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The Use of Gamification and Its Impact on Crowdfunding Participation:

Nicholas C. Styles
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The Use of Gamification and Its Impact on Crowdfunding Participation:
A Participatory Action Research

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Nicholas C. Styles

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

2018

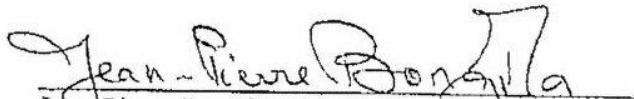
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA


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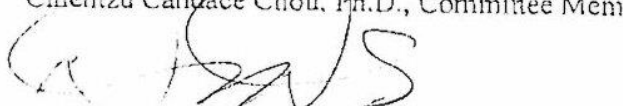
A Participatory Action Research

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee


Jean-Pierre Bongila, Ed. D., Committee Chair


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David Deeds, Ph.D., Committee Member

April 5, 2018

Final Approval Date

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to

My Best Friend, Ross Clanton, who gave me his unyielding support and encouragement;

My Grandmother Mae, who taught me to always work hard in everything I do;

My Mother Luise, who taught me to never, ever give up;

My Papa Kim and Mama Kristi, who raised me to be the man I am today;

My Rabbi Sim Glaser, who instilled in me the foundations
of Judaism;

My Aunt and Uncles:

JoAnn Fuller

Oscar Childes Jr.

Winfred Bernard Fuller Sr.

Don D. Fuller

Steve Fuller

Who has instilled in me the meaning of love, compassion, and appreciation for family, duty, honor and commitment and I thank you for it.

Last I would like to thank two people who are no longer with us, Oscar Lee Childes Sr. and Lenora Outlaw Hines, my grandfather and great-grandmother. Your love, passion and support has provided the family with the strongest foundation in building a legacy and I thank you for every-thing you have done. You taught me the skills and knowledge needed to build a successful and well-balanced life and this dissertation is dedicated to your memories and legacies.

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First, I am deeply indebted to the many people who have supported me through this long, arduous journey obtaining my doctoral degree. Completing a doctorate is a multi-person process. I simply could not have done it without the love, support, and encouragement of my family and friends.

My Biological (and Second) Family:

During the course of my doctoral studies, my family helped me realize where my true passion lies, in entrepreneurship. I would especially like to thank my mother; my brother and sister, Brian Jones and Jessica Fuller Clark; and my niece and nephews, Cherokee, Matthew, Michael, Braylon, and London.

I would also like to thank my second family, Papa Kim and Mama Kristi, for raising me as one of their own; my adopted sister and brother, Sable Fuller Gjesvold and Maxwell Fuller; my brother-in-law, Dallas Gjesvold; and my nieces, Olivia, Ava, and Rowen.

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My Aikido, Karate, and Champion Families:

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My Committee Family:

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My committee members, Dr. Candace Chou and Dr. David Deeds, told me, "You have the right idea and the resources to propel these ideas. We believe in you, now push forward and make it happen!"

Finally, I would like to thank the eight seasoned entrepreneurial participants who agreed to be interviewed and to share their stories with me. Each one of them truly personifies courage, integrity, commitment, and compassion. I am humbled by them and grateful for their time and forthright responses for this study.

Abstract

This action research study examined how the use of two gamification tools (CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time) can increase the interest of venture capitalists to invest in the start-up company that designed both tools. Data were collected through interviews and field notes using convenience sampling. The eight participants in this study were people who had previous knowledge of and supported the two projects. The initial findings revealed that participants and potential investors were inclining to support Children Story Time rather than CreatiCUBE. The flexible nature of action research allowed a refocus of the study on the latter gamification tool. Four themes emerged from the analysis of data: 1) participants had no particular interest in funding; 2) funding was a byproduct of market demand; 3) Children Story Time was a market-disrupting tool; and 4) strategies emerged to secure venture capital investment. Three analytical theories shed light on the findings: Bourdieu's cultural capital theory and Csikszentmihalyi's flow and transactional leadership theories. Findings provide evidence that, to secure financial investment, startup entrepreneurs need to immerse in the cultural capital of their community and appeal to the support of close friends and family members to create a workable application, demonstrate the application has over 10,000 daily users, and hold a successful Kickstarter campaign.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate how incentives such as points, badges, avatars, leaderboards, challenges, or levels, and achievements or rewards, often referred to as “gamification” (Bogost, 2011) might increase participant engagement and foster greater participation in crowdfunding events. Crowdfunding refers to funding a project by getting small amounts of money from a large number of people, usually via the Internet. This research was motivated by a search for seed funding to start an entrepreneurial business called CreatiCUBE and an unsuccessful search for investment funds.

A recurrent issue for any new venture is lack of access to financial resources. Longstanding research suggests that minority individuals face especially difficult funding challenges when marketing innovative solutions compared to nonminority populations (White, 1971). A primary goal was to determine if this indeed was the case that minority populations experience greater difficulty in obtaining funding. Another goal was to determine if access to financial resources was related to minority entrepreneurs’ engagement with venture capital investment and if there would be negative consequences for those investors engaging with the minority business community.

Cobbs and Turnock (2003) found that people who come from impoverished environments have diminished access to social and economic capital for investing. Furthermore, entrepreneurs from impoverished backgrounds often lack access to knowledgeable people, such as angel investors or venture capital investors, who could supply cash investments and the ability to assemble information about the types of investment needed in the early stages of its growth (Cosh, Cumming, & Hughes, 2009). Applying for credit is another alternative for capital support, though a limited history of business operations and/or a proven record of accomplishment

contributes to the challenges of obtaining credit (Stemler, 2013). With limited access to financial service firms, lending institutions, venture capital investors, and private institutions (Cosh et al., 2009), entrepreneurs often seek help outside secure investment channels such as their friends and family (Agrawal, Catalini, & Goldfarb, 2014). In many cases, entrepreneurs develop such “bootstrapping” techniques to support their initial financing through their personal community of friends and family members (Belleflamme, Lambert, & Schwienbacher, 2014; Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene, & Hart, 2006; Ebben & Johnson, 2006; Sannajust, Roux, & Chaibi, 2014; Winborg & Landstrom, 2001). Finally, many entrepreneurs attempt to approach stable, knowledgeable investors with resources to commit funding, but they are not often successful in attracting sufficient capital for their projects (Lambert & Schwienbacher, 2010).

Bourdieu’s social capital theory (1977/1972, 1984, 1986, 1993) has been useful in understanding the underlying mechanisms that facilitate or fail to facilitate entrepreneurial efforts of people with limited access to capital, knowledge, and power. The emergence of the internet offers new opportunities to use social capital theory for the purposes of constructing solutions to the problems experienced by entrepreneurs with novel and interesting ideas but few resources to implement them. One emerging trend for securing financing among entrepreneurs is crowdfunding (Agrawal, Catalini, & Goldfarb, 2013; Kleeman, Voß, & Rieder, 2008; Tomczak & Brem, 2013; Unterberg, 2010). Crowdfunding is “a large number of investors’ contributions of finances to projects, products, or business ideas” (Wenzlaff, Gumpelmaier, & Eisfeld-Reschke, 2012, p. 13). The use of crowdfunding, while promising, has not been fully tested as a means of attracting capital on a large scale.

Gamification as a Solution

An emerging literature supports internet-based gamification tools for marketing entrepreneurial efforts (Alčaković, Pavlović, Popesku, 2017). As an example, in 2010, rap artist Jay-Z employed the advertising firm, Droga5, to gamify a book launch to create a more engaging customer experience (Robson, Plangger, Kietzmann, McCarthy, & Pitt, 2016). Droga5 then partnered with Microsoft's search engine *Bing* and designed a combination of an integrated online mechanism and on-the-street gamified experience in which players set out to find pages of Jay-Z's book *Decoded* in various locations and unexpected places; examples included a rooftop in New Orleans, cheeseburger wrappers in New York City, and memorabilia in Jay-Z's 40/40 Club (Robson et al., 2016). The outcome of this usage of gamification was revealed in a number of ways. First, Jay-Z's social media Facebook page increased by over 1 million subscribers. Second, his book *Decoded* spent 18 weeks on the *New York Times* Best Seller list and was covered by many major international media outlets and cultural influencers such as bloggers (Droga5, 2011). Third, Microsoft's search engine *Bing* saw a nearly 12% traffic increase with over 1.1 billion global media impressions; this moved *Bing* into the top 10 most visited websites in the world, a first for the long time social media search engine (Droga5, 2011). In another example, *Samsung Nation*, *Pepsi Soundoff*, and other online loyalty programs use points, levels, or badges to drive customer engagement and deepen the relationships they have with the brands they use or aspire to use (Robson et al., 2016). These efforts required significantly less capital investment to launch and, in that way, provide a potential solution for low-capital entrepreneurs to market their efforts.

Significance and Purpose of the Study

Rather than using gamification tools directly for marketing purposes, this study intended to examine whether a newly designed gamification tool by Creative Styles Company could

increase the participation of interested individuals in the online funding activities known as crowdfunding (Liu & Wang, 2018). Specifically, the study used gamification tools as an instrument to motivate its users to invest in a product called CreatiCUBE. The working assumption was that a successful game was likely to attract greater numbers of users who, in turn, were likely to invest in the company that produces such gamification tools. By the same token, it was anticipated that the users of CreatiCUBE would be likely to lend their finances to the building of this company.

CreatiCUBE was built around the concept of modular technology and dramatic play enhancement. As an innovative product, CreatiCUBE was designed to develop and enhance cognition in young children. The toy design was specifically engineered to stimulate auditory, visual, fine motor, and other sensory skills. The central concept revolved around a durable 4'w x 4'h base cube play structure that could be assembled into various interchangeable and realistic kits such as an airplane, boat, hospital, fire station, lemonade stand, police station, and post office. The various kits were interactive, tech integrated, and in working conjunction with the base cube. The functionality of the kits simulates those of actual facilities, so the experience is not only creative, but it also teaches essential life skills such as independence and responsibility. The intent of the product is to immerse the child in realistic environments, where they can incorporate learned skillsets that teach them various roles adults play in society. The range of activities balanced physical play and technological engagement. The intent was to allow young children the freedom to construct their user experience. As a consequence, parents who watch their children develop their cognitive abilities because of engaging with the gamification tool, CreatiCUBE, would be more likely to participate in crowdfunding in support of this new industry.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was threefold. First, it examined how users' participation in a recently designed gamification tool called CreatiCUBE increased their engagement in the game. Second, this study investigated whether CreatiCUBE users translated their participation in the game into funding the project through crowdfunding operations destined to fund the product. Third, it sought to increase the participation of investors in minority-owned enterprises. The following questions were developed to investigate how participants' engagement in the gamification tool CreatiCUBE used crowdfunding activities to fund an entrepreneurial effort.

1. How has participation in the gamification tool, CreatiCUBE, enhanced participants' motivation to financially support the gaming company through crowdfunding?
2. What are the perceptions of individuals involved in CreatiCUBE toward using crowdfunding to financially support CreatiCUBE as a new entrepreneurship venture?
3. How can gamification attract more minority individuals to participate in crowdfunding startup entrepreneurial endeavors?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms and definitions were adopted.

Angel Investor: Angel investors are individuals who are affluent in capital and resources. They provide entrepreneurial startups with seed capital in exchange for equity ownership or convertible debt (Morrissette, 2007).

Badges: Badges are “visual representations of achievements and accomplishments that can be shared with other community members and are verified through data and evidence across the web” (Gibson, Ostashewski, Flintoff, Grant, & Knight, 2015, p. 405).

Business Incubation programs: These are programs that work with early stage and startup companies in providing them with resources to capitalize their first-year operations (Allen & McCluskey, 1990).

Avatar/Character: An avatar is “an electronic image that represents and is manipulated by a computer user in a virtual space (as in a computer game or an online shopping site) and that interacts with other objects in the space” (Avatar, n.d.). In this research, the term “avatar” is used interchangeably with the word “character” to describe the electronic image.

CreatiCUBE: Built around the concept of modular technology and dramatic play enhancement, CreatiCUBE is a product designed to develop and enhance cognition in young children. The toy design is specifically engineered by the author of this study to stimulate auditory, visual, fine motor, and other sensory skills. The central concept revolves around a durable 4’w x 4’h base cube play structure that can be assembled into various interchangeable and realistic kits such as an airplane, a boat, a hospital, a fire station, a lemonade stand, a police station, and a post office. The kits are all interactive, tech integrated and in working conjunction with the base cube. The functionality of the kits simulates those of the actual facilities, so the experience is not only creative, it also teaches essential life skills such as independence and responsibility. The range of activities include the balance of physical play and technological engagement allowing children to craft their user experience.

Challenge: A challenge is a call to take part in a contest or competition.

Children Story Time: This is a smart media application that provides parents with a platform to download, edit, create, and customize both personal and traditional children’s stories. Parents can create and transpose characters of their children in the stories, change the scenes and background illustrations, add their voices and other environmental sound effects, and animation

to tell a culturally relevant story. Children Story Time is made for early childhood development and focuses on 2- to 6-year-old preschool readers.

Crowdfunding: Crowdfunding is “the practice of obtaining needed funding (as for a new business) by soliciting contributions from a large number of people especially from the online community” (Crowdfunding, n.d.).

Crowdification: This is a process of engaging people in crowdfunding endeavors with gamification tools and techniques (Overman, 2016).

Entrepreneur: “One who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise” (Entrepreneur, n.d.).

Gamification: The application of game design elements in non-game environments that improves the users’ engagement, learning, productivity and flow through repetitive use of the gamification tools, points, badges, avatars, leaderboards and challenges (Seaborn & Fels, 2015).

Human Capital: Human capital refers to the value of a person’s intellectual property (knowledge, motivation, health and physical) that can be monetized as an exchange (Bourdieu, 1984).

