (Zahra et al, 2023; Gonçalves, 2021).

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

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

In so doing we develop a qualitative case study and use an inductive research approach, using the Gioia methodology (Gioia, 2012, 2021; Gummesson, 2017). The context of the research is arts crowdfunding ecosystem, that exemplifies a service ecosystem due to its 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 these interactions facilitate innovation and strengthen emotional bonds, making it a rich application scenario for studying ecosystems (Quero et al, 2017; Foa, 2019). The case study analyzed is the well-known arts open platform Patreon, a world reference 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 actor's 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 institution's changes and networks of actors working in ecosystems (Klimas & Czakon, 2022; Skalen & Gummerus, 2022). They 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 the Service-Dominant logic theory (SD logic) ecosystem approach for its capability to understand complex contexts in continuous process of change and evolution (Vargo et al, 2023, Akaka et al, 2021, Akaka et al, 2023, Chandler & Vargo, 2011). 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 proper recognition (Fehrer et al., 2020; Quero et al., 2020). The present research represents a contribution framed on the eleventh fundamental premise of the service-dominant (S-D) 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. This 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 relevant literature, a systematic literature review was conducted. The review process followed a systematic approach guidelines 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 questions 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 focused solely on technical aspects of platforms.

The search continued until data saturation was reached, defined as the point when no new themes emerged from the articles reviewed. A total of 55 articles were initially identified, and 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; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020; Paora-Wysocka, Z., 2015; Currie & Swanson, 2009). A recent body of work has brought together the concepts of institutionalization and de-institutionalization, and highlight the need for research towards, not only stability or change, but in the process that moves from one to the other (Polese et al., 2021; Haak et al., 2020, 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 loose 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 loose 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 the stability of existing institutions while simultaneously paving the way for emergence of new practices and innovations.

Understanding de-institutionalization requires an in-depth exploration of its various forms and the conditions that leads to its occurrence. For example, cognitive, normative or regulative 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 the literature. Table 1 provides an overview of these conceptualizations, including the notions of institutional erosion, disruption, and phase transition, highlighting 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 based on 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 a 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) old institutionalization approach with neo-institutional approaches developed by the Service Dominant Logic (Gonçales & Silva, 2021; Edvardsson et al, 2014; Edvardsson et al, 2018; Vargo & Lusch, 2016) and Institutional Work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Koskela-Huotari et al, 2016), this paper conceptualizes de-institutionalization as "*Changes taking 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 in a systemic perspective (Edvardsson et al, 2018; Vargo and Lusch, 2016; Chandler et al., 2019). Recent literature has focused on de-institutionalization as a part of a general process related to an emergence and phase transition and has called for research to provide theoretical and empirical support to this topic (Sarno et al, 2024; Polese et al., 2021; Aksom, 2020). In this perspective, 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 (Srinivasan, 2021; Scaringella & Raziwon, 2018; Edvardsson et al, 2014). Van Alstyne et al. (2016, pp. 55) highlight how "Platform business bring together producers and consumers in high value exchanges"; According to Fehrer et al. 2018 (pp.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 and 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. In 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 in the system institutions and make possible phase transition or emergence to take place as a result of it (Polese et al., 2021). Key

players within the platform ecosystem and the literature covering this agency of actors in open platforms led to the first exploratory research proposition:

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

Recent literature highlights the need for putting the focus on the importance of institutions in ecosystems and the need for research from the SD logic approach (Gonçalves, 2021; Vargo et al, 2023). The growing platform business models offer new different ways of connecting actors simultaneously (Srinivasan, 2021; Fehrer et al, 2018) and demand urgent research towards actor's individual and collective agency in connection with institutions (Haack et al, 2019; Ferreira et al., 2015; Dellbridge & Edwards, 2013).

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” and Michalke et al. (2022) refer to them as “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, the institutions arise as a key influence regarding resources' connection and influencing actor interaction (Koskela-Huotari & Siltaloppi, 2020), and, as Fehrer et al. (2018, p. 558) posited “the disruption of existing institutions [...] accelerates the development of positive network effects”. Osorno (2020) puts the focus on the need for research innovation in open platforms, highlighting the need for research the innovation developed by users and communities, in the same perspective proposed by 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 **exploratory research proposition grounded in theory is as follows:**

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

This proposition aims to explore the potential link between actor interactions and innovation within platform ecosystems. It is exploratory, serving to guide the 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. A 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”.

