

Crowdfunding and Online Identity: Cashing in on Authenticity?

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Introduction

Popular music celebrities in the new media environment are in the unenviable position of having to meet multiple, often conflicting, expectations from their fans. On one hand, popular musicians are increasingly expected to have and maintain an online presence through various social media platforms, and may use direct online interactions with audience members as a way of consolidating or building their fan base both locally and globally. There must inevitably be occasions when celebrities are merely going through the motions of the audience engagement, which is a necessary part of their career. However, in direct conflict with this, popular musicians are also expected to act in a genuine and relational manner in their virtual- and real-world contact with fans; to do otherwise is to attract accusations of inauthenticity, which may be harmful to the public's perception of them. Popular musicians must operate within the boundaries of these contested roles.

Crowdfunding is a practice that exists at the nexus of these conflicting expectations, relying as it does on musicians' abilities to promote themselves and their projects, using online platforms such as Kickstarter, Pledge Music or Pozible. Crowdfunding campaigns invite participants to make a financial investment in a forthcoming creative venture by offering various tiered rewards for donating certain amounts. Crowdfunding puts the people responsible for the execution of a project in direct contact with the people who are likely to engage with it, blending the roles of fan and investor in the same way that creator and celebrity have been combined. Christopher London warns that it may be dangerous to confuse relationship and retailing.

[I]n treating social relations as 'stocks' that can be 'accumulated', the relations themselves are treated as mere means to an end: that of (physical or financial) capital accumulation ... It's culturally premised on the idea that people come to their social relations only by thinking in terms of 'what can I get out of this' and not in terms of 'what do these people mean to me and me to them' (Rheingold 2006a: 61).

Elsewhere, Rheingold calls this a 'commodification of community' (Rheingold 2006b: 72). Although on the surface it appears to be a model based purely around financial



transactions for goods and services, crowdfunding also trades heavily on hidden social, cultural and emotional exchanges between popular musicians and fans. These inexplicit investments are central to crowdfunding, and work on investors' perceptions that creators and their projects are authentic and genuine. In an environment that is increasingly reliant on the digital marketplace, is it possible for musicians to participate authentically in online communities based around their creative practice, or will their online presence only exist as a means of cashing in on the collective devotion of their fans? This paper examines the interdependency of the virtual- and real-world environments in crowdfunding projects by Amanda Palmer and Eskimo Joe, highlighting the important role authentic and relational interactions with fans played in the success of the two campaigns, and identifying some of the issues which may arise when fans make an emotional as well as a financial investment in the outcome of a creative project.

Performing Authenticity

'Authenticity' is a common but conflicted term in music scholarship. An authentic performance in Western classical music is one that closely adheres to the composer's instructions, usually recorded in the written score ([Fisher 2011: 405](#)), and the performance conventions of the time of composition. In contrast, a piece of popular music is more likely to be described as authentic if it is performed or recorded by the person or people who composed it or, in the case of a cover song, if the performer has made stylistic changes (to tempo, harmony, inflection, instrumentation, etc.) so that the song is consistent with their own individual writing and performing style. The term nears ubiquity in discussions surrounding relational fan-celebrity interaction. Psychologists use the term 'dispositional authenticity' to describe 'the unimpeded operation of one's core or true self in one's daily enterprise' ([Brunell et al. 2010: 901](#)). The components these researchers found to be present in an individual with high dispositional authenticity (self-awareness, unbiased processing, behaviours that accord with values, and striving for honesty in relationships) are all difficult to discern without intimate knowledge of the individual, which is especially difficult when the individual in question is a celebrity. For the popular musician, authentic fan-celebrity relationships may involve the exposure of what Rojek ([2004: 11](#)) terms the 'veridical' self, that is, the celebrity's private and genuine face rather than an enacted or staged public persona. Examining the nuances of authenticity in theory and practice will highlight the importance of these relational forms of celebrity in crowdfunding projects.

Authenticity involves an accord between motives and actions, and as such is difficult to identify absolutely in celebrities. Rather, there are certain behaviours often associated with authenticity. Lionel Trilling suggests authenticity involves a certain disregard of others, especially concerning creative work.

The artist ... ceases to be the craftsman or the performer, dependent upon the approval of the audience. His reference is to himself only, or to some transcendent power which – or who – has decreed his enterprise and alone is worthy to judge it ([Trilling 1972: 97](#)).