Indiegogo: An international crowdfunding website that allows people to solicit funds for an idea, charity, or start-up business. Indiegogo charges a 5% fee on contributions. This charge is in addition to credit card and PayPal charges that range from 3.5% to 9%. The web address for Indiegogo is <https://www.indiegogo.com/>

Intrapreneur: A person who is employed by an organization but can interact with investors as an entrepreneur. Intrapreneurs are usually encouraged to develop their ideas into a workable product by the companies they work for (Jain, Ali, & Kamble, 2015).

Kickstarter: An American crowdfunding website that allows people to solicit funds for a workable idea, creative projects, such as films, music, stage shows, comics, journalism, video games, technology, and food-related projects. People who back Kickstarter projects are offered tangible rewards and one of kind experiences in exchange for their pledges. The web address for Kickstarter is <https://www.kickstarter.com/>

Leaderboard: A leaderboard is, “a scoreboard showing the names and current scores of the leading competitors” (Leaderboard, n.d.).

Motivation: Motivation is something that moves someone to act in a certain way.

Points: Credit accruing from creating a good impression.

Seed Funding: Seed funding is money that is used for starting a new business, program, project, etc. (Seed funding, n.d.). Seed money options often include friends and family funding, angel funding, and crowdfunding.

Series A Financing: Series A refers to the first round of securities financing for companies. Investors usually receive a class of preferred stock in exchange for this investment (Caruso, 2017).

Start-Up: A start-up is a fledgling business enterprise (Start-up, n.d.)

Venture Capital Investors: Venture Capital investors are people who specialize in providing Series A – E funding cycles for various business enterprises. Venture capital investors usually only invest in high risk/high reward organizations in hopes of securing a high equity position in those firms (Ante, 2008).

Virtual World: Is a massive multiplayer online world (MMOW) that is a simulated computer environments populated by many users. Users can explore, exchange and barter with

other players, while participating in engaging activities designed to enhance the user experience (Reaves & Reed, 2009).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this review of the literature was to identify scholarly studies related to the history and uses of gamification and its potential effects on entrepreneurship. The following search terms were adopted: gamification, behavioral incentives, motivation, and venture capital. From the results of the searched terms, literature was organized into the following sections: (1) the long history of gamification and entrepreneurship; (2) current understanding of gamification; (3) gamification and crowdfunding; and (4) classification of gamification. After introducing the content review, the theoretical framework adopted to interpret research findings will be introduced and explained.

The History of Gamification and Entrepreneurship

Gamification is a new marketing trend as a product engagement tool that was initially used only by marketing directors (McGonigal, 2011). Researchers have begun to argue that gamification growth in education and digital based learning systems is providing new opportunities for growth in considerable educational potential (Pérez-Manzano, Almela-Baeza, 2018). As a consequence, gamification is becoming a must-have element of consumer engagement programs (McGonigal, 2011). At the same time, the demographics of gaming are shifting. Using 2013 data, Doyle (2015) found that “women accounted for 47 percent of gamers in the U.S. and 29 percent of gamers are over the age of 50” (p. 141). Doyle (2015) also reported that the “48 million people played games on smartphones and tablets” (p. 141), which indicated a significant increase over the past decade. Gamification emerged as a surface level marketing strategy that utilized gaming tools such as points, badges, avatars, leaderboards, challenges or levels, and achievements or rewards to incentivize behavioral patterns for securing consumer and

brand loyalty through participation engagement. Subsequently, the gaming industry used this strategy to generate revenue totaling billions of dollars (Vgsales, 2016).

Origins of Gamification. Games, or the Latin terminology of *ludus*, has had a wide range of meanings, covering a variety of fields, from theatre to dance, from childish diversions to gaming with dice (Stenros, 2015). On many occasions, games were thinly veiled representations of power relationships in societies from which they originated. An example is the game of chess. Chess originated in the eastern part of Asia and then migrated to the middle-east, Persia, Spain and the rest of Europe (Davidson, 2012). In Europe, the game evolved into a reflection of medieval power relationships. The pawns represented the serfs, members of the labor class who were used as sacrificial individuals in time of war. The knights represented the professional soldier whose job was to protect the most important pieces of the game. They also could be used as sacrificial lambs in times of war. The bishops represented the power of the church, a rich and vast institution at the time. The castle represented the refuge or strategic location for land ownership. The queen is the only piece that is represented by a woman; she is the most powerful piece who has the ability to move all over the board. In medieval times, the queen was often used to empower kings by adding landownership and titles through political marriages. The king often relied on the queens' political advice and strategy, so in many cases the queen was involved in the political machinations of the court. The king is the most important piece. If a kingdom lost its king, that could mean a change for the worse, in terms of economic conditions, social status and religious tolerance. Therefore, in the game of chess, it was important to ensure that a kingdom maintained the safety and security of its king. Everyone from the pawn (serf) to the bishop (church) to protect and serve the king.

Also inherited from antiquity were games of chance, among which the game of dice may be considered the medieval game par excellence (Caillois, 1962/1958). Card games arose during the last quarter of the 14th century as well as collective games like the *jeu de la soule* (i.e., Shrove Tuesday Football), games that arose out of ceremonial practices linked to the calendar (Aries, 1962).

While the original rules of these games are close to the present rules, their evolution reveals a growing complexity such as the introduction of trumps into the game of cards (Aries, 1962). The game of chess was radically transformed at the dawn of the 16th century with the possibility offered to noble pieces of taking from a distance and the increased powers of the Queen (Aries, 1962), a change that reflected the changing political relationships in Europe (Davidson, 2012). Many games began to involve “stakes,” from a few small coins risked on Sunday in the tavern to the enormous sums gained or lost at a time by a *Louis d'Orléans* (1372–1407) or a *Philip the Bold* (1342–1404) (Aries, 1962). Thus, the nobility made games an element of distinction in which ostentation played the primary role. *Chansons de geste* and courtly literature made chess an attribute of noble life (Caillois, 1962/1958). Men of war, royal officials, domestics, and clerics participated in games.

Authorities did not respond to the wide scale introduction of stakes in a uniform way (Fleming, 1996). Some heirs to Roman legislation, who were anxious to maintain order, tried to prohibit games or regulate the conditions and course of games (Caillois, 1962/1958). A penal phase was succeeded by a fiscal phase. The Church, which saw games as an activity that could turn to contempt of God, neighbor, or oneself, confined its prohibitions to clerics alone, distinguishing between athletic games (authorized), intellectual games (tolerated), and games of

chance (forbidden) (Caillois, 1962/1958). Nevertheless, gaming continued to take on significance in society.

Current Understanding of Gamification. The past decade has seen an increasing use of gamification as a learning tool (Werbach & Hunter, 2012). Gamification is the use of “game elements and game-design techniques in non-game contexts to engage people and solve problems” (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011, p. 9; Werbach & Hunter, 2012). The foundation logic of gamification is that it uses game design to increase exploration, motivation, and retention of nongame activities (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011; Werbach & Hunter, 2012). The concept has gained traction in business, health, and wellness initiatives, though not as much in education. It is not clear why education as a discipline has not grasped gamification. At least part of the reason is that it connotes a lack of seriousness and accountability on the part of students and educators (Dicheva, Dichev, Agre, & Angelova, 2011; Kapp, 2011). Still, researchers and designers are exploring the vast usage of *ludic* activity in play simulations and computer applications (Deterding et al., 2011; Gamification Geek, 2018).

Nielsen (2017) argues, “As user experience became a more solid field in the 1990s and 2000s, there was further work and research in this area, with people considering the role of fun and play in user experiences” (para. 1). The idea is that creation of play in software design can elicit positive emotions. Rather than simply making interfaces easy to use, the developers focus on building engaging tools that can elicit positive emotions through things such as sound, graphics, and animation, thus enhancing the user’s experience with the software (Nielsen, 2017). Enhanced user experience attracts consumers, enhances usage of systems, and actively engages members in their company’s products (McGonigal, 2011).

Gamification as Learning Technology. Despite some initial resistance in education, today gamification is being developed more extensively for educational purposes. One of the primary arguments made by most traditional advocates of gamification is that playfulness and fun enhance engagement and problem-solving (Darejeh & Salim, 2016). Another argument for using gamification in non-game contexts is its ability to increase user engagement through motivational exercises (Darejeh & Salim, 2016). A third argument in support of gamification in education is that ‘digital natives’ construct new paradigms of engagement for a ‘new’ generation of learners (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008).

Engagement and motivation are two important elements of gamification tools; these are important but are not sufficient for educational purposes, since education is about mastery or competence (Gee, 2007). Today, many young adults are engaged by games; however, these games have little resemblance to the learning and skills development required to be successful at a university or on the job. Furthermore, the content generated by many games can produce “a simplification of reality” (Gros, 2007, p. 23). In response to this concern, games developers are attempting to create games that are built specifically to improve critical thinking skills and enhance the educational properties of the user’s environment (Duffy & Jonassen, 2013; Gee, 2003).

The concern that games better relate to real world goals reflects a constructivist learning approach (Chipman et al., 2006; Duffy & Jonassen, 2013; Hengeveld et al., 2007). According to constructivists, children engaged in play are actively exploring the world, forming mental representations of that world, and then testing these representations against reality through various forms of behavior. About 60 percent of the top selling iPhone apps on the education store are made for toddlers and preschoolers (Cooney, 2010). Still, there is a concern that many forms

of technology on the market do not reflect the kind of “real world” content that young children need (Sung et al., 2007).

Researchers argued that “games present clear objectives, which are further divided into short-term achievable goals that give a seamless sense of progression to players by providing frequent rewards that act as external motivators” (de-Marcos, Dominguez, Saenz de-Navarrete, 2014, p. 82). Video games are part of a multidisciplinary field that is increasing in multidisciplinary formats amongst users and leading industry attracting talented designers, artists and programmers alike (Chatfield, 2010). Education becomes more accessible to disadvantaged groups through the use of video-games in classrooms, which promotes productivity and creative thinking through engagement and gamification tools (Kam et al., 2008; Schmitz, Czauderna, Klemke, & Specht, 2011).

For example, in their recent scholarly works on the application of gamification to teaching and learning, de Marcos et. al. (2014), summarize four articles that focused on its application in the educational community. In one article, Haksu and Young Yim (2012) describes the different learning activities of their educators and how they incorporated the learning in game design. Raymer (2011) articulates his thoughts on how people can promote engagement through various e-learning systems. In another article, Erenli (2012) reflected on the tactics of gamification and how it improved the teachers’ ability to influence their learners’ perspectives. In the last another article, Simoes et., al. (2013) presented scenarios where teachers validated their learning activities by integrating game designs into their curriculum framework. Kapp (2012) argues that gamification in education is “a serious approach to accelerating the experience curve of learning, teaching complex subjects, and systems thinking” (p.13); therefore, it negates the possible effectiveness of gamification in education. Researchers in this area have

articulated concepts of developmental processes related to gamification usage in educational institutions (Browne, Anand, Gosse, 2014; Compton-Lilly, 2007; Gros, 2007).

Gamification and Entrepreneurship. From a psychological standpoint, engagement comprises the energy, involvement, and efficacy experienced by the individual (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). In an entrepreneurial context, there are two types of engagement processes that are of particular interest: investor (player) engagement and customer engagement (Robson et al., 2016). Player engagement entails ‘harnessing’ investment opportunities to their network of friends and community members to increase their involvement, satisfaction and enthusiasm in new venture ideas (Kahn, 1990). For projects to succeed, it is important for the investor to become engaged early in the process of development (Saks, 2006). Furthermore, increases in investor engagement has been linked to the increase of customer satisfaction (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002), which increases the investors’ desire to increase engagement with the customer (Robson et al., 2016). Customer engagement, far from being an individual experience, is characterized by interactive processes that include consumer feedback through writing social media reviews, participating in branding events, and use of social media (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek, 2011; Parent, Plangger, & Bal, 2011). Successful engagement leads to increased interaction with a product and this, in turn, leads to habit formation; that is, the consumer develops a strong preference for the product over competitors (Duhigg, 2012). In this way, gamification can create behavioral changes in customers by establishing preferences for consumer brands (McGonigal, 2011; Robson, et al., 2016).

Gamification and Crowdfunding

Product development is dependent on start-up capital. Various developers have utilized crowdfunding for initial investment in educational, academic, and business products (Caniels, De

Stobbelei & De Clippeleer, 2014; Elerud-Tryde & Hooge, 2014). This has been achieved in several ways. One way is to provide statistics on video game usage as a solution for developing employees' collective creativity, using crowd sourcing platforms (Poetz & Screier, 2012) or interacting with innovation intermediaries for collective exploration (Agogue, Ystrom & Le Masson, 2013). Other approaches analyzed the enhancement of critical thinking skills with video game usage (Clark, Howard, & Anderson, 2011; Edwards, Coddington, & Caterina, 1997) Still others sought solutions in creating technological advancement for educational purposes (Sanford, & Madill, 2007; Robertson, 2012; Dominguez, Navarrette, de-Marcos, Sanz, Pages, & Herraiz, 2013).

There is a gap in scholarly literature as to how crowdsourcing can work in initial investments. One reason for this gap is that increased use of crowdfunding comes during a shaky period for the video game industry (Dolan 2013). Research conducted by Gerber and Hui (2013) on the motivations and deterrents for participation in crowdfunding activities indicated that dichotomous fundraising platforms have provided financial opportunities for start-up organizations to fund various projects. Recent reports indicates gamification's potential solutions in providing successful tools to utilize in securing the initial monetary compensation for project launch deserve more study (He, Chen, Lee, Wang, & Pohlmann, 2017; Kavaliova, Virjee, Moehle, & Kleppe, 2016). Deterding et al. (2011) argues that "gamification has gained in popularity among practitioners and scholars as a tool to motivate, engage, increase user activity, and retain consumers in a particular brand or community" (p. 1). For example, Dolan (2013) indicated that the year 2012 set a record for crowdfunded video games. The same year Kickstarter generated \$83 million compared with \$3.6 million in 2011 in campaigns for games and console systems alone.

