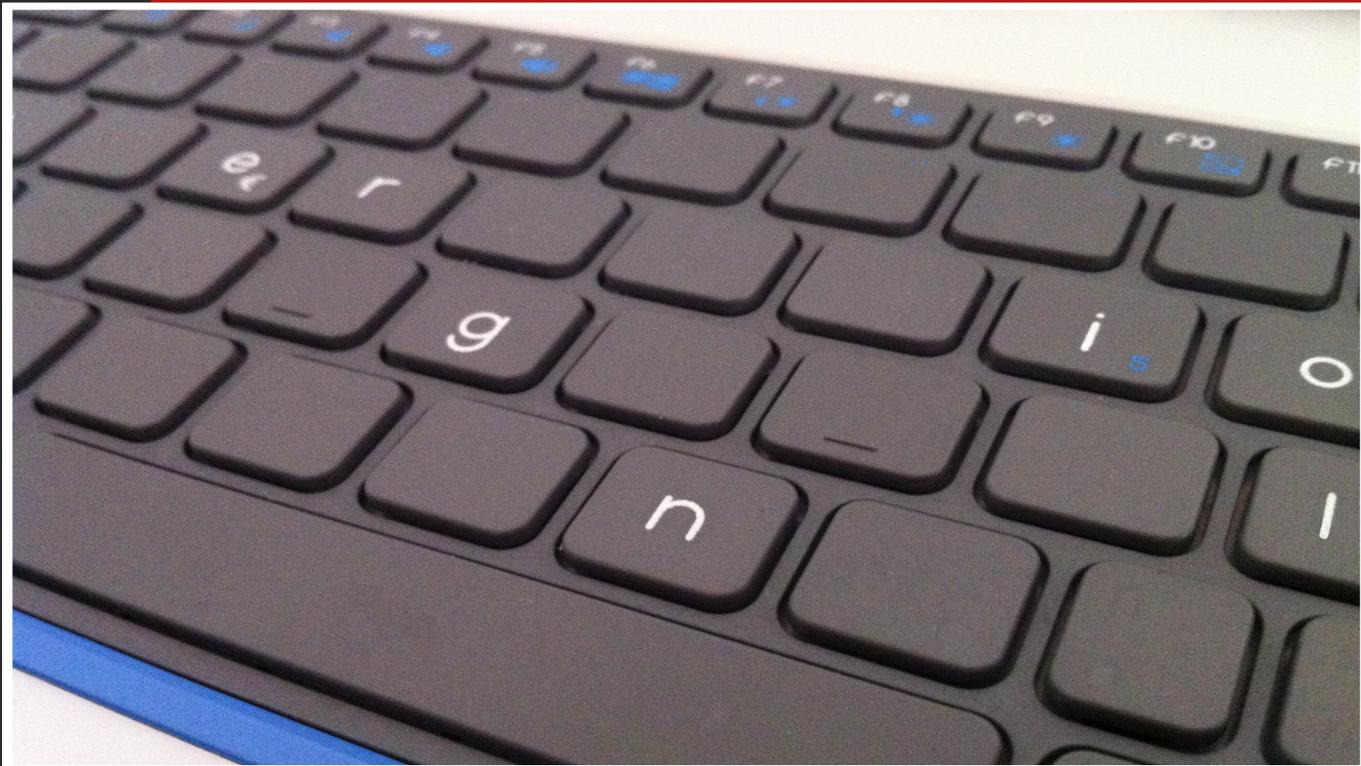




# online

HEIDELBERG JOURNAL OF RELIGIONS ON THE INTERNET



## Volume 09 (2015)

Institute for  
Religious Studies

University  
of Heidelberg

# Table of Contents

- 01 **Crowdfunding a New Church - A Multimodal Analysis of Faith-Related Giving Rhetoric on Indiegogo**  
*Adam J. Copeland*
- 19 **Renegotiating Shari'a-Based Normative Guidelines in Cyberspace - The Case of Women's 'awrah**  
*Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf & Leslie Tramontini*
- 45 **The Ahmadiyya in Germany - An Online-Platform as a Multi-Functional Tool**  
*Lauren Drover*
- 63 **Discovering the Digital Authority - Twitter as Reporting Tool for Papal Activities**  
*Damian Guzek*
- 81 **Internet and Kyais in Indonesia - Negotiation of Authority in a Mediatized Environment**  
*Fazlul Rahman*
- 107 **Attitudes Towards Women's Participation in Public Prayer Among Jewish and Muslim Websites**  
*Oren Steinitz*
- 125 **Review: Cybertheology - Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet**  
*Frank Bosman*



# **Crowdfunding a New Church: A Multimodal Analysis of Faith-Related Giving Rhetoric on Indiegogo**

Adam J. Copeland

## **Abstract**

The development of Internet crowdfunding platforms has transformed how businesses, nonprofits, and even congregations seek funding from large numbers of donors who each give a relatively small amount of money. In particular, Indiegogo's religion category for campaigns has developed into a platform used by Christian communities seeking funding for expanding their ministries. Drawing upon a rhetorical analysis of five faith-related campaigns that closed funding between December 2013 and April 2015, I consider how the giving rhetoric varies between the campaigns' mode of communication, comparing their textual rhetoric to their video messaging. Using the lens of multimodal theory (Córdova, Shipka), I argue that while the textual rhetoric of the campaigns studied emphasizes communicating practical information about the ministry, the giving rhetoric of the campaign videos highlights a more personal, emotional connection between the ministry and potential backer.