For popular musicians, this might involve some degree of inattention to the trends of the moment, focusing instead on creating work that is personally satisfying, without a particular market in mind. John Encarnacao elucidates this notion, highlighting the difference between musical works that are created with awareness that the musical output will be heard or consumed against tailoring the creation of a musical product to a specific audience or market ([Encarnacao 2009: 72](#)). Works targeted to certain audiences can, in some contexts, be viewed as artificial rather than 'something inward, personal and hidden, the goal primarily of self-expression rather than other-directed communication' ([Kelly 2010: 132](#)). Duncombe suggests an authentic individual is 'one who cuts through the conventions of manners, norms, and communications and connects to his or her "real" self' ([Duncombe 2008: 37](#)) and elaborates that 'more than anything else, this search to live without artifice, without hypocrisy, defines the politics of underground culture' ([Duncombe 2008: 37](#)). Kelly notes that in some subcultures, such as the one surrounding the New Sincerity movement, any awareness of a public self is interpreted as an attempt to utilise publicity for personal gain and is therefore 'associated with bad faith or an artificial dishonesty' ([Kelly 2010: 133](#)). In each of these definitions, authenticity is theorised as the external manifestation of internal motivations and decisions, positioned within culturally contextual dialogic exchange.

By considering Trilling, Kelly and Duncombe's thoughts about authenticity with respect to the notion of enacting relational forms of celebrity, a neat accord is notable. A performer who eschews manufacturing an obvious public persona and allows audiences access to his or her veridical self, or perhaps creates a public face that appears veridical, is more likely to be seen to be acting authentically.



Performers can also enhance the perceived authenticity of their persona by demonstrating Kelly and Duncombe's search for the real and distaste for the artificial. By actively avoiding perceptions that their music and their public selves are contrived, by enacting personal integrity in creative output, and allowing fans some access to their veridical self (or a convincing production of the same), celebrities can establish themselves as authentic. These markers of authenticity are by no means exhaustive or absolute, but they are useful in giving some indication as to the ways authenticity is understood or identified by audiences.

Ultimately, authenticity or inauthenticity is a subjective matter based on how fans perceive the work and actions of a performer, rather than existing as an objectively determined set of characteristics, and will necessarily be influenced by modes of consumption and interaction. In the new media marketplace many fan-celebrity interactions, and certainly all crowdfunding projects, are substantially enacted online. Authenticity and identity in the virtual environment will therefore have an impact on the success or otherwise of any crowdfunding venture.

Authentic Online Identities

Identifying authenticity is further complicated when focusing on Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), as consideration must be given to whether authentic interactions can actually take place online. Is the very idea of authentic communication occurring via the interface of a computer, between two people who may never meet in the physical world, reliant on representative rather than real expression, inherently paradoxical? Consideration of how identity is established in cyberspace may clarify whether or not authentic interaction and relational forms of celebrity are possible in virtual space, and offer useful insights into the environment in which crowdfunding projects occur.

Evidence suggests that online environments both impact upon and are impacted by real-world spaces. Clare Madge and Henrietta O'Connor theorise that cyberspace is a liminal or hybrid region where virtual and geographic spaces coexist ([Madge and O'Connor 2005: 83](#)) where 'online and offline worlds are mutually constituted' ([Madge and O'Connor 2005: 85](#)). Research into education, youth culture and technology supports the idea of amalgamated online and offline lives in adolescents. Spears et al. ([2012: 19](#)) found that the virtual and real worlds and relationships are intertwined for young people, and that 'the online life does not make sense *without* the offline life. Or to put it more radically: there is no distinction, because it is all part of the *same* life' ([Spears et al. 2012: 17](#)). For the popular musician, this means that the establishment of an authentic online presence is necessary as a tool in the development and maintenance of connections with their physical real-world audience. In P. David Marshall's discussion of singer-songwriters in the sixties, he connects a star's cultural power, that is, their ability to create and stylistically influence an audience group, to the strength of their connection with the community of fans. He highlights the importance that the music celebrity is both perceived to be acting authentically, and that he or she be 'a virtual member of his or her own audience in order to sustain his or her influence and authenticity, and the commitment of the fan' ([Marshall 2006: 204](#)). Although here the term 'virtual' is not a reference to the musician requiring an online presence, in the post-internet music industry it is often the case that stars become virtual members of their audience by connecting with them in cyberspace via social media or blogging. These platforms allow the celebrity to communicate about their work and themselves with a global network of fans and potential fans, and enable the possible ascription of Marshall's cultural power.