Crowdfunding's Support of CreatiCUBE. Crowdfunding has been used to fund several startup entrepreneurship activities including, to some extent, CreatiCUBE. In the past two decades or so, marketing scholars have reexamined the fundamentals of the consumption experience and suggested that a different form of consumption, (individual transactions) being augmented by community based experiences, had emerged (Mathwick, Wietz, & De Ruyter, 2008). Experiences based on community product consumption were increased in mass proportions in brand communities (Hsu, Chang, & Lee, 2013). One trend was that many members of a brand community were no longer just participants who simply shared information with other members or post comments in threads, but they actively engaged in behaviors that benefitted the brand and the brand community. A brand community allowed consumer to form a “non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412).

As a result of the internet, brand communities are more accessible to consumers throughout the world (Johnson & Lowe, 2015; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012; Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). Social media and the proliferation of online brand communities has altered the consumption experience for most consumers by making a range of products more accessible. Many consumers spend more than one-third of their waking hours on social media (Adler, 2014); consequently, online brand community participation has become more than common. Brand communities often exert a persistent and profound effect on members’ perceptions and actions (Muniz & Schau, 2007). Marketers can benefit from the activities of brand communities as they rapidly disseminate information (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003), monitor customer information exchange (Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2010), facilitate the adoption of new products

(Thompson & Sinha, 2008), and maximize customer participation and value co-reaction opportunities (Brodie et al., 2013; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009).

Crowdsourcing is a new form of business organization, where consumers' online *ludic* activities serve as a free resource for the benefit product assessment (Kozinets, Hemetsberger, & Schau, 2008). This enables reaching a larger pool of talent for problem solving and exploiting related knowledge that exists outside one's immediate sources and influences (Howe, 2006). In contrast to open source and commons-based peer production, crowdsourcing is sponsored and managed by the organization. One's organization is responsible for issuing the task, creating incentives for crowd participation, and assessing the results (Brabham, 2008; Howe, 2009).

My company, CreatiCUBE is a new start-up that focuses on creating strong brand awareness in the early stage process in launching our innovative product in the online community. Crowdsourcing sites have attracted lots of attention as innovative social media platforms enable individuals or firms to obtain ideas/solutions of specific problems from external helpers all over the world (Howe 2006, 2008). Individuals can communicate and collaborate with each other via social media on product or solution development (Shen et al., 2014). Crowdsourcing a project builds strong relationships in the brand community where members can collaborate in a virtual space. Online brand communities are non-geographically bound where admirers of the brand can share a sense of belonging to something larger than the individual self (Kavaliova, Virjee, Maehle, & Kleppe, 2016). Utilizing these devices can create a level of trust between online brand community members, cultivate rituals and traditions as defined within complex cognitive narratives and improve the social systems that reduces the complexity levels of people's anxieties and enhance their coping mechanisms of uncertainty and risks (Luhman, 1979).

Classification of Gamification

Gamification in general and CreatiCUBE in particular operate both as educational and entrepreneurial tools. Literature mainly classifies these tools into various categories according to their technological design or their storyline design, as explained in the next sections of the paper.

Gamification as Education Tool. As educational products, gamification tools go beyond simple quizzes, puzzle games, and are usually classified as narratives. They use storytelling as a key to entertainment, but also for educational purposes. Stories support learning by linking engagement activities to meaningful experiences and through this process, the stories anchor knowledge in the learner's episodic memory (Kriszenberger, 2005). One of the best practice solutions proposed by (Alexander et al., 1977; Gamma, Helm, Johnson, & Vlissides, 1994) is to find the analysis in design patterns that is adaptable in system comparisons. Martens et. al., (2009) argues, "Learning system with game design elements, gamification design is considered as the predictor of collaborative storytelling websites' success" (p. 477). Popular collaborative storytelling websites could attract a plethora of users to discuss and collaborate stories online. To describe collaborative storytelling, users can work together in teams using words to originate creative stories in helping other users to develop their interpersonal and story related skills through transformational life experiences. Moreover, collaborative storytelling websites provides connections with other popular social media services, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instant Messenger. These social media platforms enhances the facilitation of news between online community members and social influences in building better relations between educators and Internet researchers.

Researchers argues that gamification design in collaborative storytelling can increase the contribution of fun and interactivity, which is critical for success (Hsu, Chang & Lee, 2013; Reeves & Read, 2009; Chloe, Jang & Song, 2011). Recently, gamification is widely used to

increase users' interaction and engagement in variety of domains, such as businesses, education, health and wellness and training programs, which facilitates the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational behaviors in people (de-Marcos, Dominguez, de-Navarrete, Pages, 2014).

Moreover, systems that used gamification features can attract engaging users to collaborate with other members in creating stories for increasing daily users and higher site times (Erenli, 2013).

Therefore, gamification essentially functions as entertainment, which increases the collaborative storytelling and users' participation and engagement with others (Hsu, Chang & Lee, 2013).

Gamification as Technology Tool. This literature review explored the use of iPad software to teach literacy skills to early childhood education students, motivated by the above situation and possible opportunity. The potential of using video games in learning was highlighted, among others, by Prensky (2001) and Gee (2003). There have been a few studies looking at educational tablet game software (Browne, Anand, & Gosse, 2014; Wattanatchariya, Chuchuaikam, & Dejdumrong, 2011; Yan, 2011). Video games are popular among younger generations, designated by some as digital narratives (Prensky, 2001), "but little support exists in the professional research literature for the use of the iPad to support students with disabilities" (Cummings & Rodriguez, 2013, p. 44).

The articles above have unveiled many potential advantages of video games in education like immediate feedback, information on demand, productive learning, motivating cycles of expertise, self-regulated learning or team collaboration (Gee, 2003; Rosas, Nussbaum, & Cumsile, 2003) and suggested that it could also be used in web-based education as a tool to increase student motivation and engagement. According to Gartner (2013), "tablet computers have recently exploded in popularity, reaching 116 million in sales worldwide in 2012 and are projected to grow to 468 million by 2017" (p. 135). By utilizing the direct control user interface

(touchscreen) these devices provided opportunities for innovative solutions in addressing low adult and child literacy deficiencies. Tablet software could be less cost prohibitive than human interaction, thus alleviating the requirement for human instruction. Utilizing a tablet could provide an interactive learning experience and alleviate any childcare or transportation issues.

Tablet software is designed to be a both fun and engaging method of learning, often increasing adult participation in literacy education. There have been some studies analyzing the effectiveness of tablets in education. Rothschild (2011) proposed that through the use of applications, the iPad is somewhat of a “digital education prescription pad,” and the ability to customize a popular device to suit the needs of each individual student is motivating (p. 164). Moreover, video games teaches players how to master the game mechanics and active learning process by providing challenges and interactive activities, thus increasing the economy of game ownership (Koster, 2005).

Academics and practitioners acknowledge the relevance of integrating customers in the development of new products or services in innovation and relationship management (Borger, Afuah, & Bastian, 2013). Engaging customers in the value co-creation process is advocated as a powerful means of establishing a dialogue with them (Varey & Ballantyne, 2006) developing a community around firms’ interests (Healy & McDonough, 2013) strengthening the commitment toward the new offering, and stimulating positive perceptions and attitudes from customers (Kaptien, Parvinen, & Poyry, 2015; Nishikawa, Schreier, & Ogawa, 2013; Xiang, Cai, Lam, & Pei, 2013) which can boost adoption rates and generally seem to considerably reduce the risk of innovation failure (Nambisan & Baron, 2007; Zheng, Li, & Hou, 2011).

Research supports that negative characteristics in video games can have biased consequences in addition and aggressive behaviors that could also influence the negative

stereotypes of gender bias (Anderson, & Bushman, 2001; Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004; Kafai, 1996; Salguero & Moran, 2002; Sherry, 2001; Webber, Ritterfeld & Mathiak, 2006; Schrader, Archambault & Oh-Young, 2011). Moreover, the research supports the positive influence and the expanded cluster of accessible solutions on motivation (Malouf, 1987; Millar & Navarick, 1984), spatial ability (Greenfield, Brannon, & Lohr, 1994; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 1994), and complex motor skill development (Day, Arthur, & Gettman, 2001; Mane, Adams, & Donchin, 1989; Schrader, Archambault, & Oh-Young, 2011). Applying the gamification in education approach has the potential advantage of increasing the level of engagement with students by inducing motivation without decreasing their critical thinking skills.

Gamification as Storyline Tool. Stories are narratives that are comprised of statements of any report of connected event designed to reflect the author positions of truth or fictitious imagery, presented in a sequence of written or spoken word to interest, amuse or instructed the observing participant (Ahlquist, 2011). Narratives are organized statements that guide proper behavior, cultural history, and formation of communal identity in establishing values within the learner (Merkel, Sanford, 2011). Researchers support that there are three properties of stories that are predictors of the importance of statements: hierarchical ordering, statement connectivity, and statement categories (e.g. Johnson & Mandler, 1980; Lorch & Lorch 1985; Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979). Moreover, some studies considers the success of collaborative storytelling is due to the critical factor of adding the gamification designs into the websites, because of its ability to create fun, engagement and interactivity (Reeves & Read, 2009; Choe, Jang, & Song, 2011).

The fact that some statements in a story are systematically perceived as more important than others is clear. First, “important” proclamations are recalled more easily (Binet & Henri, 1894/1978; Black & Bower, 1980; Mandler & DeForest, 1979; Newman, 1979; Omanson, 1982; Thorndyke, 1977; Trabasso & van den Broek, 1985, 1988; Trabasso, Secco, & van den Broek, 1984). Second, that which is designated as important is encapsulated within a discrete time range (van den Broek & Trabasso, 1986; Omanson, 1982; Rumelhart, 1977; Trabasso & van den Broek, 1985, 1988). Third, information designated as important is more likely to be associated with answers to questions about main ideas or reasons for other statements (Goldman, 1985; Goldman & Varnhagen, 1983; Grasser, 1981; Stein & Glenn, 1979). Fourth, information perceived as important facilitates performance of successive tasks (Bridge, Belmore, Moskow, Cohen, & Matthews, 1984; Brown & Smiley, 1977; Lorch & Lorch, 1985).

Gamification design can offer users the ability to collaborate through shared stories without limitations of time and place (Hsu, Chang, & Lee, 2013). In collaborative storytelling websites, participants work together as a team in creating stories and collaborate on new ideas (Hsu, Chang & Lee, 2013). Ahlquist (2011) has shown how a fictive world is created in the classroom with learners, working in groups, taking on the roles of characters in an unfolding story. The story develops as the learners work on tasks that are designed on the basis of curriculum content and which integrate theoretical knowledge and subjects such as art and drama (Ahlquist, 2011). Ahlquist conducted a five-week case study on a class of Swedish 11-13-year olds in the spring of 2009 (Ahlquist, 2011). For two hours a day, four days a week, the learners were immersed in the roles of families in a group of four in a newly built small fictional town, working in a group of four (Ahlquist, 2011). The researchers created a fictional English narrative based on sustainability (Ahlquist, 2011). The participants were required to describe their

reflections based on the English syllabus of their everyday life, living in this small fictional town (Ahlquist, 2011). Researchers suggested that, for many children, the process of learning to read begins before the beginning of formal instruction in school (Kendeou, Lynch, van den Broek, Espin, White & Kremer, 2005). Current views of early reading development maintain that the process of developing the ability to read is a complicated measure comprising a dichotomy of skills (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998), including basic language skills (Dickinson & Snow, 1987; Snow, 1983).

Theoretical Framework

A combined study that used Bourdieu's 'Cultural Capital' (1975, 1990), Csikszentmihalyi's Flow theory (1975, 1980), and Transactional Leadership theory (Avolio & Bass, 1999), provided a new lens through which to view the data. First, these theories are explained.

Bourdieu's Cultural Capital & Reproduction Theory. In his theory of cultural and social capital reproduction, Bourdieu (1986) considered social capital as the access to resources within a network of relationships. "Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction has attracted great attention from sociologists in the English-speaking world, since the early 1970's" (Nash, 2010, p. 431). Bourdieu's cultural capital referred to the collection of symbolic social assets that promoted social mobility beyond economic means. In addition to cultural capital, Bourdieu also recognized social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248).

Bourdieu observed that human societies must be studied as systems of economic and cultural production (Bunge, 1979). In essence, sharing similar forms of cultural capital created a

sense of collective identity and group position through elements such as language, skillsets, mannerisms, and credentials. Bourdieu (1986) differentiated three forms of cultural capital: ‘the embodied state’ (long-lasting dispositions); ‘the objectified state’ (cultural goods), and ‘the institutionalized state’ (academic qualifications). People with high cultural capital can use it to advance in ways other than economic means. Bourdieu (1986) argued that owners of cultural capital can convert any of these forms to profitable financial investment for themselves and their children. An example of obtaining cultural capital conversion for financial profit is the attainment of education. Empirical studies show that parental education has positive effects on children’s educational success (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997; Sullivan, 2001; Rossel & Beckert-Zieglschmid, 2002; Jungbauer-Gans, 2004; Gesthuizen et al., 2005; van de Weefhorst & Hofstede, 2007). In fact, in modern societies, the school system has become the most important agency for economic advancement in all social and economic classes. Thus, social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) has helped scholars in a number of fields transcend a narrow definition of capital as economic capital.

Csikszentmihalyi’s ‘Cultural Models’ – Flow Theory. Flow theory addresses the issue of human motivation and performance (Dornyei, 2001; Schmidt, Boraie, & Kassabgy, 1996). According to the theory, intrinsically rewarding experiences are more likely to push people to higher levels of performance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Intrinsically motivation involves engagement in tasks that, while presenting challenges, enables the person involved in the task to experience it as almost effortless, thus, as part of a natural “flow.” Those who report subjective experiences of flow describe it as being “in the zone,” “in the groove” (Jackson & Marsh, 1996), “blinking out” or “having the touch” (Abbott, 2000), and an experience when “everything gelled” (Snyder & Tardy, 2001, p. 29). Flow is the outcome of initial struggle and effort, but

once it is experienced, flow becomes self-reinforcing as the person works to achieve the same experience of effortlessness in the activity (Trevino & Webster, 1992). Csikszentmihalyi suggested that flow is the basis for peak performance in sports. Abbott (2000) also identified flow as the basis for success in writing and scholastics, other skills that develop through initial struggle, an experience of effortlessness, and then repeated practice in order to reach a higher level. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) stated, “Families, schools, religious communities, and corporations, need to develop communities that foster” a sense of flow (p. 8).