The capability of open platform ecosystems to connect actors and facilitate networking practices and innovation led to the third exploratory research proposition:

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 with recent works that highlight the need to address the innovation issue from an ecosystem multi-actor approach (Klimas & Czakom, 2022; Edvardson et al., 2018; Helkkula et al, 2018), in coherence. In this context, Gohoungodji & Amara (2022) put the focus on innovation in the creative industries and highlight need for research in this specific area. Recent literature is increasingly putting the focus on actor's interaction as a source for research with capability to trigger innovation through value co-creation (Fehrer et al., 2020; Fehrer and Nenonen, 2020; Storbacka et al, 2019; Storbacka et al, 2016; Peters, 2016).

Research process

A qualitative approach was chosen to explore the 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, allowing 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 (Gilliland et al., 2013; Blumer, 1954). These propositions 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 the 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 (where theory emerges from the data). In line with this, the exploratory research propositions 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 (Magnani & Gioia, 2022; Gioia, 2013). We aim at shedding light towards a social phenomenon and its dynamics. This emerging and complex context requires the use of a qualitative data collection method (Eisenhardt, 1989) in order to develop the required in-depth knowledge that is demanded by the research. (Lindgreen et al, 2020; Strauss & Corbin, 1997 and Gummesson, 2017). In the SD logic approach, context is a key factor in the appropriate understanding of how value is created (Vargo et al, 2023; Osorno, 2020; Chandler & Vargo, 2011). The choice of the arts context and the 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, it relates to crowdfunding context, which has a group of 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 it enables in-depth analysis of a service ecosystem as a unit (Otto & Jarke, 2019; Baron et al., 2018; Beverland, 2018). In this perspective, Lindgreen et al. (2020, pp.A7) posit "By using a case study method, researchers can make a holistic view and explore social processes in rich and complex detail".

The focus of the qualitative approach was to investigate de-institutionalization as a process performed by the actors (Storbacka, 2016; Wieland et al., 2016), according to exploratory research propositions rooted in theory.

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

Three steps configured the research process:

Step 1. Data collection:

1. Netnographic research: allowed for the identification of resources (Appendix I, Table 1).. This information confirmed Patreon had the characteristics to be considered as a single case study. The presence in academic papers (Sanyoura, 2022; Bonifacio et al., 2021; Hair, 2021; Regner, 2021; Mixon

et al, 2017;) and other non academic sources (i.e. Patreon was listed on the CBN 50 Disruptor list) justified the unique characteristics of this platform.

2. Primary data: according to theory (exploratory research propositions) and netnographic research, the need for primary data emerged. This first involved the manager's perspective, according to Nenonen et al.'s (2017) suggestion of "building theory with managers", and, in a second stage, a group of senior expert academics were involved to test and shape the theoretical approach (See Appendix 2). In the final stage, three in-depth interviews with a consumer, a creator and an arts management consultant were added to improve the approach to the ecosystem perspective. The annexes contain detailed information about the experts. The complexity of the subject matter led us to design an open-ended questionnaire, which was administered either in an interview or via email (in which 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 obtain a well-thought-out response reflecting their perspective on the topic (Dillman, 2007).

Step 2. Data analysis and coding procedure.

1. Coding procedure: The Gioia methodology guided the data analysis to develop grounded insights into actor information. Data coding was conducted in three stages:
 - a. 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 participant's language to ensure that the codes were grounded in the data. In this stage, one researcher conducted the initial coding, generating a list of "first order concepts".
 - b. Second-order themes:

The first order codes were then grouped into second-order themes based on their conceptual similarity and relevance to exploratory research questions.
 - c. Aggregate dimensions:

The second-order themes were synthesized into aggregate dimensions to construct a higher-level understanding of innovation and new practices emergence in arts crowdfunding ecosystems. This process led to the identification of key dimensions such as "actor's identification of system failures", "actor initiation of de-institutionalization", "actor's efforts to reach stability" and "actor's value co-creation triggering new networking practices" among others.