## **Keywords**

crowdfunding, rhetoric, giving, Indiegogo, church planting, multimodal theory

## **1 Introduction**

Following the advent of Kickstarter.com in April 2009, crowdfunding has quickly become a global phenomenon generating over \$16 billion in 2014 ("Global Crowdfunding," 2015). Though hundreds of Internet-based crowdfunding sites operate today, two vie for dominance in the United States: Kickstarter and Indiegogo. While Kickstarter remains the top site for tech-related product launches, Indiegogo nurtures an avid fan base and reliable campaign success. Thanks to a more open

approach to campaigns than Kickstarter, as well as a more flexible fee structure, Indiegogo is often the choice crowdfunding site for campaigns connected to nonprofit organizations.

Financial giving to churches and other faith-related organizations makes up a significant portion of philanthropy in the United States. Among those people who frequently attend religious services, around 75% give to their congregation and 60% give to charities religious or nonreligious (Daniels, 2013). Unlike Kickstarter, Indiegogo offers a “religion” category for project creators to classify their projects. While explicitly religion-related projects makeup a small portion of Indiegogo’s overall crowdfunding efforts, the category itself deserves study as a newly-developing area for faith-related giving. This paper considers the rhetoric of several faith-related Indiegogo campaigns through the lens of multimodal theory. I argue that, while supporting the same larger purpose, in the church-related crowdfunding campaigns studied, the videos and textual rhetoric serve somewhat different purposes. Namely, campaign videos emphasize personal connection, emotions, and gratitude while campaign textual rhetoric functions in ways mostly descriptive and informative.

## 2 Crowdfunding in Context

The rise of the Internet has enabled fast-paced digital communication. One result of today’s speed of communication is the ability to receive feedback from many people in a short amount of time. Some have come to call tapping into this resource as receiving wisdom from “the crowd.” While in common speech many use the phrase “crowdsourcing” fairly liberally, Daren C. Brabham’s definition of crowdsourcing does not actually include crowdfunding. According to Brabham, *crowdsourcing* “leverages the collective intelligence of online communities to serve specific organizational goals” (Brabham, 2013, p. xix). Crowdsourcing requires mutual benefit and shared “locus of control regarding the creative production of goods and ideas” between the organization and public (Brabham, 2013, p. xxi). *Crowdfunding*, on the other hand, tends not to include much give-and-take. Instead, in crowdfunding backers present an already-existing idea (not a problem, as in the case of much crowdsourcing) and ask others for financial support. Ethan Mollick developed one of the first academic definitions of crowdfunding:

Crowdfunding refers to the efforts by entrepreneurial individuals and groups—cultural, social, and for-profit—to fund their ventures by drawing on relatively small contributions from a relatively large number of individuals using the internet, without standard financial intermediaries. (Mollick, 2013, p. 2)

Lawton and Marom suggest the spirit of crowdfunding stems from what they call the “DIWO movement.” Rather than DIY, “do it yourself,” DIWO “do it with others” extends the spirit of creation connected to the DIY movement and, using the Internet, broadens the connections. “Crowdfunding is very much a kindred spirit of DIWO. People in the crowd tend to invest in projects to which they have an emotional and social attraction” (Lawton and Marom, 2012, p. 55). Relatedly, artist Amanda Palmer who raised more than \$1 million on Kickstarter, writes of what she calls “Maximal DIY.” Maximal DIY emphasizes collectivism and the willingness to ask for help from others. Palmer writes, “Maximal DIY relies on trust *and* ingenuity. You have to ask with enough grace and creativity to elicit a response, and you also have to *trust* the people you’re asking not to ruin your recording session, not to poison your food, not to bludgeon you with a hammer as you sit in their passenger seat” (Palmer, 2014, p. 101). This collective approach, asking and trusting others, is at the heart of crowdfunding.

While Brabham makes clear not to classify *crowdfunding* as *crowdsourcing*, he does suggest that crowdsourcing will “certainly play a role in the future of product development and will affect creative professions and possibly government funding of the arts in the future” (Brabham, 2013, p. 39). Rodrigo Davies suggests the civic use of crowdfunding is a “small but rapidly growing subgenre within the field of donation-based crowdfunding” (Davies, 2014, p. 129). Further, Davies’ research suggests an emerging “typical” civic crowdfunding project tends to be projects similar to “a small-scale garden or park project in a large city that produces a public good for an underserved community” (Davies, 2014, p. 46). Likewise, I suggest an emerging *typical* religion-related crowdfunding project seeks funding to create a new space or emerging ministry on the edge of the traditional, established church.

To launch any crowdfunding campaign project creators must employ a page template offered by the website. This template leads to a final published campaign page that project creators may share on social media platforms. Like many digital publications, the project page is multimodal. On Indiegogo, pages include (at least) a short description header area for a video or still image, a longer descriptive area for textual writing (and the possibility for more pictures), a tab/page for campaign updates, a tab/page for written comments from backers, and a sidebar for images and written descriptions of project perks offered to potential backers.