In response to the critical need to advance equity and excellence in entrepreneurial start-ups and improve the quality of life for marginalized populations, rigorous exploration of what works is required, particularly as entrepreneur’s reconsider pedagogy, access, and creating climates conducive for entrepreneurs’ and venture capitalists’ engagement. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) claimed that, “wherever there is a need for the improvement of life, the flow theory can point the way” (p. 5).

Schmierbach, Chung, Wu and Kim (2014) conducted an experimental study involving flow theory and the application of game design in examining the contextual application of self-determination and flow theory in influencing college students. In their findings, the researchers tested their enjoyment through flow and how they used a “path mode analysis” between challenge and skill through various game modes in a casual tower defense game (Schmierbach, Chung, Wu, & Kim, 2014). Gee (2003) argued that video games engage children in a “compelling world of action and interaction” (p. 68). Because they were able to master each skill through flow immersion and perfection, the engagement encouraged the children to keep participating in the world of the game (Gee, 2003). The researchers concluded that the performance of the flow value increased from 3 – 10% because of the performance of the flow

(Schmierbach et al., 2014). They determined that the players would enjoy the game, if it offered minimal challenges, while the participants who played the more difficult challenges of the game, often felt less competent (Schmierbach et al., 2014). The researchers also determined that the game difficulty reduced the challenge-skill balance of these players, thus interrupting their flow (Schmierbach et al., 2014). Similarly, Sherry (2004) argued that “flow and challenge-skill balance is linked to enjoyment” (p. 328). Furthermore, giving these empirical findings, the studies support that while challenge-skill balance was strongly correlated with enjoyment, the relationship presents dichotomous findings between two contradictory deceptive terminologies; the enjoyment of balancing the challenge-skill and establishing the correlation of flow (Schmierbach, et al., 2014).

Transactional Leadership. According to George (2006), transactional leaders “not only inspire those around them, they bring people together around a shared purpose and a common set of values and motivate them to create value for everyone involved” (p. 52). Leadership literature suggests that transactional leadership is better suited for creating a system of rewards and punishments exploitation (March 1991; Vera and Crossan, 2004). Transactional leadership also “emphasized convergent thinking, efficiency, and continuity” (Du, Swaen, Lindgreen, & Sen, 2011, p. 5). Luthans and Avolio (2003) further specified that a transactional leadership style resulted in “greater self-reflection” and “self-regulated positive behaviors” toward others (p. 91).

Transactional leaders focus on the self-interest of their employees by offering rewards or threatening sanctions (Moynihan, Pandey, & Wright, 2012; Walumba, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Transactional leadership rests on the behaviorist views of human activity. Part of the leader/follower relationship is the leaders’ delegation of rewards and punishments in crafting their perspective roles (Khan, 2017). However, this type of engagement

limits the opportunity “to capture the complexity of leadership processes in modern organizations” (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010, p. 83). Incomplete planning is often related to a failure to consider the bigger picture. According to Benjamin (2016), transactional leaders have an “over reliance on a single approach, and unwillingness to discuss, or even consider, the ideas of others, which limits a leader’s creativity and his ability to adjust if things go wrong” (p. 1). Without reflexivity and willingness to change strategies as internal or external issues arise, transactional leadership was seen as less effective for entrepreneurial start-ups.

There are three tenets that comprises the foundation of transactional leadership: contingent reward; active management-by-exception; and passive management-by-exception (Bedi, Alpaslan & Green, 2015). Contingent reward leaders often negotiates for additional resources to exchange commendations for followers performance by engaging in constructive goal oriented solutions that is mutually agreed upon by clarified expectations from both follower/leader (www.quizlet.com).

Active management-by-exception is the practice of setting clear expectations and active monitoring of neglectful standard, mistakes and errors in the operations of the business (Walumba, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). These leaders observe their followers actions and performance, while enforcing the rules by taking corrective actions in ensuring they avoid these mistakes (Walumba, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Passive management-by-exception is the practice of passively waiting for neglectful standards, mistakes, and errors to happen and wait until the signs can no longer be ignored before deciding action (Walumba, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). These passive managers are leaders who failed to intervene until problems become serious and waited to take corrective action until the mistakes are brought to their attention (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Overall, transactional leadership is often defined as the use of contingent rewards and sanctions intended to create employee self-interest in achieving organizational goals. Moreover, the employee's self-interest, might be used as a token or application of organizational goals set by both the manager and employee (Andersen & Pallesen, 2008). In the next section is a description of the methodology used to collect and analyze data for this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study used qualitative research methods to investigate the research questions. Qualitative research appeared to be well appropriate to this category of studies because it applies the techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviewing (Biklen & Bogdan, 2011). Creswell (2013) argued, “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding, the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). This process of research involved creating emerging questions and procedures, data collection in the participants’ environment, analyzing the data strains to effectively produce particular themes and weaving them in generalized themes for the purposes of interpretation.

Biklen and Bogdan (2011) stated that “the qualitative approach demands that the world be examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (p. 5). In qualitative research, the researcher does not proceed with preconceived notions; “you are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know, you are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts” (Bikden & Bogdan, 2011, p. 6). Likewise, this action research project was approached with an open mind.

CreatiCUBE as Gamification Entrepreneurship

This study focused on the interaction between gamification and crowdfunding with an application to CreatiCUBE, an entrepreneurship endeavor of my own design. This section provides a description of CreatiCUBE, its background as well as its use of crowdfunding mechanisms. CreatiCUBE was born out of a simple idea. Is it possible to take a cardboard box and turn it into anything one wanted for the purposes of play? This project was born out of an idea for creating products that focused on education, play and creativity. In the summer of 2013,

this researcher volunteered for several early childhood daycare operations in the Twin Cities (mainly at the University of St. Thomas and New Horizons child care centers). In every facility, there were three common traits: The first commonality was that all the children attending these institutions shared the same age range of 0 months – 5 years of age. In a few centers, there were some 6 – 9-year-old children, but they were usually the younger children's older sibling and they only came to the center after their school let out, which was 3:00 p.m. on average. The second was that none of the children at the time were playing with any smart media devices and the centers were mostly focused utilizing toys that emphasized the cognitive enhancement and the physical development of their children.

The third was that in all of the centers the kids played with a cardboard box. They weren't just playing with the box, but they also used scissors and tape to deconstruct and construct the physical manipulation of the structure, so they could enhance their imaginative life environments. To further explain, they used the outer structure of the walls to create different drawings, colorings and images to manipulate their environments artistic expressions, they kept altering the environment every day to resemble something new, and different while maintaining the original base structure. I was superbly fascinated about the strong imaginative display of cognitive learning, the children exhibited with each other while learning through physical and spatial play. Immediately I went home and started constructing several cardboard prototypes that showed me how children could manipulate these environments through physical play.

Furthermore, I wanted to see how a physical toy could captivate the children's attention and allowed them to create a personalized imaginative solution for their playtime anxiety. I tested the original prototypes with my 7-year-old niece (Beebe Jones) and 5-year-old nephew (Chocolate Jones). Both children taught me so much during the initial prototype testing. For

instance, I recognized right away that the structure had to be more thick and solid material if we were going to market this as a commercialized product. The children played with this toy every day, so it was important to create a structure that could expand and advance its physical limitation, while increasing the children's creativity. In addition, I learned that the structure had to be dynamic enough, so parents and children of preteen years would be able to manipulate its entire structure for mobility solutions. Meaning that older children (age 7+) could expand the structure into larger construction pieces for enhanced playground solutions. The walls had to have a laminate primer solution for the ability to create unlimited artistic expressions and last the structure had to be malleable enough to interchange as a physical transformer to allow for endless imaginative joy. This device allowed the children to continue creating expressions that are more artistic while it built their cognitive and imaginative skills through physical and parallel play.

Action Research

Qualitative research takes many approaches, including action research, although some quantitative practitioners have used it (Anderson & Herr, 2015). Action research is "different in that research participants themselves either are in control of the research or are participants in the design and methodology of the research" (p. 1). This study used participatory action research since it involved the design of CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time, two tools at the center of this study. Secondly, this study explicitly studied users of gamification tools as they participated and offered to possibly invest in the gamification business.

"Action research is either research initiated to solve an immediate problem or a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a community of practice to improve the way they address issues and solve problems"

(Denscomb, 2010, p. 125). Likewise, my study intended to solve a community problem, that is, how to attract the beneficiaries of CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time to enjoy the game and crowdfund the enterprise that created the two games. Action research practice is grounded in actions that organizational or community members have taken, are taking, or wish to take to address a particular problem. The idea is that changes occur either within the setting and/or within the researchers themselves.

Anderson and Herr (2015) distinguished five categories of action research based on such criteria as positionality of the researcher, validity creative, contribution of the research and research tradition. In relation to the positionality of the research in a slideshow created by Alqaharah (2015), the five categories of action research include; “1) insider (where research studies their own/self/practice; 2) insider in collaboration with other insiders; 3) insider(s) in collaboration with outsider(s); reciprocal collaboration (where insider and outsider teams collaborate); 4) outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s)” (p. 1) (Her & Anderson, 2015).

The last category better fitted my study in that I stood as an observer (outsider) who studied the process of using CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time and of participating in related crowdfunding activities in which users (insiders involved). This category of action research was different from the traditionally applied research model (case study, ethnology, etc.). Traditional social science research often frowns on the researcher intervening or participating in any way the research setting, while action research demands that the researcher participate in some capacity of intervention. For the action researcher, the interventions constitute a descending spiral of action cycles in which the researcher initiated the following:

1. To develop a plan of action to improve what is already happening;
2. To act and implement the plan;

3. To observe the effects of action in the context in which it occurs;
4. To reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and on, through a succession of cycles (Kemmis, 1982, p. 124).

Herr and Anderson (2015) argued, “Thus, an action research study on this end of the continuum is viewed as applied research in which the outsider may engage more closely with the study’s participations. The level of engagement... can vary during the life of study” (pp. 52-53). Therefore, as the initiator of CreatiCUBE / Children Story Time and the researcher, I anticipated some form of close participation in the study, although I did not directly play or assess the game with participants, nor did I engage in crowdfunding the business that I have created.

Research Participants

After obtaining the approval of the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB), I actively began the process of selecting participants for this study. I used convenience sampling and some form of snowballing strategy to gather eight participants among those who had invested time, money and energy to my project (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). I obtained four participants through convenience sampling and four others through snowballing.

The former four participant entrepreneurs consisted of people who are from my close circle of community members, while the three other participants from Children Story Time became connected through the original four participants. In addition, one of the participants is a venture capital investor (Ernest “Chest” Rockwell) was introduced and connected from one of the three Children Story Time mentors (Brock Love). The participants in my study comprised of eight diverse entrepreneurs, investors, and stakeholders, all of whom initially engaged in participating with my first Indiegogo Crowdfunding campaign for CreatiCUBE in October 2016. Sensing that I would be unsuccessful in securing the Seed capital for CreatiCUBE, I ceased the

focus for investment in March 2017 to also include my other gamification software called Children Story Time. I used the same sampling population for the two gamification software’.

Snowball or chain sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017) also came into play in this study. During time of new adjustment, which includes less focus on CreatiCUBE and more attention to Children Story Time, I approached one of my mentors and close friend from the CreatiCUBE advising team Milk Butterworth who introduced me to two additional mentor participants (Hardbody Harrison & Brock Love). Love then introduced me to his connection in Silicon Valley, a venture capital investor, (Ernest “Chest” Rockwell) whom had expressed potential interest in providing either Seed and/or Series A funding for Children Story Time.

The sample of eight participants was deemed appropriate for completing this qualitative research. For example, Creswell (2013) asserts that a study that looks deeply into the characteristics of a very small sample often results in more knowledge than a study that looks shallowly into a larger sample. The participants were all located in the continental United States: three in Minnesota, two on the east coast (Massachusetts & New Jersey) and the remaining three on the West Coast (Silicon Valley & Arizona). The participants were all in business and had over 200+ years of combined experience in entrepreneurship. The participants were all considered to be in the higher economic income class as well as technologically proficient.

Table 1 provides a summary of the participants with their age range, their profession and their social status.

Table 1

Summary of Participants

Participant	Age	Profession	Social Status
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Ernest “Chest” Rockwell	55 - 65	Venture Capitalist	Top 1%
Brock Love	50 - 60	Entrepreneur - Ripcord	Top 1%
Hardbody Harrison	50 - 60	Motivational Speaker	Upper Middle Class
Cornerstone Hamhock	50 - 60	Crisis Public Speaker	Middle Class
Clamor Lovejoy	60 - 70	Entrepreneur-Construction	Upper Middle Class
Dr. Calverous Notation	65 - 75	Retired Professor	Upper Middle Class
Wolfgang Jones	35 - 40	Director of Innovation	Upper Middle Class
Milk Butterworth	55 - 65	Entrepreneur - Xact Sensing	Upper Middle Class

Data Collection Process

To collect the data for this research project, I used a combination of interviews (phone & face-to-face) to obtain rich data that was detailed, focused and full (Charmaz, 2006). In accordance with action research (Herr & Anderson, 2015), I conducted field observations, collected visual artifacts, used researcher’s reflections and field-notes (Creswell, 2013). I also notified each participant of their interview sessions through phone calls, emails and text messages.

Due to distance and timing issues, I conducted the majority of the interviews through phone calls that supported the interviewees’ time and natural environments. For example, I conducted phone interviews with participants in homes and offices, as well as their transportation devices including cars and limousines. Scholars (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2017) have it that researcher retrieves the best information when the participants are at their most relaxed.