However, the establishment of a singular, consistent, authentic online identity is a problematic due to the proposition that identity is mutable online ([Kitchin 2001](#); [McKeown 2013](#); [Walmsley 2000](#)). It is possible for an individual to use the online environment as a site in which to experiment with multiple versions of the self, and these online representations both impact on and are impacted by the real-world person. As Kitchin puts it:

It is difficult to accept the argument that on-line identities are *completely* separate from identities within 'embodied' real space ... [Identity] might be fluid and fragmented but it is also situated ... Bodies cannot be transcended: rather, they are a fundamental constituent of us, of being ([Kitchin 2001: 83](#)).

Kitchin firmly affiliates physical and virtual identities, suggesting that neither the online nor the offline representation of the self can exclusively constitute the definitive or authentic identity. Rojek ([2004: 17](#)) observes a risk of fans experiencing cognitive dissonance when



and if a celebrity's representation of self is too divergent in different contexts, which may result in unwillingness to attribute the celebrity with cultural power and respect. Cognitive dissonance, according to Rojek, may arise in fans when a celebrity's public persona is shown to be dramatically removed from their veridical self; in these cases the celebrity's inconsistency may lead to accusations of inauthenticity. Accepting Rojek's thinking, as well as the proposals that identity is mutable in cyberspace and that online and offline identities are mutually constituted, it becomes clear that celebrities must have congruence between their virtual- and real-world selves to avoid the possibility of cognitive dissonance. The cyberspace and real-space versions of self must be in agreement for celebrities to establish an authentic online identity.

Celebrities establishing authentic online identities and communities with fans must overcome both the perception that online interaction has less value than that occurring in the real world, and general scepticism surrounding perceptions of authenticity. Rheingold (2006b: 6) refutes any claim that online relationships are less valuable or real than those that exist in the physical world. He further posits that, although online communication functions differently to real-world communication, disingenuousness does not necessarily follow. He argues that analysis of online communication should not 'assume that true human emotions can't be transmitted through media, or that they don't count as much as face to face emotion' (Rheingold 2006b: 8). Certainly, from Rheingold's perspective, the possibility exists for the development of authentic and relational online communities between celebrities and fans. Graeme Turner (2006) describes the cautious attitude the general public holds when interacting with celebrities and the entertainment industry as 'suspicion':

[i]ndividual celebrities may overcome this suspicion by convincing the public of their authenticity, but the concept [of authenticity] itself is seen by many as representing the triumph of image over substance, and of representation over the real (Turner 2006: 364).

A paradox is highlighted here: to overcome the public's scepticism a celebrity must demonstrate authenticity, but authenticity itself is seen as an artificial construct. The performer's ability to act authentically is hampered, as any outright attempt to do so could be viewed as precisely that – an act – something manufactured and inauthentic. The internet is an environment that allows the public unprecedented access to celebrities' thoughts, feelings and actions, but the relationships developed online must appear authentic for fans to attribute celebrities with cultural power.

For the popular music celebrity, authenticity, both online and offline, is difficult to identify, establish, or utilise without appearing to manipulate the public. Avoiding perceptions of artificiality and putting forward a representation of the self that is perceived to be both veridical and likeable is necessary to establish connection and community with fans, and these connections are likewise necessary for the financial and cultural success of any project the celebrity may wish to pursue. However, the mutual constitution of virtual and physical identities and communities coupled with the pitfalls associated with presenting an incongruous public face mean that authentic celebrity is a highly conflicted notion. Analysing the recent case of Amanda Palmer's celebrated crowdfunding success allows scope for further consideration of the issues surrounding authentic communication in the virtual environment.