While the idea or concept itself of a proposed Indiegogo project is certainly an important factor in a project’s success or failure, the messaging of a campaign also contributes to audience reception and, therefore, to how many backers and how much funding a project receives. According to Indiegogo, “campaigns that use video raise 115% more money than campaigns that do not” (Indiegogo, n.d.). The *Indiegogo Playbook* (online) gives tips on what pitch videos should include. The tips come in both textual and video form. The *Playbook* site also links to John Trigonis’ instructive blog post, “5 Ways to Power-Up Your Crowdfunding Pitch Video” (Trigonis, 2013).

### 3 Multimodality and the Crowdfunding Genre

While crowdfunding invites a vast array of theoretical and methodological approaches, I am particularly interested in how the communicative form requires multimodal designs, among them graphics, video, typeface, images, visuals, and social sharing. Responding, in part, to the proliferation of digital composition in our world today, those within the academy now wrestle with how best to understand, and further, to teach students to analyze multimodal writing. “Literacy today is in the midst of a tectonic change,” writes Kathleen Blake Yancey, noting also that “never before has the proliferation of writings outside the academy so counterpointed the compositions inside” (Yancey, 2004, p. 298). Indeed, like all of us, student encounters with multimodal writing, especially its digital forms, has become so commonplace that it is easy to forget how relatively recently many of our electronic genres were developed. For instance, it was only natural that this year’s annual business startup weekend in Fargo, N.D. launched business ideas that many creators planned to take to crowdfunding (Olson, 2015). Just six years ago, crowdfunding was not an option; it did not exist. Today, crowdfunding has practically become default for young entrepreneurs.

While the general message of most crowdfunding campaign launch videos broadly corresponds to the message of campaign textual rhetoric, the video genre requires a different mode of communication. Launching a successful Indiegogo campaign therefore calls for what Bowen and Whithaus call “multimodal composing” which involves “the conscious manipulation of the interaction among various sensory experiences—visual, textual, verbal, tactile, and aural—used in the processes of producing and reading texts” (Bowen and Whithaus, 2013, p. 7). Students, and the vast majority of would-be crowdfunders, likely do not think of the composition process as “multimodal composition.” Chances are they did not take a class in crowdfunding rhetoric in college. Instead, project creators approach it as a tool to support their “ask” (to use the lingo of the field), a method, as Indiegogo puts it, to “create the world you want to see, one idea at a time” (Indiegogo, n.d.). This lack of academic consideration does not necessarily diminish the quality of writing on the platform. Both scholars and students often learn to compose with new technologies outside of classrooms, a phenomenon that worries Yancey when she considers how far the academy lags behind actual digital writing situations. She writes, “Given *this* extracurricular writing curriculum and its success, I have to wonder out loud if in some pretty important ways and within the relatively short space of not quite ten years, we [composition scholars] may have already become anachronistic” (Yancey, 2004, p. 302). Does this gulf call for a crowdfunding campaign to fund faculty workshops on how to teach crowdfunding?

Along these lines though with a different emphasis, Nathaniel Córdova argues that multimodal literacy for today is more than about simple understanding of meaning, but about “design and performance” and developing awareness of our “performative relationship to

technology” (Córdova, 2013, p. 157). Indiegogo campaigns then can become testing grounds for tracking the success of a particular technological multimodal performance: the project launch page. The crowdfunding launch page genre emphasizes multimodal writing endeavoring to convince readers to take action by funding, or at minimal, sharing the campaign via social media.

While much digital communication tends to be multimodal, Jody Shipka cautions that we not limit notions of multimodal composition only to the digital. In fact, Shipka suggests that we expand our appreciation to include “the highly distributed and fundamentally multimodal aspects of all communicative practice” (Shipka, 2013, p. 76). Such an approach supports the aims of Indiegogo since project launchers seek, ultimately, not only to communicate but to accomplish a very specific *end result* of receiving funding. Shipka would likely appreciate the goal of crowdfunding within her concept of communicatory “multimodal accomplishment” which asks students to “assume more responsibility for determining the representative systems that best suit the work *they* hope to accomplish” (Shipka, 2013, p. 76). Elsewhere, Shipka describes her requirement that students “compose a highly detailed *statement of goals and choice (SOGC)*” for each text they produce (Shipka, 2011, p. 113). The SOGC must respond to questions including,

1. What, specifically, is this piece trying to accomplish...
2. What specific rhetorical, material, methodological, and technological choices did you make in service of accomplishing the goal(s) articulated...
3. Why did you end up pursuing this plan as opposed to the others you came up with?  
(Shipka, 2011, p. 114)

Shipka’s work with the SOGC highlights the fact that multimodal writers make choices related to the mode in which they are composing. It is reasonable to assume that every part of a crowdfunding campaign is aimed at supporting the ultimate goal of gaining funding. Funding, to use Shipka’s term, is the ultimate “accomplishment.” However, the design of crowdfunding pages requires campaign messaging that extends beyond one mode of communication. When it comes to a crowdfunding campaign page, it’s certainly possible that the aim of a project video may differ from the aim of a textual section or sub-section. Together, the multiple modes of communication make an argument for project funding, but we should not ignore the constituent parts of crowdfunding rhetoric.