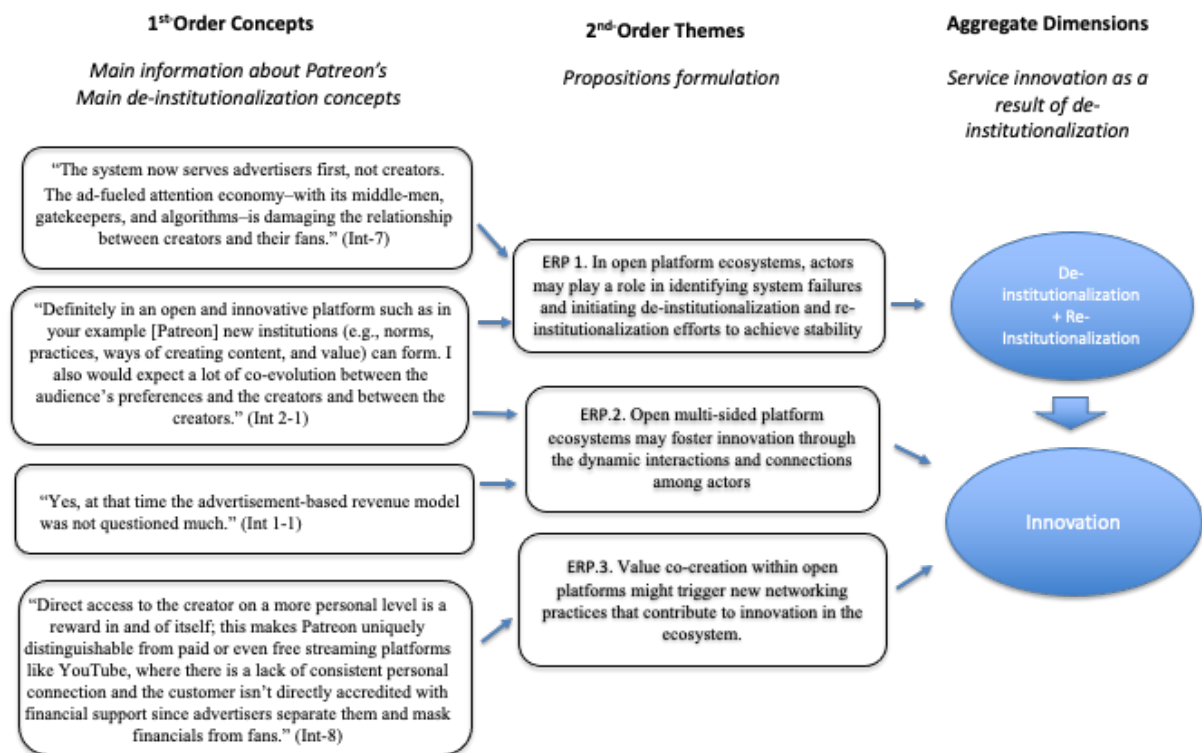
Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, which was determined when no first-order concepts or second order themes emerged. This indicated that the data adequately captured the range of experiences related to de-institutionalization and innovaton practices emergence in arts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

Figure 1 represents Data Structure, capturing the key dimensions and dynamics of the studied phenomenon, 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 the sources of the data analysis have been provided, including interviews, video and all the 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 there are two ideas: the creator's payment without an advertiser's influence and the creator's 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 exploratory research propositions (ERP) introduced in this paper have evolved through the grounded theory analysis. The findings illuminate the process of de-institutionalization in platform innovation, providing valuable insights into how actors drive this change. These propositions were intended as guiding tools and have been shaped by the inductive process, reflecting the dynamic nature of the phenomena under investigation.