Amanda Palmer as Relational Celebrity

In April and May 2012, Amanda Palmer, formerly of The Dresden Dolls and currently active as a solo musician, chose to crowdfund the promotion, mixing, manufacture and distribution of her recorded but, at that time, unreleased new album, *Theatre Is Evil*. The campaign, on US-based crowdfunding platform, Kickstarter, aimed to raise USD\$100,000 by offering supporters a tiered selection of rewards, ranging from receiving a digital download of the album for a pledge of USD\$1, to having a doughnut with Palmer before a show for USD\$1,000, or securing an exclusive performance by Palmer for USD\$5,000 (Palmer 2012b). As a crowdfunding pitch, this arrangement was reasonably conventional and not dissimilar to other successful campaigns, for example those run by The Polyphonic Spree or Ben Folds Five in 2012. Although in many ways Palmer's campaign was completely conventional, she made USD\$1.2 million (twelve times her target) in thirty days, which remains Kickstarter's highest earning music-based crowdfunding project to date. To contextualise the magnitude of this success, Björk's attempt in January 2013 to raise GB£375,000 to convert the iOS application (app) that accompanied her *Biophilia* album to Android was withdrawn after only 10 days when it became apparent that it would not reach its target. At the time of initiating the crowdfunding projects, Björk was arguably the better established of the two acts (if only by virtue of having thirty-five years



of performances and record releases to her name, to Palmer's mere decade in the public eye). How, then, did Palmer's crowdfunding venture achieve such overwhelming success where others have tried and failed? Palmer suggests that her accomplishment relates to her devoted and long-term relationship with her fans:

All of what I do is about collaborating, and throwing parties, and finding people to work with, and getting everybody involved including the fans, and so it's an extended family of thousands of people that's been growing for ten years. That's why you're seeing this huge outpouring of support, it's not random and it's not sudden. If you really love the people who support your work they'll go to the ends of the earth for you ([Franco 2012](#)).

An active blogger, and with more than a million followers on her Twitter account ([Palmer 2014](#)) in her public posts, Palmer frequently makes reference to the desire she has for, and the personal pleasure she derives from, interacting with fans. In a recent interview she described her social approach to music making:

I love hanging out with the fan base. I love being social. I love trying crazy parties. To me, the music is almost an excuse to get to that part ... There are social musicians and there are antisocial musicians' ([Robinson 2012](#)).

Amanda Palmer models an intimate and relational approach to fan-musician interactions, and attributes much of her crowdfunding success to these modes of practice.

Palmer is explicit about the high value she places on her authentic and reciprocal relationship with fans, and has used *crowdsourcing* as part of her business practice for much longer than her name has been associated with *crowdfunding*. Palmer actively seeks out opportunities to connect with her fans on a more personal and intimate level than is typically available at a large concert; when touring she often elects to stay in fans' homes rather than at hotels, and involves fans in many aspects of her business practice. She works to develop intimate communities with her fans and performs so-called 'ninja gigs' at most stops on her tours, which are only advertised online and by word of mouth and generally involve an impromptu performance in a public space by Palmer and a group of fan-musician volunteers. Her fans are intrinsically involved in both the organisation and the execution of these events. A key recent example occurred at South-by-SouthWest (SXSW) music festival in Texas in March 2013, where Palmer used her fan network to crowdsource everything required for a ninja gig (including a 400-seat theatre, four bands, an array of gear and instruments, a film crew to record the event, and of course an audience of 400 people) in less than 24 hours. Palmer's description of the event emphasises the importance of the sense of collective community it engendered:

it was three hours of together. it was better than ANY show i could possibly have tried to put together over the course of months ... this is what is possible. nobody paid to get in. and nobody formally got paid ... there was an idea, and there were people, and there was music, and there was sharing, and then it was over ... it all felt real ([Palmer 2013a](#)).

Palmer was already using both crowdfunding and crowdsourcing practices as early as 2003 ([Robinson 2012](#)). According to Palmer, the main change that the prevalence of these approaches has brought about is that 'Kickstarter just gave us this legitimised marketplace to do what we were already doing, but with a name and a system everybody can understand' ([Robinson 2012](#)). Amanda Palmer's case demonstrates that community, connection and consistency of practice are pivotal to the success of large-scale crowdfunding projects.

