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Kickstarter-driven crowdfunding: advancing sustainable innovation and mindful consumption in environmental entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores how environmental crowdfunding initiatives on Kickstarter promote mindful consumption types—acquisitive, repetitive and aspirational temperance—by examining their alignment with sustainable innovation and circular economy principles. The aim is to identify project attributes that resonate with backers and encourage the adoption of sustainable practices.

Design/methodology/approach – Using thematic content analysis, the study analyses project descriptions of successful Kickstarter campaigns in the environmental category. It identifies thematic patterns and distinctions among mindful consumption types and explores their relationship with crowdfunding success.

Findings – Study results reveal that financial success alone does not ensure alignment with mindful consumption principles. Key insights highlight differences in thematic priorities across mindful consumption types: acquisitive temperance emphasizes functional benefits; repetitive temperance focuses on self-reliance and renewable energy; aspirational temperance centres on creativity and community building. These variations reflect the current stage of environmental entrepreneurship and reveal a gap for achieving disruptive sustainability models.

Originality/value – This research contributes a novel framework for understanding how crowdfunding platforms can facilitate shifts towards mindful consumption by identifying specific project attributes and themes that resonate with different consumption temperance. Insights offer practical guidance for entrepreneurs and policymakers aiming to promote systemic sustainability through crowdfunding.

Keywords Crowdfunding, Sustainable innovation, Mindful consumption, Circular economy, Thematic content analysis

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The transition towards sustainable lifestyles and innovation demands collaboration among diverse stakeholders, so it is especially important for companies to build spaces – or ecosystems – where innovation and creativity can thrive (Eizaguirre *et al.*, 2019; Sabel *et al.*, 2024). Co-creation and crowdfunding have emerged as transformative tools within these ecosystems, since they enable ideation, collective problem-solving and decision-making, and a pooling of resources that give rise to new, smarter, more creative solutions. The result is an integration of environmental, social and economic dimensions that favour new modes of consumption and act as a strong foundation for sustainable innovation that aids the transition to a sustainable economy and addresses the challenges of achieving the sustainable development goals (Böckel *et al.*, 2021).

Crowdfunding platforms have revolutionized the way projects are funded and supported through enabling the collective financing of ventures and, in the process, strengthening the relationship between companies and their customers (Kukurba *et al.*, 2021). These platforms also support co-creation, in so much as they provide an opportunity for creators to involve backers and supporters in the creation process, from idea generation to feedback and idea validation, thus serving as early indicators of purchase intent (Mollick, 2014). By fostering a

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sense of community and shared purpose, crowdfunding channels support projects that align with sustainable and mindful consumption values, offering alternatives to unsustainable practices (Belleflamme *et al*., 2014).

Mindful consumption is a concept that represents a "confluence of mindful mindset and mindful behaviour that can be seen to minimize our consumption impact. Mindful mindset is characterized by a sense of caring for self, for community, and for nature. Mindful behavior is characterized by tempering of excesses associated with the three modes of consumption: acquisitive, repetitive and aspirational" (Sheth *et al*., 2011, p. 22). It is distinctively different from sustainable consumption in that it delves into behavioural moderation driven by an awareness of impacts on oneself, others and the planet, instead of focusing on reducing resource use and environmental harm. Acquisitive temperance involves avoiding overconsumption, repetitive temperance relates to curbing impulsive buying and aspirational temperance focuses on reducing status-driven purchases (Gupta and Verma, 2019). Mindful consumption also aligns with the principles of circularity in the sense that it seeks to optimize resource use through strategies such as those proposed by Morseletto (2020). In advancing the implementation of circularity, both sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship are crucial; while fostering conscious product usage is significant, entrepreneurs must prioritize disruptive business models that integrate circular economy practices and enhance resilience and sustainability (Leone *et al*., 2023; Ferreira *et al*., 2021).

This study argues that crowdfunding projects might nurture mindful consumption within the environmental sustainability dimension of innovation. By integrating environmental, social and economic considerations, crowdfunding projects offer a platform to challenge linear consumption models and foster systemic change (Leone *et al*., 2023). Mindful consumers show an enhanced ability to make better financial decisions, coherent with individual values. They also tend to think more openly and confidently when facing problem-solving scenarios.

Despite the recognized potential of co-creation and crowdfunding in fostering sustainable attitudes (Fischer *et al*., 2017) and empirical evidence of mindful consumptiońs benefits (Bahl *et al*., 2016), the link between crowdfunding and mindful consumption remains underexplored. This research aims to fill this research gap through the analysis of successful Kickstarter projects in the environmental category using thematic content analysis as its methodological foundation (Vaismoradi *et al*., 2013). Mindful consumption requires more than financial backing; it necessitates a mindset shift and the alignment of projects with personal values. While crowdfunding has been shown to promote certain sustainable behaviours, this relationship is neither straightforward nor definitive (Gustafsson *et al*., 2012). For instance, greenwashing risks and inadequate focus on environmental sustainability may undermine the long-term impact of such initiatives (Böckel *et al*., 2021). Thematic content analysis ensures a systematic approach to identifying themes and patterns to unveil this relationship between mindful consumption and crowdfunding project success. Inductive theme development is followed by a descriptive re-coding so that further classification is offered to explore the following research question:

> How do crowdfunding projects influence mindful consumption behaviours and what are the distinctive mindful consumption beliefs for each type of behaviour?

This paper advances existing literature by clarifying the interplay between crowdfunding attributes and mindful consumption behaviours, with a specific focus on environmental sustainability. By framing the discussion within the circular economy, this study offers a conceptual and practical foundation for leveraging crowdfunding as a tool for promoting mindful consumption and achieving environmental sustainability goals. In doing so, this research provides practical insights for entrepreneurs and policymakers, highlighting the role of crowdfunding in advancing sustainable innovation and fostering systemic change.