Likewise, since the eight participants in the study work and live different hours, it was suitable to interact with them whenever it was most appropriate.

Interviews

An interview is a conversation where questions are asked, and answers are given by a qualitative researcher for recording and writing down information obtained (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative research, the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants, telephone interviews, or engages in focus group interviews with six to eight interviews in each group (Creswell, 2013). These interviewed assets are either structured or unstructured and comprised of open-ended questions that are few in number and designed to elicit the diverse views and opinions from the participants (Creswell, 2013). Since action research evolves through the methodology process, interviewing is seen as one of its effective tools in conducting the research (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Because of this complex reality, conducting interviews is a vital piece of any action research methodology; it is a chronicle of research decisions; can reflect the thoughts, feelings, and impressions of the participants; and an asset reflecting the increased understanding that comes with the action research process (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Following the recommendation of Creswell (2013), interviewing was the main method used whereby “I (as the researcher) went back and forth between the participants, gathering new interviews, and then returning to the evolving theory to fill the gaps and to elaborate how it works” (p. 85).

The interviews consisted of eight participants all of whom initially financially supported our CreatiCUBE Indiegogo crowdfunding campaign in October 2016 and Children Story Time. I also asked each participant to take part in an in-depth semi-structured interview. While sticking to the interview format, I allowed the respondent to guide the conversation. Although expected

interviews to last no more than one hour, a few went over by several minutes. Below are some major interview questions, which I kept open-ended, and increased according to research demands.

What inspired you to invest your time and energy in CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time?

What are you hoping that CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time accomplish in your community?

What other strategies should the company put in place to attract financial venture investors?

In your opinion, how can minority entrepreneurs connect with effective solutions in funding their entrepreneurial development?

Researchers in the qualitative tradition (Creswell, 2013; Patton 1990; Marshall and Rossman 1999), categorized interviews into three general types: the informal conversation interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview. Because I knew all of the participants well, I used a combination of the informal conversational interview, blended with the general interview guide approach. In other words, the interviews had some guided questions, although overall, I adopted an informal, conversational tone throughout the process.

Interviews lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to 60 minutes, and I tried not to influence the participants' answers. After explaining to the participants', the purpose of my research, I began each interview with the question, "How has participation in the gamification tool the CreatiCUBE game enhanced your motivation to financially support the gaming company through crowdfunding? With permission from participants, I taped and subsequently transcribed

the contents of the interviews. I digitally recorded the interview sessions to emphasize the capturing of the participants' voice intonation and emotional expression in a single setting. The goal was to provide closure to the capital raising process, identify final thoughts and collect any missing data.

Field Notes

In addition to the interviews, I wrote extensive field notes of observations. The observational phenomenon that an action researcher often uses to assemble their specific qualitative observations are referred to as field notes (Herr & Anderson, 2005). I intended the notes to be evidence that produced meaning and aided in the understanding of the phenomenon. In fact, field notes allow researchers to access the subject and record what they observed in an unobtrusive manner (Herr & Anderson, 2005). I wrote those field notes during, and immediately after the field observations to comply with the advice by qualitative inquiry gurus such as Merriam and Tisdell (2017). Along with field notes, I also collected respondents' written personal accounts, such as books or articles authored by them. Additionally, I compiled detailed narratives (Charmaz, 2006) relevant to my study.

I also provided the participants with downloaded materials of our virtual demonstratives (flowcharts, power point presentation and app demo) that described in detail the virtual assets of Children Story Time and its app demo version. Several participants analyzed our PowerPoint presentation and provided me with invaluable feedback for investing solicitation from other investors. The notes I accumulated from the pitch deck were a combination of comments on our photos, visual slides of Children Story Time. The notes reported on the virtual observation the participants' engagement with our product presentation.

Researcher's Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a concept that is paramount in participatory action research (Robertson, 2002), ethnography's, and hermeneutic and post structural approaches (Koch & Harrington, 1998). Reflexivity refers to a process of ongoing critique, assessment, and awareness of how one's experiences influence research at each stage of its development. Furthermore, reflexivity plays an integral part of all research (Fontana, 2004), though its importance is not always recognized (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

This research was a reflexive process in that it focused my views on the study during the process of data collection. In observation of the use of this analysis, which follows the lead of Schon (1983), I intentionally reflected on the experiences and concerns of my participants with regard to the funding possibilities of CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time. I reflected on my values as a researcher and subsequently bracketed some of biases as the founder of the gamification tools that were in the center of the study. Self-reflexivity was critically important because it enabled me to make judgement necessary to achieve the effectiveness of my actions, evaluate my actions, evaluate the outcomes, and modify the concerns and ideas by moving forward.

Data Analysis

Herr and Anderson (2015) states that “as with any good qualitative study, data analysis is not something that begins after the data are gathered; it begins at the start of the study and is key to the action research process” (p. 128). Therefore, I processed the data as they appeared to me and I consulted with the participants whenever necessity had arisen to insure an accurate collection and analysis of their deeds, words, and thoughts. According to Biklen & Bogdan (2011), “mechanically recorded materials are reviewed in their entirety by the researcher with the researcher's insight being the key instrument for analysis” (p. 4). Furthermore, the descriptive

nature of qualitative research had permitted me the properly understood root causes of my chosen study. The data obtained was often in the form of words and pictures rather than numbers as is the case with other forms of research.

In keeping with action research, after I collected the data, I coded and analyzed them to identify the themes that data generated (Charmaz, 2006). First, I proceeded through open coding to code my data for its major categories of information (Creswell, 2013, p. 86). Next, I employed the use of axial coding to pick one open coding category on which I decided to focus. In this structured approach, I (as the investigator) assembled the data in new ways after open coding, including presenting a coding paradigm or logic diagram in which I (as the researcher) identified the “central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 89). Then, I created other categories around this core phenomenon. Finally, I proceeded through selective coding “in which the researcher takes the model and develops propositions (or hypothesis) that interrelated the categories in a model” (Creswell, 2013, p. 87).

As far as systems are concerned, I used NVIVO software. This enabled me to easily create my codes, as well as write memos to go along with my code creation (Bazeley, 2013). In addition, the software had provided for the creation of a storage area for each topic or concept to maintain structure and facilitate identification. This software also offered the drag-and-drop feature, which enabled the importation and proper identification of outside sources (Bazeley, 2013, p. 137).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a very important concept especially when it comes to research. As noted by Biklen and Bogdan (2011), “nothing is more indicting to a professional than to be charged with unethical practices” (p. 48). Two issues dominated traditional guidelines on ethics, namely

informed consent and the protection of informants from harm. As I think about my specific situation of involving players to participate in my crowdfunding campaign by donating their time, labor and monetary dispensation to my cause. My intention was to protect my participants by providing full disclosure and a consent form which was made available to all participants and approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB) of the University of St. Thomas. Next, I used pseudonyms rather than real names of participants to ensure their privacy.

Some of the risks involved with the participants in this study were: the interviewee's thoughts may not be properly captured, and they may share some very personal stories. To mitigate this, I provided a copy of the transcript that was made available to them for review before proceeding with the research. As mentioned earlier, I used pseudonyms for the participants as well as their teams to maintain confidentiality. I safely stored all data obtained on my password protected master computer, which only I was able to access.

As with any action research endeavor, my role as an outside/inside researcher was subjected to personal bias due to my status as the initiator and owner of the project I studied. To mitigate similar biases in action research, Herr and Anderson (2015) advises to "articulate to the best of our ability these biases a build a critical reflexivity in the research process" (p. 73). I intentionally used reflexivity throughout the research. Additionally, I behaved and looked for groups of people who challenged my thinking, shared alternative points of view, pitted out inconsistencies in my thinking, and analyzed problematic assumptions that I took for granted (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Limitations

This study had several limitations, which could diminish the validity of the findings. First participants in the study had different business experiences and did not have any specific

expertise in raising start-up capital for entrepreneurs. Their responses to questions regarding the potential funding sources for CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time could be limited.

Given that, this study was participatory action research (Herr & Anderson, 2015), my close involvement with the two gamification tools and the seasoned entrepreneurs might have created biases in the interview questions I asked. However, my use of extensive reflexivity upon each data collection session should have mitigated any negative effects on the findings of this study.

Although the limited number of participants is recommended for in-depth data collection in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013), a larger sample population might have produced various results. This study could have used more representation from minority groups who would be interested in investing with either CreatiCUBE or Children Story Time. This limitation does not dilute the findings drawn from the sample, which I purposely selected for this study.

Chapter 4: Quest for Gamification Start-Up Investment

The purpose of this study was to investigate how two gamification (Bogost, 2011) tools, CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time, might increase participant engagement in investing in the gamification company that created the two ludic tools. Specifically, the research concerned a search for a seed fund to foster the entrepreneurial business that created the two-gamification tools that most participants in this study had enjoyed. This chapter presents the company's launching events leading to potential seed investment in both CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time. Figure 4.1 below shows the CreatiCUBE prototype and Figure 4.2 shows Children Story Time icons from the application's web page. The following sections lay out the fund-seeking events in their chronological order, each followed by researcher's reflexivity (Anderson & Herr, 2015).



Figure 4.1 This is a photograph of a CreatiCUBE prototype.



Figure 4.2. Representation of Children Story Time web interface

CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time Pre-launch Party

This journey of finding innovative solutions in funding my gamification ideas began with the launch of my toy company and gaming company (CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time). Both CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time began with a pre-launch party on Monday, May 23, 2016. The purpose of this launch party was to give exposure to the community in hope of securing the necessary start-up capital needed for prototype launch. Another purpose was to stir up the people in the Midwest who are known to be frugal when it comes to investing in new start-ups. In addition, we wanted to create some market tractions with both companies. The location of the event was the Anderson Student Center at the University of St. Thomas (in

partnership with the Colleges of Educations and Entrepreneurship). The partnership with the University of St. Thomas impressive results in securing the location and potential local investors. Since I began this journey, I have been working hard to establish a platform to support funding for both startup initiatives. I invited my entire close circle of friends, families and community members, who has shown past support for my initiatives. The room was packed with tons of spectators and over 200 guests enjoyed the food, the network, and the entertainment to the music that my Rabbi and his band The Sons performed as they played eclectic mix of original rock songs. To top off the event, I made a PowerPoint presentation and introduced visual representations of both companies.

At the end of the presentation, all participants expressed immediate interest in our CreatiCUBE toy and requested that I set up some testing procedures for the product at one of their open locations. My aunt who is also a Director at New Horizons Corporation introduced me to her bosses at the corporation with the hopes that they could invest in CreatiCUBE. As opposed to the feelings about CreatiCUBE, all participants agreed that Children Story Time needed further refinement before some potential investors could give it some attention. Because of the feedback, we received from the event, company team decided to focus our resources on completing the CreatiCUBE prototype. I had to spend approximately \$10,000 to complete all assets for CreatiCUBE, while utilizing less time in completing the Children Story Time assets.

Reflecting on this first attempt to raise the seed fund for the two gamification tools, I knew as historical practices that people in the Midwest had been known to invest in two types of start-ups (i.e., medical devices and manufacturing). Despite this fact, I believed that since Minnesota has one of the worst achievement gap in the United States, investors would pay interest in an instructional innovative tool like CreatiCUBE. In fact, this innovative toy play

structure could address the various learning deficiencies that begins before a child attends a daycare institution.

Even though they warned me of the investing limitation in the Twin Cities communities. I figured that our original ideas would entice the most ardent financial supporters within the region. More specifically, I decided to focus our initial product launch on CreatiCUBE, but I urged my independent contractors to keep working on the assets for Children Story Time, including its business model as our plan B.

I took this precaution if the capital I sought to raise for CreatiCUBE would not go as well as I hoped.

CreatiCUBE Test Site and Indiegogo Campaign

CreatiCUBE Test Site. The test site for the CreatiCUBE's prototype was at New Horizon, and the event occurred on Tuesday, July 23, 2016. It had been two months since we had our pre-launched party. The company had needed two additional months to complete the CreatiCUBE prototype. After the completion of the design, I contacted the corporate office of New Horizons to set up our testing site for CreatiCUBE. Lavender Lushbottom (i.e., New Horizon's Vice-President of Legal Affairs) scheduled our testing date for Tuesday, July 23, 2016 and time from 9:00am - 12:00pm. When I arrived at 8:15am my aunt, the manager of the Eden Prairie location, Hiccup Higgins, and the Executive Director of the Eden Prairie location greeted me. Hiccup led me to an open space in the toddler room where we could set up our CreatiCUBE prototype.

As I started to unload the materials, my videographer (i.e., Creamcorn Jenkins) arrived with his camera equipment. My aunt and I immediately set up the CreatiCUBE, while Creamcorn set up the camera equipment for recording the outcomes. Once everything was ready,

Hiccup brought in several rounds of children (i.e., 5 at a time) to “play” with the CreatiCUBE. We recorded the various interactions of the children. Many of the children immediately gravitated towards the CreatiCUBE, while a very few displayed physical fear in engaging with the toy. However, with a little assistance from Hiccup, those who were afraid were able to gradually blend with the rest of the children. Round after round (totaling over 3 rounds), Hiccup kept bringing in more children (totaling over 15 children) until our time elapsed. Creamcorn recorded all the interactions of the children with our CreatiCUBE. When we finished, Creamcorn and I spent a few months editing the final material in preparation for a CreatiCUBE crowdfunding campaign. In addition, three teachers who accompanied the children also loved the product, and Hiccup said that she would be willing to purchase a CreatiCUBE once it would go to market. With this new information, my aunt who was very satisfied with the results contacted her superiors Lavender Lushbottom, Seymour Butts, and Chartcraft Collingsworth to set up a sales pitch for the CreatiCUBE. This allowed us to schedule our CreatiCUBE Indiegogo campaign launch for Sunday, October 16, 2016.