Amanda Palmer: Criticism and Media Snark

It is perhaps as a result of her reputation for relationality and authenticity that Palmer was subjected to extensive heated criticism in the media as a result of some questionable business decisions in late 2012. When it became apparent that her crowdfunding campaign would greatly exceed its target, Palmer released a dubious acquittal of how she would spend a million dollars should she raise that sum ([Palmer 2012a](#)). Although a number of the cost amounts she quoted seemed excessive even for estimates ([Jefferson 2012](#)), it wasn't until she invited semi-professional musicians to supplement her band on tour and play for free in their local city that the criticism became



widespread. Members of the online press were forthright in their disgust. The President of the American Federation of Musicians stated, '[i]f there's a need for the musician to be on the stage, then there ought to be compensation for it' (Hair in [Jefferson 2012](#)), and reputable producer Steve Albini got into a visceral online spat with Palmer around the issue of reasonable expenditure of funds ([Albini 2012](#)). Concerns seemed to be based not in fact, because few commentators begrudged Palmer the USD\$1.2 million she had raised and she distributed the promised rewards reasonably promptly following the campaign. Rather, complaints circled nebulously around an implication that following up her success with a request for free services was hypocritical, and that her supporters had been somehow betrayed. The venomous and expansive nature of the criticism Palmer received indicates that the crowdfunding process involves more than merely the exchange of funds for goods and/or services. Crowdfunding also incorporates emotional and cultural transactions between participants and artists, which take place in ways that are not always immediately apparent, either to observers or those directly involved.

The criticisms Palmer received as a result of what observers claimed were questionable business practices reveal the delicacy and fugaciousness of perceived authenticity. The very collective-ownership, inspired by Palmer's authentic persona, that led to the pledging of such a significant sum was also in this case a driving factor in the conflict that followed, with many supporters and observers operating as if the invitation to sponsor the campaign was not only an investment in its outcomes but also its processes. In light of the definitions of authenticity examined earlier, it may be that observers sensed that the motivation versus the execution of Palmer's crowdfunding campaign and tour was incongruous, and she was therefore not the authentic relational celebrity she pretended to be. Similarly, considering Rojek's (2004) celebrity interaction theories, fans may have constructed an image of Palmer's identity that was at odds with her unwillingness to pay all of her musicians, and this may have created a cognitive dissonance. It is arguable whether or not she delivered on the unspoken emotional investments that were made, but then it is difficult to gauge whether or not it is reasonable for investors and observers to have a right to involvement in the implementation of the project as well as its consummation. Regardless of what conclusions are drawn about Palmer's personal authenticity, she had conducted a crowdfunding project honestly and ethically by delivering on the explicit rewards promised to investors.

Although Palmer has recently received significant criticism, there has also been some acknowledgement of the consistent methods she has adopted throughout her practice. Palmer used the same successful fan-oriented business practices before and after raising USD\$1.2 million ([Eakin and Robinson 2012](#)). She eventually relented and agreed to pay the supplementary musicians, although she also raised the valid point that musicians had never been under any obligation to volunteer if they felt it was not advantageous to them in some way. What this episode more broadly highlights are the complexities surrounding both fans' affection for celebrities, and collective ownership of activities. Crowdfunding offers a tremendous opportunity for independent musicians to have their creative work funded, or to know prior to the work being done whether or not a market for it exists. However, it also creates numerous obligations to their supporters, some of which may not be readily apparent at the outset. Kim Pallister (2012) acknowledges the usefulness and the difficulty of the emotional investment that accompanies the financial one.

In most cases ... the backing of a project represents an emotional investment by the backer ... This emotional investment is a powerful force. It's what can make backers not just a source of funding, but passionate evangelists, dedicated contributors, and loyal return customers ([Pallister 2012: 49](#)).

Pallister goes on to suggest that the expectations of this emotional investment are not always clearly outlined, and that backers may become upset if the project does not proceed in the manner initially outlined. In Palmer's case, 24,000 people invested in her project, which led to both supporters and observers operating as if the invitation to publicly finance the project was also a solicitation for public criticism or objection to any aspect of the project that was not to the public's liking. Palmer was caught in the crossfire of divergent public expectations, even though she precisely delivered on her promises to investors and the only area in which the project departed from its prospectus was in the amount of money raised. Palmer's business practices, which have focused on authentic and relational interaction with fans both online and offline, were pivotal to the success of her crowdfunding campaign. But the collective ownership of the project meant that some of Palmer's crowdsourcing activities, even those that typified her work prior to the Kickstarter, were open



to new interpretations. The perceived change in Palmer's circumstances but not her actions, coupled with the high levels of emotional investment by supporters, left her open to receiving widespread criticism and personal attack.