Literature review and conceptual framework

Crowdfunding and mindful consumption

Innovations have a profound effect on the prosperity of businesses yet despite their strategic importance, senior managers remain dissatisfied with their organizations' innovation performance, particularly due to high failure rates of new products and services (Christensen *et al.*, 2016). To address this, companies are increasingly involving external actors, especially end-users, in the innovation process to enhance user acceptance. The concept of open innovation characterizes systems where innovation occurs cooperatively with external actors (Abazi-Alili *et al.*, 2024). This approach has shifted focus from the features and attributes of innovation to the value and experience created and captured in collaboration with customers. Consequently, customers have evolved from passive audiences to "active co-creators" (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008) and even "prosumers" (Belleflamme *et al.*, 2015).

Crowdfunding exemplifies this shift, involving customers very early in the innovation process through crowd voting, which helps to identify and support the best product concepts (Revilla and Rodriguez-Prado, 2018), improving product quality and its utility (Belleflamme *et al.*, 2014) and increasing market acceptance to the extent some authors consider this involvement an early predictor of purchase intent (Mollick, 2014). Indeed, Belleflamme *et al.* (2015, p. 7) specifically wrote that "funding is a predictor of future demand" (2015, p. 7) and as such could serve for future funding rounds even if traditional channels such as venture capitals, irrespectively of the amount raised (Stanko and Henard, 2017). In technology-based projects, pledging a higher amount of money ignites professional investors' interest and secures subsequent funding (Roma *et al.*, 2017).

Mindful consumption encompasses a mindset that implies an enhanced awareness of the consequences of our purchases and their impact on ourselves, our society and the environment. The term also includes the extent to which this mindset involves mindful behaviour in the form of temperance (Sheth *et al.*, 2011). In the context of crowdfunding, the support of particular social or environmental innovation and projects might be seen as a consequence of this awareness (Milne *et al.*, 2020). By backing such projects, mindful consumers not only express their preferences but also potentially influence the development of ventures that promote mindful consumption in others. Gupta and Verma (2019) identify three key aspects of mindful consumption: acquisitive temperance (avoiding overconsumption), repetitive temperance (resisting impulsive buying) and aspirational temperance (moderating status-seeking through purchases). An acquisitive temperance refers to overconsumption, that is, an excess of consumption to a level that surpasses our real needs or even capacities to consume. Repetitive temperance is related to impulsive buying behaviours and individuals' lack of control on their buying decisions. Lastly, aspirational consumption temperance reflects a status-seeking behaviour where individuals might seek to project a certain social status in their purchasing choices (Nawaz *et al.*, 2021).

It is crucial to differentiate mindful and sustainable consumption, though they share some overlap (Quoquab and Mohammad, 2020). The emphasis of mindful consumption is very much on individual awareness and intentionality as an inward, psychological process focused on the meanings individuals derive from what they choose to consume (Fischer *et al.*, 2017; Geiger *et al.*, 2019). The focus is on self-regulation and alignment of consumption with personal values. This alignment tends to reduce compulsive or automatic behaviours and can lead to a personal consumption habits better suited to sustainable practices (Kumar *et al.*, 2024). This focus of mindful consumption on the individual contrasts with the more outward-facing, systemic, environmental and social impacts of consumption practices implicit in sustainable consumption (Geiger *et al.*, 2019) and a broader societal scope of application, including corporate social responsibility (Fischer *et al.*, 2017).

Crowdfunding platforms, positioned as collaborative ecosystems offering solutions to unsustainable practices, should align with this objective by supporting ventures that embody mindful consumption principles. Failure to do so risks greenwashing and perpetuating unsustainable consumption patterns (Böckel *et al.*, 2021). Despite the pertinence of this subject,

limited research explores the intersection of mindful consumption and crowdfunding (Akbari *et al*., 2022; García-Flores and Madero, 2020). Both studies frame mindful consumption within collaborative consumption, suggesting its potential to validate business models promoting sustainable choices (Guckenbiehl and Corral de Zubielqui, 2022; Kraus *et al*., 2022). This is particularly relevant for this study, as disruption and innovation, two distinctive features of entrepreneurship, are crucial for developing transformative solutions that promote mindful consumption (Milne *et al*., 2020). Furthermore, crowdfunding, as a collaborative funding method, relies on individual financial decisions at their own expense. If backed projects ultimately fail to encourage mindful consumption, individuals may feel misled and misguided since a premise of mindful consumption is the alignment of mindset and behaviour with individual values.

Success drivers in crowdfunding platforms

Scholarly work on crowdfunding has focused on understanding the elements that guarantee success of projects on different platforms, primarily Kickstarter. Evidence suggests that early contributions accelerate success (Colombo *et al*., 2015), independently of campaign length or funding goal (Dalla Chiesa *et al*., 2022). Shorter campaigns can generate a genuine boost in funding, with support increasing as the deadline nears (Kuppuswamy and Bayus, 2017). However, this correlation can be disrupted by the accumulated social capital of serial crowdfunders, who achieve funding success earlier and across more projects (Buttice *et al*., 2017).

The number of backers, while negatively correlated with the total pledged amount, positively impacts later market performance (Böckel *et al*., 2021). This suggests that projects with a larger backer base are ultimately more sustainable from a business perspective. Social capital itself has been studied mostly qualitatively, with research focusing on the number of comments and number of updates shared with the community of backers (Kromidha and Robson, 2016), since frequent interactions foster a sense of ownership. From a quantitative perspective, it has been shown that the pledge/backer ratio is an indicator of social capital and that larger ratios increase the chances of success as are the number of reward tiers (Kromidha and Robson, 2016). Crowdfunders often leverage social connections with backers of previous campaigns (Buttice *et al*., 2017). Notably, Kuppuswamy and Bayus (2017) demonstrated that individuals are more likely to support projects with a perceived social impact, particularly those with environmental or pro-social initiatives. Consequently, projects in these categories tend to have higher social capital, with backers engaged with their communities.