ERP1. 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 exploratory research proposition 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 does not confirm the proposition but explores 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 reveals instances where actor connections do not necessarily result in innovation, emphasizing the variability of outcomes. These insights refine exploratory research proposition 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 Crowdcaster, 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 on open platforms can stimulate new networking practices, though this process is multifaceted. 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 exploratory research proposition 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 first reflect on the key insights derived from our findings and what they reveal towards the role of the actor and its capability to make possible de-institutionalization in connection with innovation emergence in arts open platform ecosystems. The present paper brings to the fore the need for research towards three specific areas in the context of open platform ecosystems:

- a. De-institutionalization: the role of institutions into new business models like open platforms require to put the focus on those actors with capability to break free from institutions and the capability of the system to integrate actor's resources to re-institutionalize a community. Theory has dealt with the topic of institutions but not specifically with the agency of the actor to break rules, making the system change.
- b. According to the theory and the findings of the present research, the present paper open new vias towards open multisided platforms and their configuration to foster innovation through heterogeneous actors interactions. This perspective, build on the need for managing innovation from a new perspective, in which it's actor's interactions the engine for ecosystem evolution and self-adjust.
- c. Emergence in open platform ecosystems is dynamic in nature. This accounts for important implications towards how to trigger new practices that contribute to innovation and how to avoid negative practices with negative consequences.

These insights provide a foundational understanding of how actor engagement unfolds within microfinance ecosystems and underscore 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 contribution

The present paper uses institutions as the lens to study innovation emergence in service ecosystems. Following Gonçalves (2021), we adopt the SD logic perspective for its capability to afford complex contexts in which actor's interaction offer a place where resources exchange among engaged actors makes the systems evolve (Poepplbuss et al., 2024; Michalke et al, 2022). 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 the **first exploratory research proposition was formulated in order to capture the capability of one actor to change institutions in an ecosystem, resulting in re-institutionalization and the attraction of actors that share the same perspective. The results represent one more step ahead towards the key role of the actor to both identify failures and make 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. **The second exploratory research proposition was formulated in respect of the ecosystem capability of platform business models to attract actors to co-create value with shared commitments. The results, build on the theoretical demands to explore the capability of actors to make innovation emerge through dynamic interactions as long as the platform offer open and multisided 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. **In this perspective, the third exploratory research proposition focus on networking practices emergence 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).