As shown below, the crowdfunding sites studied seem to employ videos for a particularly emotive use. Through the use of audio and digital recording, crowdfunders use videos to communicate their emotions, hopefully, tapping into the emotions of their audience. Ludwig Wittgenstein, long before the advent of video technology, writes that we *see* emotion:

We do not see facial contortions and *make the inference* that he is feeling joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other descriptions of the features.—Grief, one would like to say, is personified in the face. This is essential to what we call “emotion.” (cited in Stout, 2012, p. 152)

This emotive quality of communication, Jeffrey Stout suggests, is an essential aspect of relational power and community organizing to bring about societal change. While Stout mainly praises the work of face-to-face discourse, he grants that videos also work to depict the emotions in a way that retain their power to affect social change. Stout suggests, “Similar communicative work can be done in documentary video and in digital video, both of which media have the additional advantage, over the written word, of presenting the voices of people aurally and their faces visually” (Stout, 2012, p. 163). In crowdfunding campaigns, the videos become the place where aural and video communication leads to this emotional connection. Thus, while the videos remain part of the larger pitch, they take on a particular role.

Several authors suggest videos emphasize the emotional, embodied, and larger human role of campaign pitches. Lawton and Marom write, “Videos make it easy, on a human level, to get familiar with the people behind the idea or cause, and they are far easier to digest than reading through a PowerPoint presentation” (2012, p. 132). The video form connects to this “human level,” but it also allows potential backers to see those whom they would back. Trigonis counsels campaigners, “The truth is you must appear in your pitch video. People give to people, not to projects” (2013). Further, he instructs project creators to consider where they shoot the pitch video. The space can “enhance the mood of the pitch” and, ultimately, must avoid anything that is “cold and uninteresting” as a backdrop for the shoot (Trigonis, 2013). In sum, far more than the mere presence of a video affects the success of campaign. Videos can help communicate emotion and introduce backers to the pitch idea as well as the people who will help make it happen.

#### **4 Project Focus and Methodology**

On April 1, 2015 I navigated to the main religion category of Indiegogo and selected the “most funded” tab. I then clicked the “show more” button twice to reveal 12 total projects. Of those 12, five projects are related to building, moving, or establishing new Christian faith communities, making up a significant portion of faith-related campaigns (see fig. 1.). While there is no truly “typical” project, the similarities between the five projects suggest they might be considered together. Of the five projects analyzed, only two met their funding goals though all raised over \$20,000 each. Arguably, St. Lydia’s Dinner Church ranks as the most successful project as it not

only raised the most in funding (\$33,240) but also receiving backing from 263 people, more than any other project considered.

Name	Location	Date Funding Closed	Project Goal	Total Raised	Total Backers
St. Lydia's Dinner Church	Brooklyn, NY	July 2, 2014	\$30,000	\$33,240	263
Christ Church: Portland	Portland, OR	April 14, 2015	\$45,000	\$30,372	171
Building and Beyond	Phoenix, AZ	Dec. 25, 2013	\$1,800,000	\$24,281	93
Equipping the Abbey	Birmingham, AL	Dec. 27, 2014	\$40,000	\$23,000	130
Building the Bridge	Wilmington, NC	Aug. 2, 2014	\$20,000	\$20,551	106

**Figure 1**

Using textual analysis and close reading of the project pages, with particular appreciation for the giving-related pitch messages of the launch videos and textual rhetoric, I analyzed the variance between the rhetoric of the five projects' videos as compared to their textual rhetoric. In particular, I looked for any variance between mode with a focus on giving rhetoric, or the reasons why backers should give to the particular project.

## 5 New Christian Communities and Giving Rhetoric

The evangelical spirit of Christian religion, among other things, emphasizes creating new faith communities. In recent years, many mainline dominations have invested significant resources in a movement to reinvigorate new church development (e.g. "1001 New Worshiping Communities," n.d.). These movements suggest that planting new churches today requires particular agility with the broader culture, and that "for new churches, social media and the general ability to communicate publicly is an important tool for outreach" (Howard Merrit, 2014). The faith-related crowdfunding campaigns below take place within this context of new creation and experimentation.

### 5.1 St. Lydia's Dinner Church

One of the challenges the creators of the St. Lydia's Dinner Church campaign faced is how to explain the unusual nature of their faith community. While in some ways the campaign is typical in that it seeks to fund a congregation moving from one meeting space to another, the atypical details of Christian community is at the heart of both the textual and video rhetoric of the St. Lydia's Dinner Church campaign. In both the video (total length 3 mins. 36 secs.) and written language of the campaign page, an early portion of the message describes the characteristics of the community and what happens at their gatherings.

Using a bolded header, the campaign page opens with the question, “What’s a Dinner Church?” (see Fig. 2).

**what's a Dinner Church?**

St. Lydia's is a Dinner Church. We gather for worship each week around meal we cook and share together.

We're a progressive, GLBTQ affirming congregation, looking for an experience of the holy that is strong enough to lean on, deep enough to question, and challenging enough to change us.

The most important thing we do is bring people together across boundaries, to sit at a table and break bread together. This is where justice begins.

St. Lydia's was founded five years ago by Pastor Emily Scott, in collaboration with friends and colleagues, and about a million supporters like you, cheering us on as we grew.



*This is Dinner Church*

**we need you to help us build!**

The past few years we've been renting a place by the night to hold our Dinner Church services. But we've grown so fast, it's time to move to a place of our own. We've found a fantastic storefront, and now we need to move in!

13 out of 30 claimed

**\$500** USD

**The Apron**

You are in the Lydian fan club! And we're so grateful, we'd like to share with you a lovely, hand printed Lydian apron with our logo to remind you of us when you're making dinner.