Team composition is also important. Gender dynamics are highlighted due to the demonstrated significance of female homophily – women supporting other women – in driving crowdfunding success rates and fostering trust and community engagement, critical for social capital (Greenberg and Mollick, 2017). Indeed, studies suggest that female-backed projects have a higher success rate. Conversely, these studies consistently show that all-male teams are less successful compared to mix-gender teams and companies (Ullah and Zhou, 2020).

The degree of innovation has also been explored, given the target audience of crowdfunding platforms, often early adopters. Results indicate that radical innovations are generally less successful than incremental innovations that build upon existing market ideas (Chan and Parhankangas, 2017). To this date no relationship has been studied between social capital and incremental innovation, providing an area for interesting advance.

The study of linguistic style in crowdfunding pitches reveals the importance of clear and relatable descriptions for backers (Parhankangas and Renko, 2017), since these correlated with attraction of funding, particularly in social causes (Defazio *et al*., 2021). Readability and tone are all critical factors linked to an improved likelihood of funding success (Zhou *et al*., 2018) understandable and relatable description. The use of water resource or sustainability-related terms (including "green" and "eco-friendly terms") do correlate positively with success (Berns *et al*., 2022), while monetary terms (e.g. discounts, promotions, savings) have a negative

correlation, ultimately leading to decreased funding and engagement (Chan *et al*., 2021) Their study of 80 K campaigns in Kickstarter confirmed a negative impact of monetary terms on project descriptions, although this effect was minimized for projects identified as sustainable. Dalla Chiesa *et al*. (2022) suggest that other qualitative elements, such as the presence of videos, pictures, comments, are not necessarily relevant for projects in sustainable fashion. Pro-social cues consistently demonstrate positive outcomes (Defazio *et al*., 2021), but their impact is particularly pronounced in these projects (Parhankangas and Renko, 2017).

Project description length and adequately detailed descriptions have been shown to be a predictor of crowdfunding success (Zhou *et al*., 2018; Du *et al*., 2015; Liang *et al*., 2020). Excessive length, verbosity or overuse of "requesting" language can reduce fundraising success (Xu, 2018). Indeed, there is an inverted U-shaped relationship between word count and project success, with overly long descriptions negatively impacting success by overwhelming or disengaging potential backers (Liang *et al*., 2020). The key to success is to achieve a critical balance between providing enough detail (quantity) while maintaining clarity (quality) to attract investors (Ren *et al*., 2021).

From this body of research, one concludes that true indicators of success for the whole of the Kickstarter community lie on having at least one of the following: incremental innovation; realistic goals; social capital, measured in terms of high pledge/backer ratio; female homophily and the use of pro-social, sustainable-related and water-related words in short descriptions and linguistic style in descriptions as well as description length. Entrepreneurs integrating sustainability into open innovation practices such as crowdfunding show a deliberate shift in decision-making by aligning their business strategies with social and environmental goals (Rapp and Olbrich, 2020; Almeida, 2024), particularly mindful entrepreneurs and particularly females (Prakash *et al*., 2023). Features guide backers to focus on projects that resonate with their values, fostering behaviours aligned with acquisitive, repetitive and aspirational temperance. Linguistic cues and social capital create a sense of shared purpose, enabling backers to reflect their consumption choices. Furthermore, campaigns with sustainability-focused attributes inspire individuals to align their financial support with mindful, promoting deeper introspection on consumption behaviours. Research highlights that sustainable product attributes, such as environmental and social benefits, significantly impact consumer decision-making. The rationality of decisions often shifts towards ethical and mindful consumption when sustainability attributes are communicated effectively (Bangsa and Schlegelmilch, 2020).

These success factors informed the research criteria considered for the methodology used in this study, contributing to the understanding of how crowdfunding project descriptions facilitate mindful consumption. In doing so, it highlights Kickstarter's potential to serve as a collaborative ecosystem that fosters mindful consumption in environmental sustainability.

Methodology

Research design

The focus of this research is the study of the relationship between crowdfunding projects and mindful consumption. Given the exploratory nature and novelty of this topic, a qualitative approach is preferred, utilizing thematic content analysis to gain in-depth insights. Detailed information about this relationship is not extensively documented, making rich descriptions and contextual understanding central to this study. For this reason, data collection involved performing thematic content analysis of project descriptions on successful Kickstarter projects belonging to the environmental category. Before initiating this research, the researchers gained a basic understanding on the factors that drive success in Kickstarter. There were two qualitative elements that spurred interest: how linguistic style and description length are significant factors in determining Kickstarter success and how the use of pro-social, sustainable-related and water-related words in short descriptions enhanced the likelihood of success. This made it clear that content analysis had to be carried out on the field "descriptions". Two types of descriptions were transcribed: a short description, normally the

title of the project; and a longer description on what the project consists of. These longer descriptions contain enough words to make coding and thematic extraction possible – in the present database, average and median totals were around 18 – 20 words, but there were also thicker descriptions of over 25 words, particularly in Clusters 2 and 3 (Table 1). From now on, cluster 1 refers to acquisitive mindful consumption, cluster 2 to repetitive mindful consumption and cluster 3 to aspirational mindful consumption.

Data collection

The environmental category in Kickstarter was chosen because of the fit with the objectives of the research. Only successful projects with a pledge amount of more than 50,000 US$ were selected so that the components that truly are associated with successful project could be identified as well as guaranteeing a larger sample size – this marks a difference with previous work that set this quantity to 100 K$ for the whole of the Kickstarter database (Huang *et al*., 2021).

A total of 212 Kickstarter projects were finally selected: for each project the following elements were transcribed: name of project; short description; lengthy description; creators; pledged amount; number of backers; goal; product category; funding days. Fieldwork took place during March–April 2023. Given that we were aiming to study the relationship between mindful consumption and crowdfunding, we further classified projects based on mindful consumption types (which we renamed Clusters, from hereon): acquisitive ($N = 34$), repetitive ($N = 78$) and aspirational mindful consumption ($N = 100$).