Crowdfunding in an Australian Context: Eskimo Joe

The principles that have been shown to underpin the success of Palmer's crowdfunding project, namely relational interactions with fans, the public's perception of the celebrity's authenticity, and the development of and involvement with communities in the virtual- and real-world, are also evident in other examples of similar projects, and are observable in an Australian context. In November 2012, Perth-based rock group, Eskimo Joe, launched a three-month campaign to crowdfund their sixth album, *The Wastelands*, which was released in September 2013, using Australian-based platform Pozible to seek AUD\$40,000. Raising nearly half their target within hours of the launch ([Conti 2012](#)), the project went on to break the record for an Australian music crowdfunding project by making AUD\$60,736 (although Eskimo Joe's record earnings have since been surpassed by Melbourne-based prog-rock band, Twelve Foot Ninja). Eskimo Joe's highly successful project utilised many of the same techniques observed in Palmer's campaign, and similarly has attracted some criticism relating to questions of band authenticity and fans' emotional investment.

Eskimo Joe's business practice thus far has differed substantially from Palmer's in terms of the degree to which artist-fan relationships have been nurtured. The band began their music career in Perth, where the music marketplace is significantly smaller than its capital city counterparts in the eastern states purely due to comparative population sizes, and where, as a result, it can be argued that a certain degree of relationality between fans and bands develops almost arbitrarily. With the national acclaim of 2006's *Black Fingernails, Red Wine*, which went quadruple platinum and the title single of which won the Aria award for best single that year, the band moved towards a stadium-gig performance aesthetic which may have resulted in some decrease in their ability to connect with fans on an individual level. Although their business practice to date has not been primarily fan-focused in the way that Palmer's has, Eskimo Joe's crowdfunding campaign marked a change towards a model that places greater emphasis on relational interaction with fans.

Eskimo Joe's decision to crowdfund their sixth album marked a shift in thinking, overtly aimed at embracing more intimate engagement with fans. In media attached to the Pozible launch, Eskimo Joe's management explicitly tells fans that '[t]oday's campaign launch sees the band keen to engage with you in a series of unique and exciting initiatives' ([Catherine Haridy Management 2012](#)). The rewards on offer in the campaign, which included attending a pre-release listening party with Eskimo Joe or a backyard barbecue hosted and cooked by the band ([Eskimo Joe 2012](#)), demonstrated a shift towards creating opportunities for more interpersonal engagement between band and fans. Frontman Kav Temperley suggested that the decision to crowdfund meant a choice to make an album for the fans rather than to please their former record company, Warner Music.

There's no one else involved apart from the people who love the music and the people who make the music. You're producing an album for the people who are into your music, there's nobody in between ... we want you to be involved and invest in it. People can contact us and tell us what they have liked about the band in the past, what they'd like to see us do and we'll try and take that on board and incorporate it ([ariacharts.com.au 2012](#)).

Here the shift to a fan-focused model is evident, with Temperley offering fans not only the opportunity to invest financially in the new album, but also to contribute their thoughts to its creative development. Similarly, on their Pozible campaign page, the band describe the 'fresh approach to writing and recording' they have made through involving their fans more intimately in the production of the record, adding, 'We see this project as an opportunity to share this album experience with you and there will be many ways to get involved' ([Eskimo Joe 2012](#)). Reports of fans' responses to the first airing of the album at the investors-only debut show indicate that this aim was achieved, and that some in attendance felt more invested in the outcome of the album due to their financial support of its creation ([Hanna 2013](#)). The approach used in Eskimo Joe's crowdfunding campaign was marked by the same fan-focused rhetoric that has been observed in Palmer's.

The shift by Eskimo Joe from the traditional, distanced approach to record production towards a more fan-focussed, crowdfunded endeavour has attracted some mild criticism. Although far less widespread and vitriolic than that experienced by Palmer, the dissent is



similarly predicated on the notion that the band is not operating authentically. Phil Jamieson, frontman of another Australian rock band, Grinspoon, has been a prominent and outspoken critic. Jamieson's reproof ([Fitzsimons 2012](#)) is based on his belief in Eskimo Joe's ability to self-fund their album rather than expecting fans to finance it.