9 out of 20 claimed

---

**\$1,000** USD

**The Cutting Board**

We can't even believe how committed you are to building our Dinner Church. THANKS! We'd like to send you a handmade wooden cutting board with an inlay of the Lydian cross. It's really pretty, promise.

3 out of 5 claimed

---

**\$5,000** USD

**The Chef Herself**

For a \$5,000 gift, Emily would like to come visit your church (or group of churches) lead a Dinner Church service, and give a presentation. It's the least she can do in response to such generosity. Candidates for this perk must reside in the continental United States!

0 out of 2 claimed

**Figure 2**

The answer follows:

St. Lydia's is a Dinner Church. We gather for worship each week around meal [sic] we cook and share together” (Scott, 2014). In the video the description is similar but is supported by several still images of the community as well as video interviews with members of the congregation explaining the actions of their gatherings using the refrain “...and it’s church.”

A significant feature of the video is the ability to include the voices of multiple members of the community. In a portion of the video preceding the actual invitation to give, five different members of the community describe what St. Lydia's means to them. A man, framed in the shot standing alone, says, "And because it's around a dinner table it's a chance to have a family." Finally, a seated woman, clearly moved, admits, "I don't know what I would really do if I didn't have St. Lydia's." After a still image of a member receiving communion, the video cuts to Pastor Emily Scott who says, "We are building St. Lydia's together and this is your invitation to participate." Then, like the campaign text, Scott explains that they have already raised \$80,000 towards the total campaign of \$120,000 (the Indiegogo campaign is for \$30,000). She makes a final pitch saying, "I hope that you'll give, and help us build St. Lydia's." Then, the video cuts to several people who appeared in previous scenes and a total of six people, all looking directly at the camera say, "Thank you" in a manner that suggests they are thanking those who donate to the campaign.

The original campaign page does not conclude with a "thank you" to donors. Rather, it concludes with an invitation to give, to send emails to others about the campaign, or sharing the campaign using the Indiegogo social media buttons at the bottom of the page. That noted, in every perk description there is some version of an exclamation indicating significant thanks (i.e. "Why are you so sweet?!? Thank you so much for giving" and "Wowzers! You are super generous and we can't thank you enough" (Scott, 2014).

In all, while the video and textual rhetoric differ at points, in general the message is fairly consistent. I did find the video much more emotionally gripping, however, likely because of the human element including many voices of community members describing, with great passion, their love for the community and their gratitude to donors. It's the people, and the glimpse at their stories and the community itself, that make the pitch compelling.

## 5.2 Christ Church: Portland

The center of Christ Church: Portland's campaign is the story of Adam Phillips, the pastor of the congregation. How the story is communicated, however, shifts depending on the mode. The textual rhetoric of the campaign page describes the story in measured language with a matter-of-fact tone. They started a church in March 2014. But, in early 2015,

The Evangelical Covenant Church terminated its partnership with our church because of our pastor Adam Phillips' advocacy for full inclusion of LGBTQ sisters and brothers in the church and our church's ethos to fully include and welcome anyone seeking to walk in the ways of Jesus. This decision by the ECC resulted in losing not only our church's family support system but the next two years funding. (Phillips, n.d.)

The pitch continues for only a few more paragraphs (202 words) that describe the work on the church, their vision for the future, and quoting John 3:16-17. Only one sentence addresses their emotions: “We are heartbroken about this decision” (Phillips, n.d.). The textual rhetoric does not include a specific ask for funds other than the general giving links provided by Indiegogo.

In contrast, the Christ Church: Portland video gives a much fuller, richer, and more compelling narrative and pitch. With somber music playing in the background, Phillips begins with the story of receiving a call from the Covenant “to uproot from the east coast and move to the pacific northwest and plant a church.” This personal context is absent from the textual version. Phillips continues, “Last week the denomination kicked us out. This is our story.” Phillips goes on to tell, from a first person point of view, looking directly at the camera, how he heard the news from the Covenant.

Last week the denomination told me...because of my vocal public advocacy for LGBT sisters and brothers, that I was no longer Covenant compatible. And they were cutting us off. They were cutting us off not only from our faith family, but from our financial support for the next two years. (Phillips, n.d.)

After 2 minutes and 45 seconds of further storytelling with great emotional appeal, Phillips moves to an explicit pitch:

But we need your help. If you can please share this story with others. And if you're so moved, please considering giving to Christ Church Portland so that we may continue our ministries uninterrupted. And keep praying for us. And come check us out as we continue to be a church here in Portland, for God's glory and neighbors' good. All our neighbors. Thank you. (Phillips, n.d.)

Phillips contextualizes his pitch in his reciting of Psalm 119:63 (“We are companions of all who seek to walk in faith and not fear”) what he calls the founding verse of the Covenant denomination. He then grounds the church's work in this verse, describing how their work flows from its foundation. Specifically, he emphasizes the “being companions of all” section and, without explicitly claiming it, the audience likely appreciates “all” in this case means what he previously referred to as “LGBTQ sisters and brothers.”

In the video mode, the Christ Church: Portland pitch is more expansive, allows for an emotive, rich appeal, and offers an explicit call for financial giving, for prayer, and for others to share the story of the congregation. In short, the video is a highly compelling narrative meant to tug on the heartstrings—and the wallet—of the viewer. The textual rhetoric seems like an afterthought, filling space and, more than anything, supporting the video.