Reliability of analysis

To ensure the reliability of the thematic content analysis, the coding process involved two independent coders. Both coders underwent training on thematic content analysis methodology to establish a consistent approach. Inter-coder reliability was assessed by comparing coding results, achieving a high agreement rate of 92%, which is higher than the accepted inter-coded agreement rate of 80% as discussed by Guest *et al*. (2012). Discrepancies were resolved through triangulation in a collaborative discussion, further enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. This rigorous process ensures the robustness of the analysis (Morgan, 2024).

Thematic content analysis

The methodology chosen to study the relationship between mindful consumption and crowdfunding success was thematic content analysis, the most foundational of qualitative analytic procedures (Green and Thorogood, 2004; Anderson, 2007). This methodology helps to identify patterns within data and ensures an inductive approach to theme development which makes it particularly suitable for exploratory research seeking to understand social phenomena from qualitative datasets. Studies on content and thematic analysis have consistently demonstrated their strengths in examining deeper meaning and context,

Table 1. Length in words of project descriptions per cluster

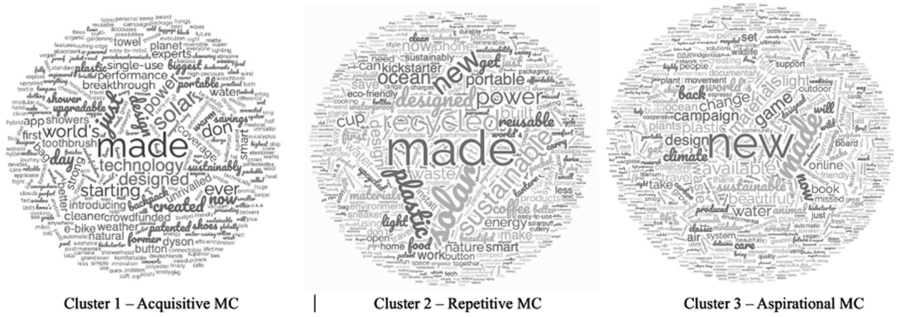
Length in words	Acquisitive MC – Cluster 1		Repetitive MC – Cluster 2		Aspirational MC – Cluster 3	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<14	11	32	20	26	28	28
15–35	23	68	57	73	70	70
>36	0	0	1	1	2	2

Source(s): Authors' own work

guaranteeing both a preferred choice over quantitative approaches in exploratory and interpretative research (Humble and Mozelius, 2022). Its effectiveness in conceptualizing rich, qualitative data makes it ideal for studying descriptive texts in unique domains such as crowdfunding (Naeem *et al.*, 2023). Semantic and textual analyses of project descriptions in crowdfunding have already revealed their predictive power in determining campaign success (Babayoff and Shehory, 2022).

In the process of theme development, new hypotheses and new questions are generated that can be partly tested through content analysis with a more deductive approach. Given the large sample size for thematic analysis ($N = 212$), we have not disregarded or sacrificed quantity – instead, quantitative fields have been coded and transformed to enhance the content analysis. As new themes were unravelled, new coding took place – for example, in the process of thematic content analysis, we discovered that materials played a role in differentiating the three clusters. We thus re-codified the whole database with new codes for different types of materials and proceeded to theme enhancement. In this way, not only have we guaranteed a truly organic approach to coding and theme development inductively, but we have also entered the realm of deductive content analysis (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013). All coding was done manually – labels were assigned to the most common words in each description and short phrases were identified, keeping interpretation at this point to a minimum and respecting the actual words of the projects so they are reflective of the whole set of data and of each individual cluster.

Word clouds were used to visualize the relative weighting of words in the descriptions (Figure 1). The three-word clusters share the word "made", expected given the nature of the study. However, the relative weight of "made" is different, with cluster 2 showing a more consistent presence of this verb. In clusters 2 and 3, the word "new" is shared and takes a centre stage, with different weightings. In cluster 1, there is also an introduction to "newness" as either "introducing" and "starting" or "breakthrough". These differences are important and hint to different themes, as we will see in the analysis, with cluster 1 being the most clearly product focused cluster with frequent mention of everyday products, both home-related ("shower", "e-bike") and for personal care ("pads", "toothbrush", "camera"). In cluster 2, sustainability-related words take centre stage ("recycled", "reusable", "upcycled", "clean", "sustainable", "environment", "nature", "organic"). There is also emphasis on portability ("portable", "pocket", "carry") and plastic reduction ("plastic", "ocean"). In Cluster 3, the core words are "new", "made" and "climate", with reference to people ("people", "community", "campaign", "network", "indigenous") and an array of alternative type of products ("game", "book", "players", "system") and "materials" (which at a closer look this became a theme).



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 1. Word clouds per cluster of mindful consumption (MC)

A priori and through word clouds, it appears that clusters 1 and 2 are more similar to each other than cluster 3, which has its own unique character.

The most important thematic codes were grouped and dimensioned accordingly, involving further codification which was carried out subsequently. New codes included: project features, project category, funding days, length of description, type of description, materials used, source of energy and 10 Rs of circular economy (Morseletto, 2020). Table 2 shows differences in coding per cluster. Most of the codes obtained were deductive, using the conceptual framework (Table 2). However, in the pre-coding, some different codes were identified through induction (marked with an "I" in Tables 2 and 3). A whole new section was identified inductively on energy source (Table 3).

