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*Understanding crowdfunding through assessing the social and cultural characteristics of crowdfunded video games.*

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#### Abstract

Crowdfunding is a recent phenomenon that promises to substantially transform production and consumption. This project aims to advance our understanding of the social and cultural implications of crowdfunding through assessing one of the most successful and high profile areas of crowdfunding: video games. This project will contribute to three bodies of scholarship. The first is research on crowdfunding. Among scholars who examine crowdfunding's social impact, views are divided between those who argue that crowdfunding will bring positive social and cultural changes and those who critique this view as too optimistic. Testing of these two views on the basis of empirical data is urgently needed. By evaluating crowdfunded products against their conventionally financed counterparts, this project will offer a part of this needed empirical basis. The second field of research this project will contribute to is theorization of social production. By conceptualizing crowdfunding as a type of social production, this project extends the boundaries of current theorizing. It also alerts scholars in the field to the possibilities and advantages of paying attention to partial, modularized cases of social production. The third field to which this project contributes is games studies. Crowdfunding looks similar to co-creation, prosumption, produsage, and disintermediation. By interpreting crowdfunding as not-for-profit actors taking up the financing part of production, this project offers a new and theoretically rich frame for game scholars to study the crowdfunding of video games.

This project's method emphasizes breadth, because the all current studies of games crowdfunding adopt methods that emphasize in-depth qualitative analysis of one or a few games. The quantitative data I will collect are metacritic scores and steam user ratings of a list of crowdfunded games. I will calculate the average scores of these games and compare them to triple A studio products and indie company ones. Additionally, I will count the number of awards that crowdfunded game won in the several representative annual game events. The qualitative data I will collect are evaluative comments on games that are recognized to be exceptionally artistic, community oriented, and socially engaged, and games with any socially innovative

features. I will check out game contents directly from games and indirectly from game videos. And a lot of game criticism, commentary, and reports will be read.