CreatiCUBE Indiegogo. The CreatiCUBE Indiegogo crowdfunding campaign was launched on Sunday, October 16 at 3:00pm. Aesthetically the party was prepared with the same resources and format as our previous pre-launch party but with more branding assets, completed prototypes, and crowdfunding video. Both the UST’s College of Education and College of Entrepreneurship sponsored the event amenities again by providing us with access to food, beverages and support service for the program. The CreatiCUBE Indiegogo campaign lasted a total number of 60 days. We were only able to raise \$1500 total in the crowdfunding campaign, which was 1% of our original campaign request of \$150,000.

The disappointing aspect of this event was the small number of people who came to support our efforts. Even though we invited 3 times as many people as last time, only a sixth participant (42 total) came to the program. For almost three months, we advertised heavily, sent out numerous event invitations, blogged about company events and provided tons of data for various social media sites. As shown in Figure 4.3. below, I even advertised the party in different UST public relation vehicles, including student paper, radio station, blog and leaflets.



Figure 4.3. Pictorial representation of a CreatiCUBE Indiegogo campaign flyer advertisement.

Despite our work and notifications, we were far less successful in recruiting larger crowds of people. My plan was to secure an abundant amount of people who would be willing to share this idea with their community, but I saw very little support and commitment from venture interests. During this time, I began to realize that there may very limited resources available for start-up capital for CreatiCUBE in the Twin Cities. I did receive support from the UST

community, including my professors, and two advisory board members. Some doctorates candidates who readied themselves for their dissertation defense attended. Feedback from my presentation and the whole event surrounding CreatiCUBE led to the turning point that another attempt to launch CreatiCUBE should be abandoned in favor of Children Story Time.

Reflecting on the fiasco of the Indiegogo campaign for CreatiCUBE, I pondered several reasons that led to the decision to hold the event of that specific day. First, the last event I launched was on a Monday night and some of the feedback I received identified Monday as the best time to launch a crowdfunding campaign. Previous feedback also suggested that people want to be notified ahead of schedule, in order to time accordingly. Second, I believed we had more time to advertise our CreatiCUBE brand to a larger public as to capitalize off the success of the previous event that brought in 200 people. I thought that we could invite more people and they in turn was going to invite their community as well. Third, the Minnesota Vikings had a bye week in football, so I figured that most people did not have Sunday plans and would be willing to try something new. However, little did I remember that the first launch event yielded a decent crowd mainly because I focused my advertisement on my friends and family connections.

Presenting CreatiCUBE Prototype

The CreatiCUBE presentation to New Horizons happened on Tuesday, November 22, 2016 at 10:00am. My aunt had arranged the meeting for us after our testing at New Horizon's Eden Prairie location. I arrived at 9:28 am to ensure that I had enough time to set up the CreatiCUBE prototype, test the presentation material and take care of any last-minute issues that would have arisen before the actual meeting. The meeting started with some delay at 10:11 am (because it took time to gather all the corporate executives from their offices and meetings). When they arrived, I noticed that each of the corporate executives was dressed in casual clothing,

while I was the only one dressed formally (in a light brown suit). To make things a little more comfortable, I removed my jacket, rolled up my sleeves and started the presentation in a casual and clear tone method. Four people attended the event (including myself).

As I presented each slide with information about the CreatiCUBE, I noticed the audience became more engaged by asking dichotomous questions about the CreatiCUBE. Seymour asked, “Can this product modularity take form of any environment?” In my response I describe how the product is designed to replicate any real-life environment such as an Airplane (Figure 4.4), a Boat (Figure 4.5) a Hospital (Figure 4.6), a Fire Station (Figure 4.7), a Lemonade Stand (Figure 4.8) a Police Station (Figure 4.9) and a Post Office (Figure 4.10).



Figure 4.4. CreatiCUBE Airplane prototype



Figure 4.5 CreatiCUBE Boat prototype



Figure 4.6 CreatiCUBE Hospital prototype



Figure 4.7 CreatiCUBE Fire station
prototype



Figure 4.8 CreatiCUBE Lemonade Stand
prototype



Figure 4.9 CreatiCUBE Police Station
prototype



Figure 4.10 CreatiCUBE Post Office prototype

Seymour then addressed the challenges to get the word out and analyzed the marketing capabilities of the product. His next question was “how do you plan to market the product? To which I responded, “Through word of mouth; also, preorder sales should enhance our marketability enough to secure potential investors.” Chartcraft asked questions in relations to the educational components of the toy. Chartcraft also asked whether teachers could use the CreatiCUBE toy to teach educational lessons. My response was positive, and I further described to the participants how each CUBE theme comes with a story creation material, that is designed to provide teachers with different elements and materials from our theme environments they can

use to create story worlds with their children. Children would be able to recreate role-playing elements with the different CUBE's for the educators and parents. I also informed them about our story curriculums and how their designs allow for the child to experience enhanced literacy development and critical thinking skills as the child participates in our environment and story creation.

Another participant, Lushbottom (i.e., New Horizon's Vice-President of Legal Affairs) asked about the legal ramifications of bringing a toy like this to the marketplace. Lushbottom articulated these sets of questions, "do you have Intellectual Property application for this product?... Does this product violate any existing intellectual property applications? ... Does this product follow government guidelines for children's toys?" My responses to these questions was a simple "yes". I further explained how I used the resources that was available to me, including Legal Corps and United States Patent and Trademark Organization, which are two organizations that is designed to provide resources in legal protection in trademarks, business, intellectual property and patent applications in filing the proper paperwork for both CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time.

After 45 minutes of presenting and answering questions about the CreatiCUBE, Seymour Butts asked how they could help to push the product further in the marketplace. My simple response was that they could contribute to the Indiegogo crowdfunding campaign we were conducting to raise awareness and an initial start-up fund of \$150,000. I added that we would be very pleased if New Horizons would participate in the crowdfunding campaign and/or become our first customer." Although Seymour seemed impressed with the presentation and the interactive exchanges, he cautioned against his support for the CreatiCUBE in its early stage. In fact, he recommended that we make a deal with an independent toy store called Lakeshore by

selling all the rights and ideas of CreatiCUBE in order to get started in business. I asked how much I could make from the sale of this product to Lakeshore and, Seymour responded “around \$150,000 total”. This number shocked me, so I politely declined his suggestion and asked if there was another viable solution in securing investment or winning a contract with his firm. He responded that he was very interested in CreatiCUBE, but only when the company would be well established. I immediately thanked the executives for their time.

Quest for Individual Investors

Sensing that we were expiring all options, I then decided to start reaching out to several people in my community. One mentor participant suggested that I connect with a few of his resources that could help in generating some type of traction. Milk Butterworth (mentor and pseudo adopted Jewish father) introduced me to Hardbody Harrison and Brock Love, two friends he suggested had a lot of influence in finding effective solutions in obtaining Seed or Series A capital. After a few months of playing email tag with Harrison and Love, I finally connected with both in April 2017. Since Harrison lives in the Twin Cities, we were able to meet face to face. I brought all my virtual demonstratives to our meeting. Harrison was really impressed with Children Story Time and promised to help bring in his resources that could help product commercialize in the market place, if I would concentrate my full attention on developing the product and brand as the focused company. Connecting with Love was quite different.

At first, his only interest was to counsel and provide strategic advice. However, when he heard my pitch about Children Story Time and how the business model differed from any known competitor, he immediately became interested in the product, but only in helping me to craft the necessary materials to secure venture capital investment. Since April 2017, I’ve been working with both Harrison and Love in preparing the foundation for a strong start-up in technology. It

was during this time, I realized that the future of my dissertation and start-up enterprise would be Children Story Time and that CreatiCUBE would have to wait until Children Story Time is a proven company. Around the time in June 2017, I was able to secure a meeting with Mata Hari to discuss her possible involvement with CreatiCUBE. Nevertheless, due to some family tragedy, Mata Hari had to change our meeting until August 2017. Moreover, I continued working with Love in preparing the pitch deck for venture capital investors, and I pursued pitching local and national investors for CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time.

The Dead-end Meeting. By the time I met with Mata Hari, on Monday, August 14, 2017, I had exhausted all possibilities of finding potential investors in the Twin Cities' market for Seed investment in CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time. In nine months, I met with thirty diverse sources for investment capital and financial support, but they all turned me down. In fact, it took three rescheduled meetings to finally connect with Mata Hari.

I first heard about Mata Hari from my academic advisor and mentor, at my CreatiCUBE launch party of Sunday, October 16, 2016. My advisor invited both Mata Hari and Senator Sluglord McHenry to my event, but due to some scheduling misinformation, she had to pass on the commitment. This presentation set up was much different. The meeting with the New Horizons executives was much more opened and friendly, while the presentation with Mata Hari was more direct and face to face with no one else in attendance. I arrived 10 minutes ahead of schedule because I didn't have to set up the prototype. I knew that this was an initial meet-and-greet and that there would be some hope in finding the Seed capital with Mata Hari.

When I arrived, Mata greeted me at the receptionist lounge in a casual, friendly demeanor. After a few pleasant exchanges, Mata led me directly to her office, which was a small room located in the corner of the building. There were hardly any pictures on the desk, nor walls.

In fact, the office seemed vacant with no one occupying the space. Before I could start the presentation, Mata apologized and warned me that she only had very little time to attend to a CreatiCUBE presentation, so I got to work, promising to be brief and requesting a possibility of follow up with her after our meeting. Immediately I took my laptop out and started the presentation.

After 2 minutes of constant interruptions with negative comments and disproportionate engagement, I felt the tension between us mounting uncontrollably, and started sweating profusely out of nervousness. It was then that I noticed Mata yawning multiple times throughout my presentation. It was then that I knew I lost her attention span and that she was not interested in the CreatiCUBE. In fact, I realized too late that she was never interested in funding CreatiCUBE, nor doing business with me. Therefore, I began feeling the pain in my stomach as I realized that I misread the entire meeting. I never felt so humiliated and ashamed. Therefore, I tried desperately to switch gears by asking her pointed questions about her involvement or potential participation in the CreatiCUBE development process. She immediately responded that she was not interested, nor would any of her friends be interested. When pressed to respond “why”, her response was simple: neither she nor her friends know anything about toys, manufacturing or the children’s industry.

Furthermore, she advanced that if I wanted to go for success, I must find people who come from these industries toy and toy manufacturing industries. Finally, I came to the evidence that CreatiCUBE would have no financial support for Seed or Series A capital and if I would have a shot at success, then I must switch my focus to Children Story Time. Therefore, I thanked Mata Hari for her time and decided to only concentrate on getting the necessary requirements for

Children Story Time as my singular focus in soliciting Seed or Series A funding from venture capital investors.

Conclusion

There were several reasons why I believed we failed to gain the traction needed in securing venture capital for CreatiCUBE. First, CreatiCUBE did not have a complete prototype. Many of the participants initially supported CreatiCUBE, but they could not physically enjoy the product in its entirety. Second, there was the Midwest investors' mindset. Several participants told me that the main reason why they could not support CreatiCUBE is that investors in Minnesota has a closed mindset when it comes to investing in innovation. Third, CreatiCUBE was not a market disruptor. Even though many of the participants supported the capitalization of CreatiCUBE, all agreed that Children Story Time has more ability to be a market disruptor, while CreatiCUBE would always play secondary to Children Story Time. The next chapter provides the views of the participants in this study as to why their interaction with the gamification tools I created did not entice them to invest their money in my toy company.

Chapter 5: Toward Effective Funding Strategies

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, it examined how users' participation in my recently designed gamification tool (CreatiCUBE) increased their engagement in the game. Most importantly, the study examined how the users and supporters of CreatiCUBE translated their participation into funding the project through Crowdfunding operations. Preliminary analysis of data revealed that there was no interest in funding CreatiCUBE. In the findings, participants showed increased interest in considering investing in my other gamification design called *Children Story Time* instead. Fortunately, qualitative research allows a researcher to expand the purpose of their study to include relevant phenomena such as my latter gamification tool *Children Story Time* (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2016; Herr & Anderson, 2015). Analysis of data collected for this study yielded four themes: No particular interest in funding gamification; funding as a byproduct of market demand; strategies to secure venture capital investments; *Children Story Time* as a market disrupting tool. I will present each theme in the following chapters.

No Particular Interest in Funding

None of the participants expressed interest in funding either CreatiCUBE or *Children Story Time* in their start-up phase. Participants' views coalesced around three main reasons to explain the failure of the CreatiCUBE Indiegogo campaign I organized to secure its initial crowdfunding target-financing goal of \$150,000. First were the product scalability issues, second the limited expertise in the manufacturing process, and third the creation and execution of a successful Kickstarter crowding funding campaign. Researchers' defined scalability as a characteristic of a system, model or function that describes its capability to cope and perform under an increased or expanding workload (Roth, Turnbow, Goldman, & Friedman, 2016).

Businesses that scale are businesses with operating advantage. Usually in product development, it is important that the business has the capacity to maneuver their choices at any time during the development phase. In startups, scalability is essential to grow the business and leverage assets for the firms continued growth operations.

For most of the participants in the CreatiCUBE's Indiegogo campaign party, there was excitement from all participants, but it was "how do I get this thing home with me". All participants agreed that it wasn't so much the lack of creativity, rather more likely their apprehension of this product being in the wrong space. Specifically, Hamhock stated, "the physical size had a lot to do with it" and "I like Children Story Time because it is scalable faster, it can get in the hands of more people." Wolfgang' comment echoed the views of other participants: "It's a lot harder to bring a physical product to the marketplace than a digital product."

Besides scalability issues, participants indicated that CreatiCUBE had minimal resources available to secure the investment from local or angel investors. Butterworth expressed his frustration about the limited availability of natural resources in the Twin Cities toy industry: "I think that the CreatiCUBE idea is one that requires some expertise in the manufacturing process and some interest in that, and unfortunately there's no businesses that focuses on folding toys anymore in the Minneapolis area... There are mold makers in Minneapolis, but not really the tools; so, you would have to go someplace else to work with a *Fischer Price* or some company like that to pull that off."