Table 2. Difference in coding per cluster: project type and message type – deductive pre-coding from conceptual framework

	Acquisitive MC – Cluster 1		Repetitive MC – Cluster 2		Aspirational MC – Cluster 3	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Project type						
Product Design	19	56	36	46	34	34
Technology	10	29	26	33	18	18
Clothing	4	12	12	15	11	11
Food/Drink	1	3	4	5	6	6
Others	0	0	0	0	31	31
Message type						
Monetary	5	15	9	12	4	5
Sustainability	29	85	38	49	26	33
Performance	33	97	68	87	51	65
Experience (I)	2	6	18	23	48	62
Design (I)	8	24	24	31	53	68
Innovation	11	32	13	17	9	12
Water	5	15	10	13	14	18

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 3. Difference in coding per cluster: materials used and energy type – inductive pre-coding

	Acquisitive MC – Cluster 1		Repetitive MC – Cluster 2		Aspirational MC – Cluster 3	
Materials used	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Plastic	2	6	10	13	4	6
Organic	5	15	22	28	16	21
Metal (I)	0	0	0	0	1	1
Protein (I)	0	0	0	0	1	1
Polymers (I)	1	3	1	1	0	0
Not declared	27	79	45	58	77	71
Energy type (I)						
Solar	4	12	11	14	4	5
Wind	0	0	3	4	2	3
Electric	1	3	0	0	2	3
Hybrid	1	3	0	0	0	0
Wood	0	0	1	1	0	0
Bioenergy	0	0	3	3	1	1
Not declared	28	82	60	77	91	88

Source(s): Authors' own work

Results

Table 4 illustrates average values for success features in Kickstarter by mindful consumption types using the top three quantitative features described in the literature. The most striking difference is the contrast between the number of projects and the pledged amount: 34 successful projects make up 70% of the total pledged amount and belong to the acquisitive mindful consumption type – almost one out of every two backers back a project in this category. It is also noteworthy that the pledge/backer ratio is very high, suggesting the presence of social capital; indeed, the top four most funded projects belonged to the same company. As we will see later, this predominance suggests backers of environmental projects tend to favour sustainable equivalents of everyday products and are emotionally invested with their Kickstarter communities. On the other end of the spectrum, we have backers of aspirational mindful consumption, who are much more open to new projects and are less invested overall – backing projects with less financial commitment and tending not to repeat often. Backers of repetitive mindful types are somewhere in the middle.

Dominant themes across clusters

Four overarching themes emerged across all three clusters. The category of product design dominated all clusters, with shared emphasis on functional product benefits and product performance. These benefits were often tied to practicality, ease of use and portability, showcasing a focus on making products intuitive and effective for everyday use. The second theme was around the desired experience, reflecting how product benefits extend beyond functionality to emotional or psychological impacts. While the expression of these experiences varied, the shared importance of enhancing users' lives through innovative and thoughtful design was evident.

The third theme was on sustainability as a core value – expected given the choice of projects in the environmental category. Common emphasis was on the use of material and the integration of sustainable solutions into product design. The fourth, and last theme was on material innovation. Across clusters, there was a recurring emphasis on creative use of materials, showcasing a push for sustainable and innovative practices in production.

Distinctive themes per mindful consumption types

Cluster 1, acquisitive mindful consumption (Table 5) is a functional cluster that emphasizes superior product performance due to clear functional product benefits, with an overuse of the word "better" (better performance, better in every way, better forecasting) and related synonyms (more, highest). The overall sense is one that these products "just deliver". Product functional benefits were mostly structured around practicality and ease of use and were backed by emotional benefits centred around reassurance and accuracy, particularly given new *materials* (cruelty free, vegan). This functionality was justified in two main ways; with *anticipated savings* in your everyday bills and with technological backing of *advanced, patented, cutting edge products* – the "ultimate", "revolutionary" products that bring sustainability to the next level. The products reflected in this category were therefore

Table 4. Average values for success features in Kickstarter

	Total	Acquisitive MC	Repetitive MC	Aspirational MC
Number of projects	212	34 (16%)	78	100
Pledged amount	1.326 M$	916 K$ (70%)	242 K$ (18%)	168 K$ (12%)
Number of backers	7,461	3,561 (48%)	2,338 (31%)	1,562 (21%)
Pledge/backer ratio		348	163	106

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 5. Dominant themes per cluster: acquisitive mindful consumption (Cluster 1)

Themes	Sample
Acquisitive mindful consumption	
Expected superior product performance	*"better in every way", "unrivalled performance", "it just delivers", "highest efficiency", "more coverage", "reliable", "strong", "fully automatic", "easy to install" "better forecasting", "technically engineered"*
Anticipated savings	*"make savings", "smart energy tracker", "lower electricity bills", "lasts twice as long"*
Functional product benefits	R-related: Reusable, reversible, refillable Practical, clean, quick, easy Antimicrobial
Sustainable options that move with you, fit your life	Portable, collapsible, packs small, ultralight, compact shared with Cluster 2
Emotional benefits	Accuracy Reassurance Design
Brings the future forward	Advanced, patented, cutting edge, the "ultimate" *"Next level sustainability", "of the future" "the next evolution", "revolutionary"*
Desired customer experience	*"superior experience", "totally badass", "exploring for a lifetime", "5-star luxury"*
Cruelty-free and Vegan mindset and materials	*"animal free", "100% natural ingredients" "vegan" "hemp", "eucalyptus"*
Everyday products	For the home Personal care Mobility Some clothing and footwear

Source(s): Authors' own work

everyday products for the home (e.g. a cordless vacuum cleaner), for personal care (toothbrushes, tampons, deodorants, handwash) and for everyday mobility (e.g. an e-bike, electric scooter).