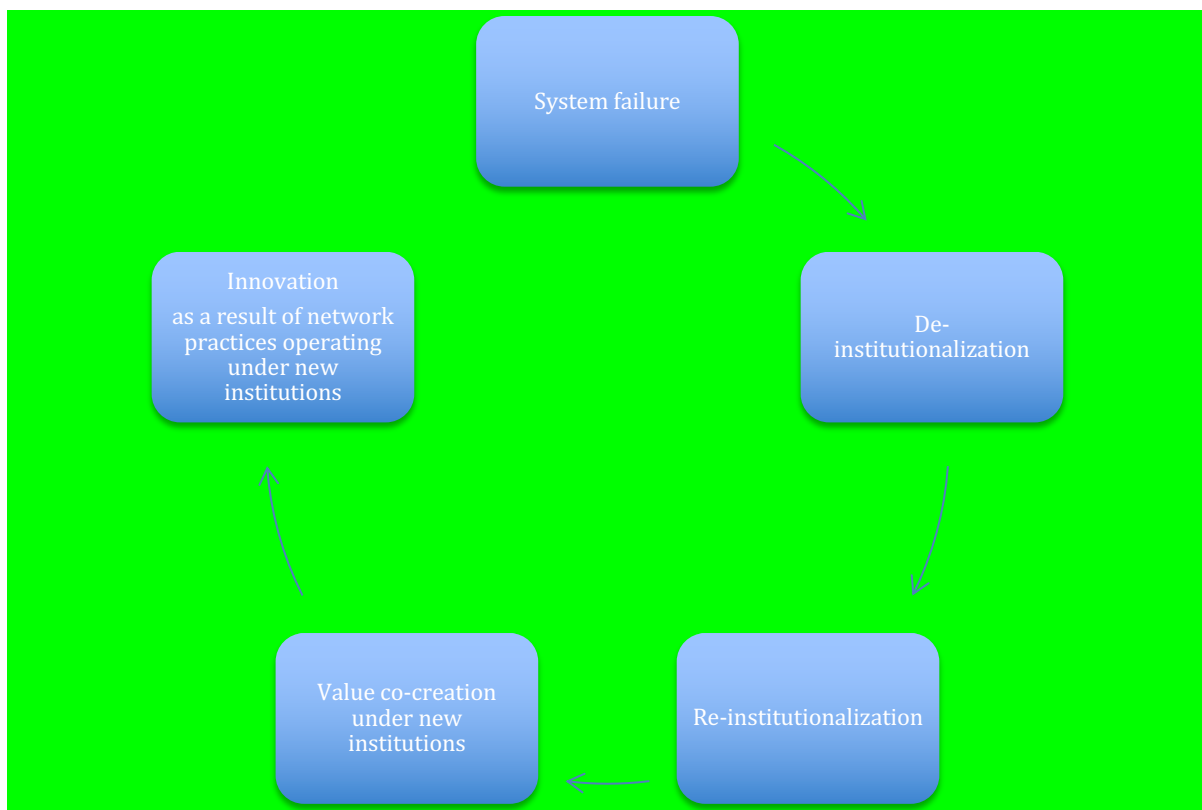
Implications for practice

The present work offers an enhanced understanding of open multisided platforms context. The study provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics within service-led ecosystems, particularly how heterogeneous

engaged actors challenge institutions, triggering a process of de-institutionalization followed by the arising of new institutions, making innovation emerge and the system evolve. The results can help platform managers and designers to manage innovation from an institutional perspective.

The exploratory research propositions developed from the SD logic lenses result in a change of perspective that 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 ERP developed combine a theoretical grounded with a case study empirical perspective in order to design strategies from a ecosystem perspective. There is system equilibrium, and all actors have the agency to make the system change and evolve. The Figure 2 represents how important are institutions in ecosystem, and the need for facilitating actor’s confluence among actors to make possible actor’s interactions and ecosystem self-adjust. In this perspective, the actors can be responsible for triggering de-institutionalization and institutionalization, making possible emergence of new practices as a result of actor’s efforts in the network to reach stability.

Figure 2: De-institutionalization as the seed for innovation



Source: The authors

Open platforms can find, in this research, suggestions for managing resources to obtain the best benefit for the system, and the capability to make the system evolve, challenging institutions and developing new ones. The propositions that result from the case study approach converge in three strategic perspectives:

a) Open multisided platforms can be seen as an ecosystem in which a community of heterogeneous actors account for the agency to challenge those institutions that do not fit the needs of the actors in the present context and propose new ones.

Evidence from Patreon can offer useful information for other open multisided platforms operating in the arts sector. Being aware of the need for offering context where the actors can challenge existing institutions and developing new ones opens a wide range of opportunities to implement this idea in specific platforms.

b) System failures must be seen as an opportunity to change and evolve.

As supported by the empirical approach and the literature (Polese et al, 2021), De-institutionalizing is a process intimately connected to re-institutionalization, and recent literature has connected it with emergence and phase transition. Breaking rules can be a good strategy if there is a critical mass willing to take part in the process.

c) Open multisided platforms: value co-creation as the core strategy for engaging and improving resource density and new practices emergence.

In open platforms, value co-creation among actors is one of the main assets, and the platform is responsible for its development and management to achieve the maximum value from all the actors engaged in the platform. Managers have to be aware of the importance of engaged actors in the platform and maximize their resources with the idea of getting multiplicative effects of their resources (Peters, 2016).

d) Open multisided platforms have to be aware of the value of “plasticity” of their business model and the strategic advantage of being managed as an ecosystem.

This idea of being a “malleable” system has important effects on the design of strategies that rely on the actors to make the system change. Considering the challenge of institutionalized norms as an strategy and a path for growing instead of a negative destabilizing measure open de possibility for the ecosystem self-adjustment and evolution.

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.

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 to design strategies according to the platform ecosystem and for other types of business models.

Data Availability Statement

This manuscript has no 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-	D2-2

			out-half-a-billion-dollars-to-content-creators-in-2019.html	
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.cnbc.com/2021/05/25/these-are-the-2021-cnbc-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