In addition, CreatiCUBE failed to generate the necessary market traction in pre-launch status needed to secure interests for our crowdfunding campaign and for a successful crowdfunding launch. Love stated, "I think one of the problems that you had with CreatiCUBE is

that you had no build up or traction with the pre-launch campaign. So, if you got people covering it in the news. If you could pre-pump the news, then you can build more following and supporters.”

Last, why CreatiCUBE failed to generate the initial Seed investment is because of the expense of tooling required to complete the toy prototype and the limited manufacturing resources available in the marketplace. The capital and resources needed to secure the costs of the CreatiCUBE minimum viable product are astronomical compared to the costs needed to secure for the Children Story Time minimum viable product. The CreatiCUBE needs more than a prototype. It needs manufacturing connections, heavy advertisement costs and a large budget set for the distribution and marketing campaign.

Butterworth exposes the need to secure valuable partnerships with established firms. He argues, “You would have to go someplace else to work with a *Fischer Price* or some company like that to pull that off.” Butterworth further explains the importance of establishing various channels of resources to produce CreatiCUBE for the marketplace. Specifically, Butterworth argues: “Even if you develop those channels, a product like CreatiCUBE would require additional channels of marketing, logistics, finance, just too many to be scalable for a start-up business. Again, I think that the best idea is to sell it someone like *Little tykes* who specializes in creating large manufactured products.”

Wolfgang criticizes the negative aspects of creating a physical product: “where as a physical product, you’ve got to create that, and you have all of the other physical supply chain and business operational things that come into play that you don’t have to deal with when you are launching a software product.”

As a summary, Hamhock explained why there was no interest in funding CreatiCUBE. For him, the limited exposure of CreatiCUBE in social media and collaborating its involvement with the wrong institution, i.e., University of St. Thomas, played a huge part in its failure to secure initial Seed funding for CreatiCUBE. He specified, if you would have placed the product on a street scale (i.e., partnered with a daycare operation or community center) and had the launch party there, then it would have made for a much better story. At the community center or daycare, we would have shown kids playing with it, then this would have equated to better success.

Although participants had suggested there would be more interest in funding Children Story Time rather than CreatiCUBE, their initial impulse did not materialize. Findings revealed there was no interest in financially supporting Children Story Time. Participants indicated that three factors limited their interest in supplying initial funding for Seed or Series A capital. First, the company did not have a working minimum viable product application for the marketplace. Investors want to see some market penetration and traction. Having a workable app that people are downloading would allow for data collection and product usability. Things that would spark the interest from venture capital investment. For example, one participant stated that Children Story Time is still in its earliest stage of production (i.e., ideation) and that it would be hard to generate venture capital interest. Rockwell emphasized, “If you want to secure venture capital investment from other venture capital investors, or from my company, *Kleenex*, *Pillbox*, *Cauliflower & Bitcoin*, your project’s cash flow projections need to show positive market penetration.”

After further probing questions about whether he would consider funding Children Story Time at its current stage, Rockwell responded “No, not at this stage. This feels more like

missionary work as opposed to for-profit work; *Kleenex* tends not to invest unless they see a path to \$100 million in revenue and this is probably too early.” Love specifies the important of generating proof of value in soliciting vital interests from venture capital investors. Love argues, “Until there is proof that somebody says, I want to buy that commodity or the thing that you made. It’s really hard to get people who are actual investors that add value, to sum onto and write a check.” Specifically Love expressed the desire of all venture capital investors when he argued, “Sometimes entrepreneurs should see venture capital investment as an afterthought and just concentrate on getting the product to the marketplace and securing the initial customer base.”

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Other participants also described the importance of securing the initial seed funding for Children Story Time, including money from a secondary investment market. Butterworth further stated that he did he did not think that Children Story Time could find financial resources in Minneapolis region, and “he felt he had to connect me with people in the San Francisco Bay and Silicon Valley area”, where many entrepreneurs who really understand how to put gamification tools together. Rockwell argued that the second criteria for venture investing is to secure 10,000+ app users daily. He suggested that once we complete the Children Story Time minimum viable product then we should concentrate on market launch and secure the 10,000+ app users to

generate the market interest. Rockwell argued, “If you have an app with 10,000 users, then that’s a different story than just having a great idea.”

Third, the company did not launch a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign, nor did it succeed in its funding goals. In addition, the participants also articulated other reasons not to fund CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time. Some participants signaled limited ability to generate the necessary funding for company operations. For example, Harrison argued that investors often look for established teams that can get the job done. He spoke of several potential investors who at one point expressed interest in funding Children Story Time but backed away because they felt that the organization was still in its infancy. Likewise, venture capital investors and participants in the study agreed that the two products were too early in the process to solicit venture capital resources for funding. Love stressed the importance of pitching many different venture capital companies for Seed or Series A funding. Love argued, “It’s a numbers game. That is why the Kickstarter campaign is vital to securing venture capital investment. They want to see you pitch other organizations and when one finally bites, then that’s when all will try to come aboard.” None was interested in taking a chance on an unproven start-up, even though the majority agreed that Children Story Time was the best chance in generating Seed capital investment.

Funding as a Byproduct of Market Demand

At first, most participants in this study, except for one, expressed optimism about Children Story Time’s chances of drawing dollar investment. They said there was a connection between market demand and product viability, and that the software designs embedded real gaming solutions. Participants were adamant about Children Story Time’s chances because they believed it has the potential to captivate the attention of the users (both the parent and children)

by increasing their vocabulary, improving their imagination, and critical thinking skills. Most participants believed that parents would gain literacy enhancement techniques through creating dichotomous storytelling experiences for contrasting audiences. Various respondents made statements to support the efforts of Children Story Time's market appeal capabilities. Wolfgang posited, "I would try to figure out how to deliver all three incentivized systems." Rockwell highlighted, "There are three items Children Story Time needs to master: productivity, recognition, and personal mastery." Harrison gave the response: "so you got three things that are trends going for you, early child development, parent/child interactive tool, and enhancing essential skills for a child's development."

Rockwell continues by making the following point, there are studies that says about 25% of people are highly motivated using gamification in their products," badges." He agreed that creating a software that has gamification solutions cannot only teach relevant material, but it can enhance the experience of the user and increase their motivation in accumulating knowledge. During the interview, Rockwell also commented saying: "You could figure out you know that the use of gamification in software can be very.... it's motivational, you are going to find that for some people it is highly motivational and for other people not so much!"

On the other hand, Hamhock articulated, "If we had a product of this magnitude then for sure it will entice the *Oprah Winfrey* people to come aboard and invest in Children Story Time." He argued that Children Story Time in its current state is not ready to approach *Oprah's* people. However, once we implement these new designs in the product, then this would lead them to change their views and invest in the product.

As opposed to the above hopeful views, some participants expressed ambivalence to the overall possibility for Children Story Time to achieve success. Dr. Notation, for example, stated:

“Frankly, I don’t think you want to hear this, but I don’t think that it has a high chance of success.” His insider’s experience with the tool was mainly behind his statement that summarized Children Story Time lacks the talents, including writers, designers, and programmers, and the monetary connections to move the project forward. He argued, “When you add to the fact that your whole team is really inexperienced at this then I think you add to the factors of failure.”

Children Story Time as a Market Disrupting Tool

All Participants made statements that spoke to their general feelings about Children Story Time as an impactful tool that could better society. They all delighted at the idea of creating a digital story telling app like Children Story Time. For example, Butterworth indicated, “I like Children Story Time because it is scalable faster, it can get in the hands of more people and it can disrupt and transform how people can look at literature.” Harrison enthusiastically reported that Children Story Time is a technologically adapting tool that many companies could use to further their product’s revenue stream. Dr. Notation articulated, “One of the things that is going for you is that Children Story Time is such a dynamic product that it would be easy for other technology companies to work with your platform and translate its services through many diverse media channels.” Butterworth expressed his ideas by saying: “But to fully answer your question, I believe that Children Story Time has the ability to not only be transformational, but to also have a strong positive impact with parents, children and families, so that is why I support it.”

Hamhock talked about the importance of creating culturally relevant stories through generations. Hamhock posited, “but more important, parents/children, grandparents or anyone can use this service and create culturally relevant stories which is more powerful and can help

society transform. This could be really, really big!” Ninety percent of participants talked about the importance of involving parents in the process of teaching children literacy. Dr. Notation argued, “The second thing is that your interests involve the parent and while there are a lot of children’s media that involves children’s media, there aren’t that many that focuses on the parents as being part of the whole process.... Especially the point of view of enhancing children’s literacy through parent interaction is really good and hold real promise.” Lovejoy argues about the merits of Children Story Time and how it would serve to improve society and well-being. Lovejoy enamored, “you are creating something new that is not only good for society, but it good for literature.” Specifically, Harrison argued, “I just thought that uh, this is something that can be in high demand or that should be in high demand and it fills a need that nobody else is currently doing.”

There was a litany of responses as to why participants were inclined to promote Children Story Time as a social impact device. All participants suggested that Children Story Time promotes strong interactions amongst people. Dr. Notation expressed the importance of system and how it has the power to alter people’s existence. Dr. Notation articulated, “so what I view what you are doing is not only creating a product, but you are changing the way people interact in their lives with positive changes through story creation.” More specifically Rockwell responded, “You are creating something new that is not only good for society, but it good for literature.” Love agrees with Dr. Notation and offers this commentary “so I think Children Story Time resonates more is because it is something that you can touch or that it touches a parent or grandparent.” Last Butterworth summarized his points:

“Also, I just wanted to say that I support Children Story Time, because it addresses a need that’s missed in the marketplace. There are tons of products that are

commercialized, but they provide consumers with little additional benefits. With Children Story Time, parents are gets a great product that is both entertaining and educational. This idea has the ability to transform society by enhancing the parent/child relationships through technology.”

Start-ups who establish parameters and milestones for Seed capital funding often find successful transitions in developing key relationships in securing the necessary funding cycles. In the next section, I present the recommendations and strategies participants in this study formulated to attract investment dollars to both CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time.

Strategies for Securing Venture Capital Investment

Most of the participants suggested that various strategies be deployed to securing venture capital investment. In this section, I will present the analysis of most recurrent recommendations participants acknowledge in securing venture capital investment. Love suggested that to attract venture capital investors, participants in this study proposed the use of three strategies consisting of visual elements such as flowcharts, freemium systems and crowdfunding or a Kickstarter campaign. A flowchart represents the operation of workflows or processes, with arrows demonstrating their order.

The freemium system is a pricing strategy by which a product or service (i.e., typically a digital offering or application such as software, media, games or web services) is provided free of charge, but money (premium) is charged for additional features, services, or virtual goods.

As for the Kickstarter, Rockwell was adamant about the effectiveness of Kickstarter for securing investment funds. Rockwell emphasized the importance of creating a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign in soliciting interests from venture capital investors. He posited the importance because the campaign would provide the venture capital investors with visual

demonstratives that provides the numerical data needed to understand the vitality of the business. Rockwell argued: “My suggestion is to try something on Kickstarter. The Kickstarter campaign is going to look like the pitch deck. It’s going to have video, numbers, data, statistics and the crowd to prove that the product is wanted in the marketplace.” Figure 5.1 represents graphically the themes that emerged from this action research study.

Furthermore, it is important to generate the traction from news resources and other outlets needed to propel the product further in the marketplace. Love expressed, “Let them know its coming. Umm, people are hungry for more news stories around March or April. I would absolutely start preparing them for late February or early March.” He reiterated the importance of timing the Kickstarter campaign to when we need money to continue developing the organization. Specifically Love argues, “The trick with Kickstarter is like the trick in selling your house in a hot market. You try to list it a little bit under the market and hope it goes over your initial ask. Because with Kickstarter, you don’t get any of the funds, unless you hit your target. Kickstarter campaigns are more likely to get venture funding investment, instead of Indiegogo campaigns. Specifically, the reason why venture capital investors desires Kickstarter campaigns over Indiegogo campaigns is market provability and reputation.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the four major themes that emerged from the data I collected and analyzed for this study. The four overall themes comprised a response to the research question of how those who participated in the gamification tools of CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time could invest financially in them. Participants responded that 1) they had no interest in funding the games; 2) any funding of the two-gamification tools would be a byproduct of market demand; 3) the gamification tool, Children Story Time, would positively disrupt the market if

completely launched; and 4) there are concrete strategies for securing venture capital investment.

In the next chapter, the findings are analyzed from the perspective of three analytical theories:

Bourdieu's cultural capital, Csikszentmikalyi's flow theory, and transactional leadership theory.