In repetitive mindful consumption (Cluster 2, Table 6), dominant themes change. This cluster discusses the need to dominate plastic and recycle waste. Functional product benefits around portability and related aspects (collapsible, compact, ultralight, foldable) were also present but the emphasis is on the end-emotional benefit of fitting one's life so that one can take action whenever, wherever. Another critical difference is the *enhancement of a more sustainable lifestyle as an endgame per se*, so projects backed are systems for sustainable living that allow for self-reliance (including eco-housing) and ultimately accelerate the rate of ecological restoration. This theme of self-reliance is backed by a strong priority for *solar fixes* in one's home: solar lanterns, solar power stations, solar panels and power plants, portable power, home battery systems and so on. Whilst in Cluster 1, the use of electricity is standard and present, the call in Cluster 2 is for zero electricity to hijack both product and psychological obsolescence. Self-reliance is possible by referring to yet another (related) dominant theme, that of the *promotion of good behaviour for the planet*, including protection, restoration, conservation and empowerment of local communities. It is for this reason that there is a call to *dominate plastic* and *source from organic waste* for recycling. In this context, the materials used are strikingly different to Cluster 1 – much more creative and including coffee and coffee husks, fruits and plants, sugarcane, soap and wood.

Cluster 3 discusses product performance in terms of functional benefits around simplicity (simple, durable, minimalistic) but made special emphasis on materials used, which are distinctively different to all other clusters (aluminium, titanium, magnesium, NFC enabled,

Table 6. Dominant themes per cluster: repetitive mindful consumption (Cluster 2)

Themes	Sample
Repetitive mindful consumption	
Enhancement of (more) sustainable lifestyle: the endgame	Systems for sustainable living, eco-housing, call to "join the movement", being self-reliant, accelerate the rate of ecological restoration, 100% sustainable, transformative calls to action around Rs: Reuse, reversible, reapply, refill, recharge
Positive consequences of good behaviour for the planet	Protection, restoration, conservation, call to save the planet, carbon neutral, empowerment of local communities, water saving, zero electricity, demand solar
Priority for solar fixes	Solar lantern, solar power station, solar panels, solar power plant, portable power, wind turbine, home battery systems
Relevance of recycling	Return items to earlier stages in production, enhancement of raw materials, transformation of alternative materials into everyday products (coffee, fruits, plant)
A need to dominate plastic	Opt for a zero-plastic world, with 100% recycled plastic, ocean plastic recycled, recycled plastic water bottles, recycled fish nets, edible cutlery
Waste is useful	Food waste into clean energy, food scraps into renewable energy, organic waste into renewable gas, waste into fertilizer, biodegradable
Sustainable options that move with you, fit your life	Shared with Cluster 1: Portable, collapsible, packs small, ultralight, compact Unique to Cluster 2 *"fits your wallet", "for everyday carry", "adjusts then scrunches", "fits in your back pocket"*
Creativity in re-usage – alternative materials for new usages	Coffee and coffee husks, fruits and plants, sugarcane, recycled fleece, made from soap, powered by wood Reusable utensils

Source(s): Authors' own work

carbon negative, açai seeds, cricket protein, magnetic line). In aspirational mindful consumption (Cluster 3, Table 7), the core belief is that community belonging is so critical for the future of the planet and the species that human relationships should be fostered while taking care of the environment, without trying to "keep up with the Joneses". The clear call to support public goods and services was clear here: from the reduced importance of product design and functional benefits (which are still present in a theme around *simplicity*), to the increased presence of alternative categories.

In this cluster, the word "new", backed by *creativity and originality* as keys to a sustainable life was of paramount importance and the most dominant theme (Table 7). This includes a call to reimagine, transform, redefine and set new standards, creating state-of-the-art differences and endless possibilities. It is interesting that *new materials* were introduced to highlight this newness: aluminium, titanium, magnesium, carbon negative, even açai seeds or cricket protein. There is a *strong call to action (eye-openers*) to make early adopters conscious of the need for change. This cluster is evangelical and very pedagogic ("how much do you know about?"), calling for *collective resilience*, for community and network creation around nature. It focuses on *promotion of respectful and responsible recreation* that protects wildlife, connects to nature, supports animal welfare, and brings care to the next level. In this context, it makes sense that another of the dominant themes should be to *rekindle the past as a source for inspiration*, so classic designs inspired by history, or reissued, evolved and transformed sustained the promise of creativity and originality.

This difference between the clusters was even more clear when the types of circular economy were classified using Morselettoś 10 Rs model (Morseletto, 2020).

Table 7. Dominant themes per cluster: aspirational mindful consumption (Cluster 3)

Themes	Sample
Aspirational mindful consumption	
Creativity and originality as keys to a sustainable life	Re-imagined, create your own, take creativity to new places, transform, designed to change the way you think, endless possibilities, new, re-defined, debuting, state of the art, new standards
Eye-openers to make you aware that change is needed	*"Why haven't I heard this before?" "How much do you know about it?"* Solutions exist; What if? Tomorrow's future discoveries; Do your own research
Promotion of respectful and responsible recreation to last a lifetime	Connection to wider nature, saving oceans, build jungles, protect wildlife, support animal welfare, cooperative workers, bringing plant care to the next level
Build a network, a community (collective resilience)	Conservation networks, eco-environmentally aware retreats, community platforms, collective resilience, global network, social business
Connect with humanity	Be kind, be cooperative, connect people, uplift indigenous voices, create jobs for refugees
Rekindle the past as a source of inspiration	Classic designs, inspired by history, designed in 1977 but reissued, vintage, evolution, transformation, the 50s are back
Original materials for everyday use	Aluminium, titanium, magnesium, NFC enabled, carbon negative, açai seeds, cricket protein, magnetic line
Simplicity	Simple, durable, minimalistic, self-sustaining, elegant

Source(s): Authors' own work

The analysis showed a predominance of smarter product use and manufacture for all clusters, particularly Cluster 1 (Table 8). In this cluster, 91% of initiatives can be classified in *rethink* and, most specifically, *reduce* behaviour, both of which aim to increase efficiency in product manufacture or use by consuming fewer natural resources. Though this category of circular economy is also important for the other two clusters, both peaking in a combination of *rethink* and *reduce*, Cluster 3 shows a higher presence of *refuse* initiatives than the other two