### 5.3 Building and Beyond

A church plant commissioned from Shiloh Community Church (location not specified), Standing Stones Community Church in north Phoenix, Arizona was founded in 2005 by Pastor David Bowen (“Standing Stones,” 2015). Soon after its founding, the church moved into a 5,000 square foot commercial office park, but eventually, according to Bowen, the congregation outgrew the space. The campaign is to build a new church campus on an undeveloped five-acre property owned by the church. Had the campaign reached its goal of \$1.8 million, Standing Stones would have ranked among the five most successful campaigns of 2013. Instead, the campaign raised just over \$24,000, 1.3% of the goal.

The campaign video begins with Bowen, standing outside the door of the current church location, explaining the church history and their need for a new space. 55 seconds into the video, Bowen invites the viewer to “Come here. Follow me” as he walks out of frame. The video cuts to Bowen at the undeveloped site, what he calls “the new home of Standing Stones Community Church. After just 12 seconds, however, the video cuts again to an architectural schematic rendering of what the new church would look like, narrated by Bowen. The introduction to the schematic section of the video is the same text, word-for-word, as the opening of the site’s textual introduction:

What if there was a safe place for families to gather together and grow? What if there was a place where broken marriages could be healed? What if there was a place where the heartbroken and weary could find peace and rest? What if the same place offered words of encouragement and a clear understanding that forgiveness of sin and eternal life is something we all can have? That’s the kind of place I dream about. (Bowen, 2013)

After this shared content, however, the video pitch continues somewhat differently than the page text as the schematics give way to Bowen, again standing in the undeveloped lot. Bowen welcomes the viewer back saying, “You’ve seen the vision of what God can do. And I hope you’re excited about that, because I am. And, really, I’m also excited about your partnership in this.” Bowen then goes on to make a direct ask for viewers to make their “best gift possible” to the campaign, promising that God will multiply it.

Overall, unlike the campaigns above, the language Bowen uses in the video and the textual rhetoric on the campaign page is fairly similar. The variance of mode, however, does change the *feel* of the messaging in several ways. First, the shared “what if” language that casts a vision and is used in both the video and text is much more powerful when accompanied with the images and video tour of the renderings of what that vision would actually look like. Second, the passionate, pleading of Bowen’s voice is evident in the video. Therefore, when Bowen looks directly at the

camera and states, “I’m asking you, please, would you make your best gift possible today?” At several moments, Bowen points his fingers toward the camera, as if pointing directly at the audience and would-be donor: “I completely believe [God] is going to do this through you,” gesturing as he states “through you” (see Fig. 3.)



Figure 3

Finally, though both modes include some language of blessing (e.g. in the video, for those who give “the gift that God will give you will be eternal”) the messages end on a different note. The textual campaign closes by directing the reader to the rewards section of the site while the video ends with a direct, continued pitch from Bowen: “That all begins with you making a gift. Please. God bless you.” In all, the rhetoric of the video messaging uses the video genre to support the textual campaign with images, gesturing, tone of voice, spoken blessing, and a final ask that verges on pleading.

#### 5.4 Equipping the Abbey

The Abbey, a new Episcopal faith community in Birmingham, Alabama uses a short, clear description of their campaign to raise \$40,000: “The Abbey is a place for sinners, saints, and coffee. We need your help to get equipped and opened.” The campaign proved partly successful, raising

\$23,000. Textual rhetoric on the page is broken into three sections, 1) What is the Abbey, 2) What We Need, and 3) Ways You Can Help. While the textual rhetoric of the campaign page is broken up by use of a few pictures of the site, construction design, and Abbey-themed merchandise, the text largely addresses the three headings directly. The videos—there is one main video and another embedded halfway down the page entitled “Worshipping at the Abbey”—tell the Abbey story with many voices, suggesting a more personal, relational approach to giving rhetoric.

The video opens with the Rev. Katie Nakamura Rengers, Vicar at the Abbey, introducing herself and explaining the Abbey’s ministry offering hospitality and worship at their coffee shop. Under a minute into the video, we are introduced to the Rev. Kelley Hudlow, Deacon at the Abbey who speaks both of the community and their needs for funds to open the coffee shop. Hudlow emphasizes, “The Abbey wants to be open to everyone, not just Christians or Episcopalians” and goes on to list a descriptions of all those to whom they are open (2014). Finally, the movie cuts to Carrie Black, manager of the coffee shop, who explains that the money given will help purchase items needed for the coffee shop such as coffee maker, grinders, and mugs. The video ends with Hudlow asking viewers to share the crowdfunding page so that they “get the word about getting the Abbey equipped” (2014)

Interestingly, the video lacks any direct spoken pitch or specific ask for funds. It addresses where the funds will go and *that* they are raising funds, but none of the speakers directly ask the viewer to give. Black gets closest when she says, “With your support we will able to purchase all the equipment that we need to open the Abbey. Thank you” (Hudlow, 2014). In this way, the giving rhetoric of the video is quite subtle other than the direct ask, at the end, for the viewer to share the crowdfunding page. What the video does do, however, subtly or not, is introduce the viewer to three leaders at the Abbey. While the video script includes few, if any, facts not present on the textual section of the page, only the video introduces the viewer to the people who will be receiving and putting their gifts into action.