I'm like, 'Go and do a fucking tour!' Your records sell triple platinum ... Eskimo Joe – multiple Aria Award winners, triple-platinum artists who get a lot of airplay – they're making a lot of money. Well, enough to raise forty grand ... their fans have to not only pay for the record, then a fuckin' ticket to the show! Shit! Give me a break! ([Fitzsimons 2012](#))

Though these remarks were certainly made off the cuff, and Jamieson later stated that they should not be taken 'completely seriously' ([Fitzsimons 2012](#)), the underlying question is whether Eskimo Joe's shift to a more relational fan-based practice is genuine, or whether it is purely a marketing strategy to ensure the success of the crowdfunding campaign. If, as Jamieson claims, Eskimo Joe is in a position to finance the album independently of either fans or record company, is it an act of inauthenticity to source funds from supporters? Palmer has addressed the question of who should be allowed to crowdfund more broadly, insisting that anybody, regardless of their personal fortune, should be able to ask for financial support from fans, and it is the fans and the market that will determine which projects will be successful. In her blog she writes:

if ANYBODY wants to give a go at having the community help them with a project, that's the ARTIST'S prerogative. If it fails, then the interest wasn't there. It shouldn't matter if it's Justin Bieber, Obama, the new kids on the block reunion project ... or the friendless 18-year old down the street who's been hiding in his bedroom making EDM¹ music. ANYBODY CAN ASK ... and since crowdfunding is – by definition – in the hands of the community: THE COMMUNITY WILL DETERMINE WHETHER A PROJECT IS SUCCESSFUL ([Palmer 2013b](#)).

By this logic, the fact that Eskimo Joe's project was successful is alone sufficient to legitimise its request for support, regardless of whether it was in a position to fund the album without the financial backing of its fans. While the authenticity of a performer, and the penchant for relational interaction with his or her audience, is certainly a factor in the success or otherwise of a crowdfunding project, an artist's financial circumstances may not be a significant aspect in fans' determining the performer's authenticity. In the case of Eskimo Joe's project, if fans are footing a bill that could have been funded in another way, they are doing so voluntarily and presumably have deemed the relational benefits that come from involvement in the venture worthy of the financial investment made. Criticism on the grounds that Eskimo Joe should have been self-funding its new album fails to recognise the valuable emotional connection and ownership that can arise as a result of investing in a crowdfunding venture.

A further area in which Eskimo Joe's crowdfunding project has received some recent remonstrance relates to the sound of the album, which incorporates more electronic influences than was apparent in their previous alt-rock output. Responses to the album have been mixed. Many reviewers commented that the new electronic sound is unexpected, often describing it as confusing or strange ([Cribb 2013](#); [James 2013](#); [McCabe 2013](#); [Nilma 2013](#)). Headlines such as 'Did You Pay Eskimo Joe to Make an Electronic Album?' ([Newstead 2013](#)) reveal some anxieties surrounding the funding and execution of the project. Eskimo Joe was clear throughout its Pozible campaign that the decision to crowdfund the album was in the interests of retaining total artistic control; fans who supported the project did so on the understanding that this was to be a 'new creative beginning' ([Conti 2012](#)) for the band. On the release of the new singles Temperley said:

'We are all feeling really excited about finally getting this first song out there! It doesn't sound like anything we've done before so we think people will be quite surprised by where we've headed' ([Hohnen 2013](#)).

Some critics suggested the freedom to create an album of Eskimo Joe's own design as a result of the crowdfunding has produced a less self-conscious record than some of its recent releases ([McCabe 2013](#)) and that there is much on *The Wastelands* that the band's existing fans will like, including 'beloved intricate guitar work' and 'plenty of Kav's unique vocals' ([James 2013](#)). Others have criticised the album for containing songs that are too alike ([Stanley 2013](#)) or commonplace 'filler' tracks ([Lynch 2013](#)). Although reviews of *The Wastelands* have been mixed, Eskimo Joe, like Palmer, has fulfilled its explicit obligations to investors by delivering the album and the campaign



rewards. However, it is again difficult to determine whether fans' implicit emotional investments have been honoured with the shift in sound and new directions in fan involvement the band attempts with the record.