Table 8. Cluster correspondence with circular economy strategies

	Acquisitive MC		Repetitive MC		Aspirational MC	
Circular economy strategy	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Smarter product use and manufacture						
R0. Refuse			2	3	10	13
R1. Rethink	9	26	24	31	18	23
R2. Reduce	22	65	21	27	18	23
Extend lifespan of product and its parts						
R3. Reuse	2	6	1	1		
R4. Repair						
R5. Refurbish						
R6. Remanufacture			1	1	5	6
R7. Repurpose			25	32	3	4
Useful application of materials						
R8. Recycle	1	3	2	3		
R9. Recovery			2	3	4	5
Not applicable					42	42

Source(s): Morseletto (2020). Authors' own work

clusters, suggesting backers of aspirational mindful consumption back projects that make products redundant by abandoning their function or offering the same function with a radically different product. This is consistent with the dominant theme of creativity and originality as keys to a sustainable life. It remains to be proved that this cluster, in highlighting newness and difference, proposes more radical innovations and are thus not as popular in terms of backers or amount pledged despite their success.

A most interesting difference is set by backers with a repetitive temperance (Cluster 2). In this cluster, one out of every three initiatives (32%) fit *repurpose*, which focuses on extending lifespans of products and its parts. This finding is fully consistent with the dominant themes around ending plastic, using waste as a source of renewable energy and the call to be creative in re-usage. It is also of interest that in Cluster 2, 47% of initiatives fit *rethink* and *reuse*, with the remaining 6% in *recycle* and *recovery*, that is, in the useful application of materials. These findings confirm the assumption made earlier that backers of Cluster 2 are searching for very sustainable, "real" options beyond substituting current products for sustainable options (Cluster 1).

Cluster 3 represents *rethink* and *reuse* (59%) but has no representation in other types of circular economy (42%) confirming the backers in this cluster are attitudinally sustainable but do not translate this attitude into behaviour. Since it is not fully rooted in behaviour and cannot be classified using circular economy concepts, one might wonder whether the attitude in this cluster really contributes to a more mindful consumption.

Discussion

This study set out to examine how crowdfunding initiatives, particularly on Kickstarter, can foster mindful consumption in the context of environmental sustainability. Its primary focus explores how project narratives, sustainability messaging and social capital intertwine to create a meaningful impact on mindful consumption, shifting it towards more intentional and environmentally conscious practices. Central to this study, therefore, lies the connection between sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship, which are crucial drivers of transformative solutions addressing environmental challenges. Crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter exemplify how entrepreneurial initiatives can align with sustainability goals by fostering innovation and supporting ventures that resonate with mindful consumption principles.

Previous literature concluded that true indicators of success for the whole of the Kickstarter community lay on having at least one of the following features: incremental innovation; realistic goals; social capital, measured in terms of high pledge/backer ratio; female homophily and the use of pro-social, sustainable-related and water-related words in short descriptions and linguistic style in descriptions as well as description length (Defazio *et al.*, 2021). These features were considered to explore other aspects less addressed by the literature and constituted the basis of our research objective.

The examination of project descriptions revealed their critical role in shaping crowdfunding success. Features such as pro-social cues, sustainability-focused language and materials were shown to encourage backers to critically assess their consumption choices. In doing so, these findings underline the potential of thoughtful project descriptions in bridging the gap between crowdfunding success and the promotion of mindful consumption patterns, contributing significantly to existing literature (Zhou *et al.*, 2018; Du *et al.*, 2015; Liang *et al.*, 2020; Babayoff and Sheory, 2022).

Our analysis reveals that different types of mindful consumption behaviours are associated with distinct project characteristics and success factors, in line with their core beliefs around consumption (Sheth *et al.*, 2011). Acquisitive temperance (Cluster 1) places focus on the irrelevance of possessions for life-satisfaction and happiness – the result is a practical mindset that backs concrete and tangible product ideas that can be used in the everyday. This shorter-term, "fits my life" attitude is behaviourally relevant, which explains why this cluster has 7 of

the top 10 most funded and backed projects in the whole of the database and the highest pledge/backer ratio. Since this ratio is reflective of social capital, this cluster has serial backers and serial entrepreneurs engaging with each other, slowly adopting products that are more sustainable than their commoditized counterparts and clearly optimizing their return for investment in terms of savings. Though we have not coded incremental vs radical innovation in this study, a future study should aim to prove that this is a cluster dominated by incremental innovation with strong social capital from big brands (e.g. Nebia, Dyson, Nuud), which explains its success (Buttice *et al*., 2017; Stanko and Henard, 2017; Chan and Parhangkangas, 2017). In short, Cluster 1 seems a relevant cluster grounded in everyday behaviour.

Repetitive temperance (Cluster 2) sustains the belief that it is important to care for the natural environment because nature saves a purpose and needs to be preserved and conserved. This belief requires action around the usage of disposable products and plastic and against technical and psychological obsolescence. This mindset empowers self-reliance and encouragement to join a sustainable lifestyle, with a self-sufficient ethos convinced that every little step counts. This results in an interesting combination between attitude and behaviour. Whilst it shares with Cluster 1 the backing of functional products that fit every aspect of your daily life, more emphasis is shown in the way both backers and entrepreneurs fight to save the planet and incorporate renewable energies into one's every day, beyond product acquisition. This is also the only cluster in which sustainable keywords appeared most often, which explains its relative success (Berns *et al*., 2022). That is, Cluster 2 backs relevant differentiation, being a mix between attitudinally different and behaviourally relevant. This finding in itself is new, even if previous work has also shown a positive relationship between mindfulness and anti-consumption behaviour in a quest for authentic living styles (Lin and Park, 2023).

Aspirational temperance is clearly attitudinal. Backers in Cluster 3 still support product design but are also mostly engaged with evangelical and pedagogic initiatives that transcend product ideas. This attitude is interesting and indeed original but not grounded in sustainable behaviours for everyday life.