This relational approach continues and deepens in a second video included on the page. The video opens with the words: “We asked some folks why they come to work at The Abbey. Here is what they told us.” Five people, then, respond to the prompt by describing their experience at the Abbey. They speak directly to the camera, and the name appears on the screen when each begins speaking in a way that feels as if the viewer is being introduced to the speaker. The final speaker, Naomi Rengers, only appears for a few seconds. Naomi looks to be under two years old, and is held in the arms of an adult. She says only, “Abbey!”

The messaging of the Abbey campaign differs by mode in two main ways. First, the textual rhetoric of the campaign page includes more direct asks for financial donations than the indirect approach of the videos. The main difference, however, is in the relationality of the pitch. By

showing so many speakers, introducing them, and hearing their voices, after watching the videos I felt as if I was beginning to get to know the community itself. The personal, relational nature of the videos introduced me both to the concept of the Abbey and, perhaps more importantly, to the people who help to make the vision a reality.

## 5.5 Building the Bridge

The Bridge Church is a new church plant based in downtown Wilmington, North Carolina, and part of the Summit Network, a church planting collaboration of several Evangelical Christian organizations. Ethan Welch, Lead Pastor, opens the campaign video by explaining that he and his family, along with a team of 50 people, recently moved from the Raleigh-Durham area to launch Bridge Church, a church that exists “for Christ, for community, and for the city” (Greene, 2014).

The visual rhetoric of the video illustrates the campaign’s purpose by abstinence. As opposed to the *Equipping the Abbey* and *Building and Beyond* campaigns featured above that show schematics of the new worship space, the Bridge video shows Welch in a run down, warehouse-like building with unfinished walls, boards strewn every which way, and uninstalled insulation piled up in the background. With inspirational music playing in the background, Welch describes the vision of the church and the vision of the space. After a cut, Welch then puts it clearly:

So, here’s the big idea. This is where you come in to play. We need about \$20,000 up front money in order to get in this space. So, the 299 chairs that will be here, that will represent people coming in to hear the gospel, maybe you could purchase one of those for us... (Greene, 2014)

After listing some other giving options, Welch ends with a series of questions, “Would you consider? Would you join us? Would you help us get here in this space? Would you purchase one of those things and be a part of Building the Bridge?” (Greene, 2014)

Compared to the textual rhetoric, the video campaign carries with it much more passion. Welch is clearly excited about the possibilities for ministry in the space, and the tone of his voice suggests optimism, perhaps especially when contrasted with the rather dilapidated-looking space in need of renovation portrayed in the video. Like most of campaigns considered in this paper, the textual rhetoric of the Bridge campaign includes additional information not disclosed in the video, including an invitation to share the campaign with others, to sign-up for the church e-newsletter, and to commit to pray for the church plant. In contrast, Welch’s giving rhetoric only mentions financial gifts. Welch’s message in the video, though indirect, is still a bit more direct than the giving rhetoric in the campaign page text. For instance, Welch tends to ask questions about considering, or joining, rather than direct, declarative statements like, “Will you support our

ministry by giving \$100 to our campaign to purchase a chair?” (Greene, 2014). The main textual area of the campaign page, however, does not include any questions or direct invitations to give. Instead, the text tends to list needs, letting the reader fill in that these needs might be filled by a financial gift. The closest sentence to a direct ask for financial support reads, “Anything you can do will help us be able to make these purchases in preparation for our launch this fall” (Greene, 2014). Ultimately, however, the approach was successful as the campaign slightly exceeded the goal of \$20,000.

## 6 Conclusion

The main goal of the faith-related crowdfunding campaigns considered here seems clear: to gain funding. While campaigners used different rhetoric to describe their pitch, the end of the campaign was to raise money. The church-related campaigns studied raised an average of around \$26,000, a drop in the bucket for Indiegogo as a whole, but a number that likely makes up a fair portion of many of the smaller congregations’ annual budget. Shipka’s work on multimodal communication pushes us beyond considering only the ultimate “accomplishment” of the campaigns themselves. The choices the crowdfunders made in each of the modes of communication in their campaign suggest different goals and choices for the different modes of the campaign.

Significant variance exists in the messaging, giving rhetoric, and emotive qualities between the textual portion of the campaigns and the video(s) associated with them. While certainly some variance exists among the videos themselves, this study makes clear that the crowdfunding videos above do share qualities. These qualities align with Stout’s studies on how to organize for social change, as well as with Trigonis’s advice for Indiegogo crowdfunders. Namely, videos help humanize the pitch through the emotive power of the human voice and visage, as well as the vision-casting imagery of shooting the videos in the very sites that will be affected by the campaigns. In this way quality videos function as hugely powerful communicate practices for crowdfunding campaigns. Broadly, these videos show campaigners giving impassioned, personal, asks for funding support. Compared to the videos, the textual rhetoric of the campaigns functions more to share information, often including details about the history and mission of the congregation, details about the campaign itself, and occasional pictures. On the whole, the textual rhetoric is less affective, shows less enthusiasm, and, most likely, is simply less important to the campaigns than the emotive, human message of campaign videos.