Eskimo Joe's campaign to crowdfund their sixth album, *The Wasteland*, demonstrates that authenticity and the desire to connect relationally with fans are key components in the creation and execution of a successful crowdfunding project. The band's case, in contrast to Palmer's, suggests that celebrities who have not made fan-artist connections a central tenet of their careers may still be able to acquire significant support from fan-investors. Regardless of when it is undertaken, relational engagement with fans online and offline remains pivotally important to the realisation of the crowdfunding project. For Eskimo Joe, as for Palmer, the invitation to invest financially also brought emotional investment from supporters. Although it is unlikely that the new album meets all of the myriad expectations from Eskimo Joe's almost 500 backers, as demonstrated by the criticism that followed its release, Eskimo Joe has demonstrated consistency between the promises made in the crowdfunding campaign and the results produced. If the group continues to engage relationally with fans after this project concludes, it's unlikely that its public image will suffer significant setbacks.

Conclusion: A Culture of Cooperative Labour

Palmer's crowdfunding and crowdsourcing operations offer useful examples of the reciprocities that exist between virtual- and real-world communities, and the ways that musicians can use authentic interactions with a relational community to support their creative practice. Similarly, Eskimo Joe's crowdfunding campaign demonstrates that bands may adopt relational engagement practices at a later stage in their career and still enjoy some of the benefits that a supportive community of fans can offer. Rojek (2011: 212), quoting Castles, describes the authentic and reciprocal relationship between the fan and star in the new media marketplace as one of 'cooperative labour', which is a term that can usefully be applied in these cases. Rojek expands:

it is preposterous today to regard fans as docile, passive recipients of cultural capital from the penthouse of popular culture that is supposedly occupied by superstars. The perception of an unbridgeable gulf between the creative labour of superstars and fans is no longer tenable (Rojek 2011: 213).

The creation of a culture of cooperative labour, whether it is a facet of a long-term fan-centric approach as is the case with Palmer or part of a newly minted attempt at greater fan engagement as for Eskimo Joe, is very important in crowdfunding campaigns. Although fans' increased emotional investment in the creative output of the musicians examined here created some difficulties, particularly in the form of greater than usual media scrutiny and the lack of clarity surrounding the emotional investment and resultant expectations of project backers, the financial benefits to the artists have been staggering.

Palmer's prediction that the crowdfunding model, which effectively undermines the role of record companies by allowing the purchasers and creators of music to interact independently, may be 'the future of music' (Franco 2012) is convincing. Various factors, including governmental regulation of crowdfunding and the success or otherwise of future high profile cases, will determine whether the practice is more widely adopted. In the long term, the future of music (or perhaps just the future of crowdfunding) will be impacted significantly by whether a true culture of cooperative labour develops between successful crowdfunders and their backers. If celebrities are seen to hit and run by engaging relationally with fans during the campaign but then disengaging once the project is complete, it may lead to disappointment and fans approaching other crowdfunding projects with more cynicism. Conversely, if celebrities honour the expectations and ownership of fans, even when this emotional attachment is unclear or expressed indirectly, and offer continued opportunities for engagement beyond the scope of the specific project, fans may be more likely to get involved with other crowdfunding campaigns in the future as a result of their positive experiences. The creation of a culture of cooperative labour is pivotal not only to the achievement of sufficient funds and to the eventual consummation of specific crowdfunding projects, but also to the long-term value of crowdfunding as a business practice for independent popular musicians.

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ABSTRACT

Online platforms provide musicians with unprecedented opportunities to forge interpersonal connections with a disparate and dispersed audience, and to distribute and finance their work independently with the assistance of this audience. Interaction through social media fosters a virtual sense of intimacy and proximity, allowing fans to receive regular insights into what is perceived to be the musician's veridical self. Whether or not this is truly the case, a musician's success may be influenced by fans' perceptions of his or her authenticity regardless of whether the authentic behaviours are constructed or genuine. Crowdfunding is a recent phenomenon reliant on the relational engagement and communication possibilities inherent in this new media environment.



This paper argues that, when musicians crowdfund a project, an indirect emotional transaction with fans may take place in addition to the explicit financial one. Fans may attach expectations and ownership to the project, and to the musicians involved, and react critically to any perceived shift from stated aims and values. The importance and risks of relational fan-musician interactions for crowdfunding are demonstrated through case studies of Amanda Palmer's 2012 Kickstarter, and Eskimo Joe's 2013 Pozible. These campaigns highlight the necessity for authentic engagement with fans for the success of a crowdfunding venture, but also show the dangerous littoral in the new media environment between perceived authenticity and perceived hypocrisy.

Keywords: crowdfunding, Amanda Palmer, Eskimo Joe, authenticity, online identity

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