By categorizing crowdfunding projects based on mindful consumption types the study demonstrates how distinct mindsets align with and promote circular economy principles. This type of categorization is a novel addition to the governance-oriented framework proposed by Morseletto (2020). From a circular economy perspective, the concentration of initiatives in Kickstarter's environmental section around smarter product use and manufacture irrespective of type of mindful consumption suggests sustainability is still very much about product use. Given that Kickstarter is a co-creation platform used by entrepreneurs and early adopters, this emphasis talks about present demand only, when sustainability should incorporate future-seeking ideas that help transform our current and sustainable consumption patterns.

Theoretical implications

At the core of this research are the intertwined concepts of mindful consumption, crowdfunding and circular economy. Mindful consumption is operationalized through its three dimensions—acquisitive temperance (minimizing overconsumption), repetitive temperance (curbing impulsive purchases) and aspirational temperance (reducing status-driven consumption). Crowdfunding is framed as a collaborative platform that facilitates co-creation and early adoption of sustainable products, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. These are further contextualized within circular economy principles, such as rethinking and reducing consumption, extending product lifecycles, and innovative material use, which collectively advance sustainability through entrepreneurial practices. By intertwining these concepts this research provides a novel framework linking crowdfunding attributes to mindful consumption behaviours within the framework of the circular economy.

This study advances existing literature by addressing a critical research gap and providing empirical evidence on how crowdfunding platforms can effectively promote sustainability and mindful consumption. Through thematic content analysis, this study identifies distinct patters

in successful project descriptions that resonate with different dimensions of mindful consumption. It highlights the pivotal role of non-financial success factors such sustainability-focused messaging, creative use of materials and social capital in driving project success. This aligns with the concept that effective sustainability messaging can enhance project success by resonating with potential backers' values and motivations (Manning and Bejarano, 2017).

Additionally, the research suggests that different types of mindful consumption behaviours necessitate tailored project approaches, highlighting the need for diverse strategies to address various mindful consumption types effectively, similar to the RCoins token project (Zurkinden and Baldegger, 2022), which demonstrated how incentivizing recycling behaviours through a digital token system can successfully engage users and promote sustainable practices. It is also critical to keep studying how non-financial success factors, such as social capital and sustainability messaging, impact success, given that this study suggests that traditional success metrics (e.g. the number of backers) may not necessarily work for sustainable initiatives. Furthermore, the application of Morseletto's 10 R framework (e.g. reduce, reuse, recycle) to categorize and analyse successful Kickstarter campaigns, adds a new layer of behavioural insights to a more recent academic discussion on the role of co-creation and crowdfunding in promoting sustainability through circular business model (Leone *et al*., 2023).

Practical implications

Insights gained from descriptions can help entrepreneurs refine their strategies and align their narratives with backer expectations (Prasobpiboon *et al*., 2021) when promoting mindful consumption. One of the key practical implications is the importance of crafting clear, sustainability-focused project descriptions, preferably under 35 words long. Detailed and transparent descriptions of sustainability impacts can significantly attract and engage backers, as highlighted by recent studies (Manning and Bejarano, 2017). In any case, money-related keywords should not be included, since they distract from the core messaging. Instead, an effort should be made to include proper sustainable-related keywords (eco, green etc.) and reference should be made to the type of material used, beyond plastic and the energy type, particularly if the product sold is involved in proper circular economy efforts.

Leveraging social networks and early backers to build social capital is another critical strategy. The success of the "circular strategy" demonstrates how community narratives and support can amplify the reach and impact of crowdfunding campaigns (Manning and Bejarano, 2017). Entrepreneurs should actively engage with their early supporters and utilize their networks to build a robust social capital base, enhancing the credibility and attractiveness of their projects. Using creative and relatable messaging to engage backers effectively is also essential.

Conclusions

This study takes a novel approach by exploring the success of Kickstarter environmental initiatives from the perspective of mindful consumption. The use of thematic content analysis has provided an enriched interpretation of aspects that were overseen in previous literature. The current study has defined the main themes used by entrepreneurs to propose sustainable initiatives to different clusters of sustainable behaviour and in doing so has provided a unique framework that links crowdfunding attributes to mindful consumption behaviours in the context of the circular economy.

Thanks to this, the analysis offered in this study contributes not only to the managerial and (social) innovation literature, informing entrepreneurs of how to find the fit of ideas that integrate customers, society and planet challenges, but also to the stream of research around mindful consumption, extending the possibilities of its implementation on organizational domains. However, our results suggest some concerning issues which should be more explored in future research. The most pressing would be to question the extent to which ventures are seeking radical disruptive ideas that encourage mindful consumption behaviours.

In addition, the most prominent factors of success should prioritize the impact pursued by projects rather than funded success. Messages around sustainability should be concrete and exemplary of the end-result and never used lightly, for they risk being seen as wishful thinking. They should be grounded in detailed description, showing transparency and real commitment on the impact intended. Otherwise, crowdfunding initiatives will be misleading.

This study is not without limitations. First, the analysis focused only on a single category, environment and a limited number of projects. A more extensive dataset of funded and not funded projects could add additional information to be contrasted with the analysis here offered. This opens a new avenue for future research, particularly in mindful consumption domains. In terms of interpretation, an approach from other angles or perspectives could have added more information on pathways and causal relationships, consolidating the themes extracted in the present study. For this reason, quantitative research should be carried out for this purpose. In addition, results of this study might reveal important aspects for entrepreneurs to shape the ideas and how they are transformed in real projects. Researchers in other fields such as entrepreneurship, innovation or business management, could also identify new research lines or keys to inform future business strategies.

Despite these limitations, this study aims to contribute to further understanding of what mindful consumption requires and how new ventures are shaped to address sustainability challenges in environmental entrepreneurship. In doing so, solutions that holistically integrate the triple benefit through mindful consumption behaviours will more easily be achieved and eventually reach the general population.

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