This research suggests several further areas for study. By combining multimodal theory and audience response theory scholars may find benefits in exploring how would-be backers respond to

particular instances of giving rhetoric depending on mode. Further, this project does not consider the influence of project perks as a factor in giving, an understudied area in the field. Finally, several project creators ask backers to give *and* share their campaigns on social media platforms. However, many campaigners also mention—in text and/or video—that if the audience cannot give financially, sharing the campaign is still an important contribution. Studies into the rhetoric and influence of the social media campaigns behind the campaigns may provide additional insight into project success. While Internet-related predications are always dangerous, I suspect that more congregations will build upon the relative success of the cases studied here and crowdfunding will become more common. Whether in digital text or video, one thing is clear: the offering plate has gone digital.

## Literature

1001 New Worshiping Communities [WWW Document], n.d. . 1001 New Worshiping Communities. URL <http://www.onethousandone.org/> (accessed 5.2.15).

Bowen, D., 2013. Building and Beyond [WWW Document]. Indiegogo. URL <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/547161/fblk> (accessed 4.1.15).

Bowen, T., Whithaus, C. (Eds.), 2013. *Multimodal literacies and emerging genres*, Pittsburgh Series in Composition, Literacy, and Culture. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Brabham, D.C., 2013. *Crowdsourcing*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, GB.

Córdova, N.I., 2013. Invention, Ethos, and New Media in the Rhetoric Classroom The Storyboard as Exemplary Genre, in: Bowen, T., Whithaus, C. (Eds.), *Multimodal Literacies and Emerging Genres*, Pittsburgh Series in Composition, Literacy, and Culture. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa, pp. 143–163.

Daniels, A., 2013. Religious Americans Give More, New Study Finds [WWW Document]. Chron. Philanthr. URL <https://philanthropy.com/article/Religious-Americans-Give-More/153973/> (accessed 4.18.15).

Davies, R., 2014. Civic Crowdfunding: Participatory Communities, Entrepreneurs and the Political Economy of Place. SSRN Electron. J. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2434615

Global Crowdfunding Market to Reach \$34.4B in 2015, Predicts Massolution’s 2015CF Industry Report [WWW Document], 2015. . www.crowdsourcing.org. URL <http://www.crowdsourcing.org/editorial/global-crowdfunding-market-to-reach-344b-in-2015-predicts-massolutions-2015cf-industry-report/45376> (accessed 4.18.15).

Greene, C., 2014. Building the Bridge [WWW Document]. Indiegogo. URL <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/807021/fblk> (accessed 4.1.15).

- Howard Merrit, C., 2014. Six important findings about new worshipping communities [WWW Document]. Christ. Century. URL <http://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2014-11/six-important-findings-about-new-worshipping-communities> (accessed 5.2.15).
- Hudlow, K., 2014. Equipping The Abbey [WWW Document]. Indiegogo. URL <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/976733/fblk> (accessed 4.1.15).
- Indiegogo, n.d. Creating Your Campaign [WWW Document]. Indiegogo Playb. URL <https://go.indiegogo.com/playbook/life-cycle-phase/setting-up-your-campaign> (accessed 3.29.15a).
- Indiegogo, n.d. How it Works [WWW Document]. Indiegogo It Works. URL <https://www.indiegogo.com/learn-how-to-raise-money-for-a-campaign> (accessed 4.3.15b).
- Lawton, K., Marom, D., 2012. *The Crowdfunding Revolution: How to Raise Venture Capital Using Social Media*, 1 edition. ed. McGraw-Hill, New York.
- Mollick, E.R., 2013. *The Dynamics of Crowdfunding: An Exploratory Study* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 2088298). Social Science Research Network, Rochester, NY.
- Olson, D., 2015. Startup event breathes life into hotcake, home brewing concepts. Forum Fargo-Moorhead.
- Our History*, 2015. Standing Stones Community Church.
- Palmer, A., 2014. *The Art of Asking: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help*, 1St Edition edition. ed. Grand Central Publishing, New York.
- Phillips, A., n.d. Christ Church: Portland [WWW Document]. Indiegogo. URL <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/1133793/fblk> (accessed 4.1.15).
- Scott, E., 2014. St. Lydia's Dinner Church [WWW Document]. Indiegogo. URL <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/798523/fblk> (accessed 4.1.15).
- Shipka, J., 2013. Including, but Not Limited to, the Digital Composing Multimodal Texts, in: Bowen, T., Whithaus, C. (Eds.), *Multimodal Literacies and Emerging Genres, Pittsburgh Series in Composition, Literacy, and Culture*. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa, pp. 73–89.
- Shipka, J., 2011. *Toward a composition made whole*. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa.
- Stout, J., 2012. *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*, Reprint edition. ed. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Trigonis, J., 2013. 5 Ways to Power-Up Your Crowdfunding Pitch Video [WWW Document]. Indiegogo Blog. URL <https://go.indiegogo.com/blog/2013/02/five-ways-to-power-up-your-crowdfunding-pitch-video.html> (accessed 4.2.15).
- Yancey, K.B., 2004. Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key. Coll. Compos. Commun. 56, 297–328. doi:10.2307/4140651

**Biography**

ADAM J. COPELAND teaches at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA where he is director of the Center for Stewardship Leaders. His interests include the study of digital religion, crowdfunding, religious rhetoric, and leadership in Christian communities. He is pursuing a Ph.D. in Rhetoric, Writing and Culture at North Dakota State University.

Adam J. Copeland  
Luther Seminary  
2481 Como Ave.  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
U.S.A.  
[acopeland001@luthersem.edu](mailto:acopeland001@luthersem.edu)