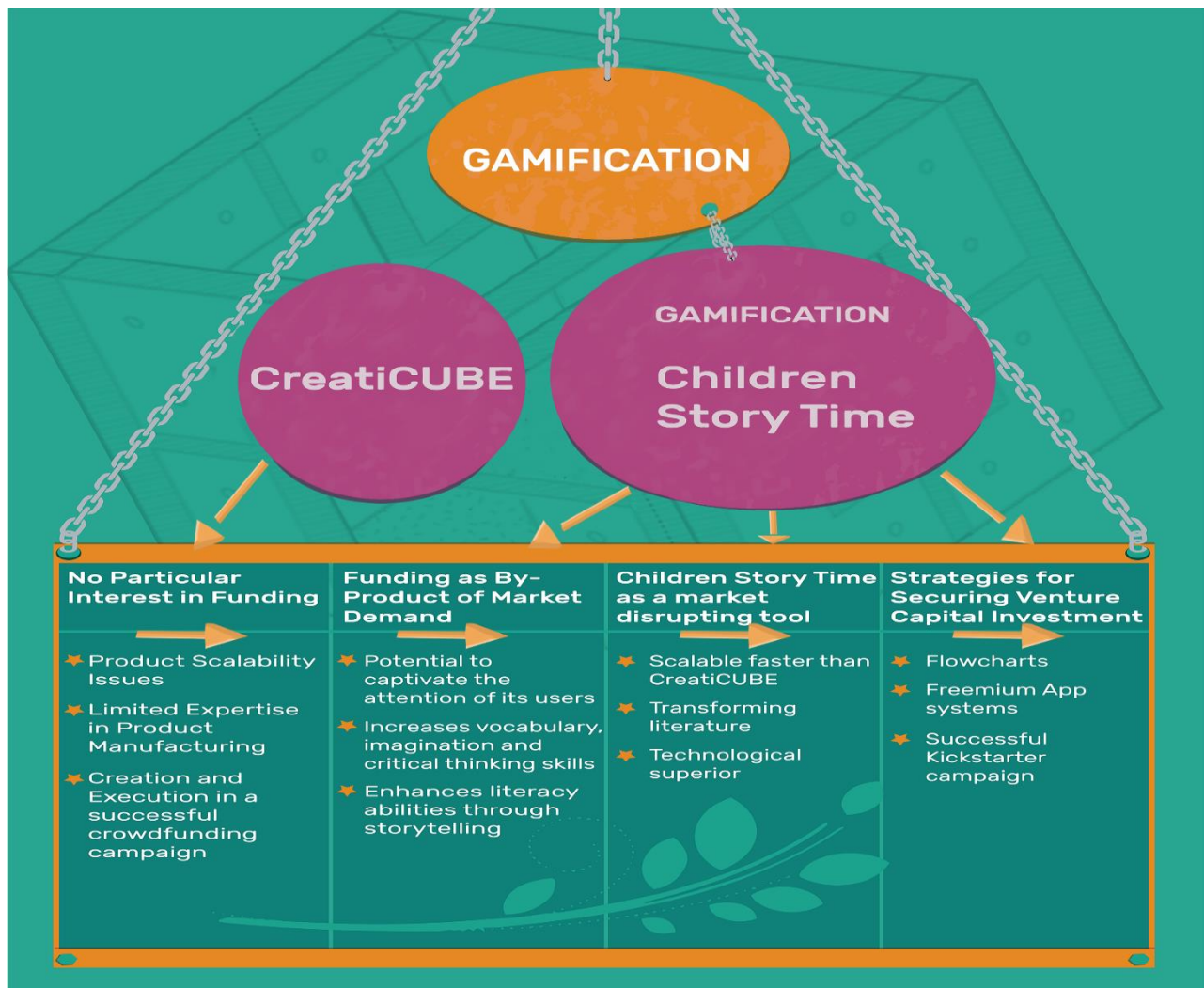


Figure 5.1. Process of funding strategies for gamification start-ups

Chapter 6: Theoretical Analysis

Throughout this chapter, the theoretical lenses of Bourdieu's cultural capital, Csikszentmihalyi flow, and transactional leadership theories are explored. This chapter also represents my interpretation of the relationship between gamification and crowdfunding on the one hand, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1989, 1994, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d) and transactional leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1999) on the other hand. In this analysis, I examine how the theoretical lenses relate to the themes that emerged from this investigation, including: 1) no particular interest in funding the gamification tools CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time, 2) funding as a byproduct of market demand, 3) Children Story time as a market disrupting tool, 4) and strategies to secure venture capital investments. Throughout this chapter, I use the following lenses to theoretically analyze the major findings of this study: Bourdieu's cultural capital, Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory, and transactional leadership.

The Cultural Capital of Minnesota

This study set out to examine how I as an entrepreneur could use gamification tools to entice venture capital investment particularly in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. Participants in this study brought up various rationales to explain their reluctance to invest in a start-up business such as CreatiCUBE or Children Story Time. However, a rationale that stood up the most was the culture of the Midwest that is not prone to risking investing in a potentially failing business venture. The first theme of this study encapsulates (no interest in investing), among other aspects, the reality that the culture Midwest Minnesota did not show much interest in investing in the gamification enterprise. Butterworth alluded to that culture when he expressed his frustration in these terms: "So I didn't think that you could find these resources back in Minneapolis, so I

felt that I had to connect you with people in the Bay area.” Most participants in this study echoed the view The Great Minnesota is not much into the game business. Participant Mata Hari confirmed that she was not interested in investing in games nor would any of her friends because it was not just part of the culture.

Bourdieu’s (1984) analysis of class rests on the concept of cultural capital, that is, a set of cultural attitudes and tastes that are acquired through upbringing in a milieu or environment. Cultural capital is linked to social class. While there can significant overlap in social class and wealth, cultural capital is not income or financial assets, Grenfell and Justin (1998) posit, “Cultural capital ensures the reproduction of class interests; education is a key site for ensuring and reproducing middle-class privilege” (p. 817). While other researchers supports that cultural capital is the foundational practices of communities and institutions that personalizes the development of individuals who represent those community institutions (Reay et. al., 2005).

For Bourdieu the concept of habitus refers to the actions and dispositions of agents, or ways of behaving and acting which are embodied and learned from social and cultural milieus (Bourdieu, 1980). Habitus is not a scripted set of rules but a set of acquired competencies that are manifested both bodily and socially and correspond to how individuals place themselves in relation to others. The power of habitus comes from its implicit normalization of hierarchical systems of privilege. Reay et al. (2005) use the notion of institutional habitus to consider the broad range of practices, histories and expectations that an institution holds, and which link the institution to other aspects of the larger society. Venture capitalists flourish where there is an institutional habitus that corresponds with the habitus of their own milieu and society.

Discussion of Bourdieu’s Cultural Capital. The Midwest investing community rarely invested in new start-up enterprises. They were primarily influenced by their habitus (Bourdieu,

1984) of internalized xenophobic values. Family members, mentors, and their religious communities in part influenced their perspectives. The habitus of the Midwest is an integral part of people's cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), which includes their upbringing, their education, and their less than homogeneous ethnic and racial compositions. All participants mentioned family as primary influencers shaping their values. The assets built during their formative years, including for some the discipline of faith, shaped their moral decision making as leaders.

For example, Hamhock commented about the discipline of his parents' faith, the foundational communal assets they built in their children, and the high expectations they held for the community: "part of our family was we had values and morals, my parents had high expectations.....Their example just became a way of practice when I got into my political and public relations career." Lovejoy similarly shared the story of his mother's adoration of Christ and the Catholic faith and how today, especially during times of challenge he said, "tapping into my faith has allowed me to face the challenging times and knowing that I can overcome these difficult challenges by relying on my faith in G_D, family and community.....Having a foundation in religion has been really important to my growth as an entrepreneur."

Participants were mindful of their values and the importance of adhering to them or as more than one shared their philosophies, in which I sum up as "chance favors the prepared mind". Numerous examples of participants' values in action were evidenced not only in the workplace but integrated into all aspects of their lives. The discipline of ritual practice appeared to influence the mindful way in which they self-regulated their behavior. For many participants, ritual practice was ongoing throughout their lives. One participant, Rockwell reflected on the importance of fulfilling his ritual routine of taking the time to meet his wife at a holiday party on the Friday we spoke and celebrating the weekends with his family, no matter the circumstances,

which reminds him of his responsibilities as a husband, father, businessperson, and educator.

Rockwell understood the importance of having balance in his life. His deep reverence for gaming and entrepreneurship is an open testament of the type of philosophy he institutes in his practice.

Rockwell sits on the boards of eight+ companies and is a highly sought out individual because he can connect you to any big named corporation, but the thing that matters the most to him is having the right balance in his life of family, friends and work.

This example relates in that it was an action that regulated his behavior when he is reminded to take the time and vacation with his family, wife and kids on holidays. Many participants talked about wrestling with decisions that were not black and white and the importance of understanding where they stood in terms of their own moral compass. Love, talked about following the golden rule: “do onto others as you would have them do onto you. I’ve experienced the struggles of being an entrepreneur and I am grateful for the people who believed in me and my ideas.... So, it’s important for me to pass along my knowledge and help others to achieve their dreams in starting a start-up. And if I can find a way to help you, I will, because that’s what we do as entrepreneurs... we find a way to give back”. It is safe to infer that the cultural capital as well as its habitus as discussed by Bourdieu (1984) might explain the resistance of the Midwest culture to invest in such start-ups as CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time.

Flow Theory and Gamification

Findings in this study revealed that all participants believe that Children Story Time is a market-disrupting tool that should have no issues in getting the funding needed in securing Seed capital investment for completing its minimum viable product. During their interactions with either CreatiCUBE or Children Story Time, participants attained a great level of delight as they

immersed themselves in the games. They delighted in the idea of the potential creation of this product innovative tool that could be used to teach literacy skills for early learners. Many agreed that this product is surely needed in the marketplace, and that the messaging must be clear if Children Story Time is to succeed in its crowdfunding campaign. Also impactful was the encouragement from venture capital community who has expressed strong interest in proposing future investment in the company. For example, Hamhock indicated, “I like Children Story Time because it is scalable faster, it can get in the hands of more people and it can disrupt and transform how people can look at literature.” Another participant, Dr. Notation argued, “the second thing is that your interests involves the parents and while there are a lot of children’s media, there aren’t that many that focus on the parents as being part of the whole process.... Especially the point of view of enhancing children’s literacy through parent interaction is really good and hold real promise.”

For this study, I used Csikszentmikalyi’s (1975, 1989) understanding of ‘Flow’ as a holistic sensation characterized by intense focus and involvement that leads to improved performance on a task. Csikszentmikalyi (1975) argues that “the more flow experiences we have, the higher quality of life” (p. 8).

For Csikszentmikalyi the concept of flow requires the following characteristics in order to provide the structural foundation to achieve its mental state of operations:

a) actions, including intense and focused concentration on what one is doing in the present moment;

b) control or the ability to sense when an entrepreneur can deal with the situation because they know how to respond to whatever happens next;

c) attention, also understood as loss of reflective self-consciousness and awareness of one-self as a social actor;

d) curiosity, including distortion of temporal existence;

e) intrinsic interest: one's ability to become fully immersed in an activity that results in focus, full involvement, and enjoyment.

After analyzing numerous stories, articles, books, and strategies on the effectiveness of flow in the workplace, the author asserts that flow is the magic “golden ratio” between boredom and anxiety. When we experience flow, “our body or mind is stretched to its limits” (p. 36). Being “in flow” not only provides a set of challenges or opportunities for action, but it also provides the entrepreneurs with a system of graded challenges, so it can accommodate the entrepreneurs continued and deepening enjoyment as their skills grow (Nakamura & Csikszentmikalyi, 2009).

Discussion of Flow Theory. All participants who engaged with this study have expressed the opinion that Children Story Time is a market disrupting tool because of its attractiveness and its potential to bring increased literacy and storytelling passion to the children and their parents. In his flow theory, Csikszentmikalyi (1975) posited that participants who understand their habitus, which is the foundation of achieving flow, deeply immersed in the activity they in which they are engaged. Likewise, participants in this study agreed that Children Story Time app would captivate the attention of the users and bring about a strong connection between the market demand and product viability. The research supports that the app's capabilities can offer parents a better interactive device between the parents and their children, therefore teaching children strong literacy patterns, thus preparing them for kindergarten readiness. The software designs are embedded with real gamification tools, such as points,

badges, avatars and challenges that are designed to build a child's literacy habitus practice, which should increase their flow state of learning.

Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1988, 2000) defines flow as the necessary substance that leads to individuals achieving a high level of balance. Snyder and Lopez (2009) argues, "When in flow, the individual operates at full capacity" (p. 196). Achieving this state creates effective symmetry for entrepreneurs. "Entering flow depends on establishing a balance between perceived action capabilities and perceived action opportunities" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, p. 90). The balance is fundamentally delicate. Being "in flow" is the way that some participants described the biased experience of engaging in impartial-feasible challenges. They undertook a series of objectives, continuously processed feedback about their progress, and adjusted their actions based on the feedback. Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2009) would argue that under these conditions, experience seamlessly unfolds from moment to moment, and one enters an intuitive state.

All participants who engaged with this study have expressed the opinion that Children Story Time, as a byproduct of market demand should have no issues in securing venture capital investment. Csikszentmihalyi argued his theory of flow, those participants who takes the time to develop and adopting their habitus practice is the core foundation of achieving a flow state. They all were active, attentive and interested in the prospects of creating a digital storytelling app like Children Story Time. For example, Butterworth articulated, "I like Children Story Time because it is scalable faster, it can get in the hands of more people and it can disrupt and transform how people look at literature."

Another participant, Dr. Notation argued, "the second thing is that your interests involves the parent and while there are a lot of children's media that involves children, there are many that

focuses on the parents as being part of the whole process.... Especially the point of view of enhancing children's literacy through parent interaction is really good and hold real promise." He further elaborated on the creation of the Dora story and summarized his thoughts about Children Story Time's market potential, "so what I view what you are doing is not only creating a product, but you are changing the way people interact in their lives with positive changes through story creation." All participants showed intrinsic interest and anticipated the same interest for all future users. The tenets of flow theory as expressed by Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2009) (including action, control, attention and intrinsic curiosity); bring to light the feelings and perceptions of those who participated in this study.

Gamification and Investment Motivation. Participants in this study often question the economic benefit a potential investor would draw from either CreatiCUBE or Children Story Time. Participant Rockwell argues about the merits of including gamification motivations to enhance the user's ludic and financial interest. He articulated, "we find that there are three kinds of motivations: social recognition, personal mastery and financial productivity". Rockwell emphasized the importance of including these elements in the company's app to generate the interest from venture capital investors. He underscored the reality that investors would not commit their money to a company unless they are certain of getting it back with increased interests. One important facet of this relationship between the participants in this study and CreatiCUBE is that the participants possessed a sense of reward-based contingency. On the one hand, most participants committed their energy and free time to helping me in preparing the strategic visual demonstratives needed for investment presentation. On the other hands, those participants willing to invest in the company were also motivated by the monetary reward they

would lose or gain in a start-up company. No one wanted to take the risk to lose his or her investment, and therefore his or her reward.

In their definition of transactional leadership, several scholars (Bass & Avolio, 1999; Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009; Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005; Bass & Riggio, 2006) agree on three tenets of transactional leadership including “contingent reward, active management-by-exception, and passive management-by-exception” (Bass & Avolio, p. 6). Like other types of leaders, transactional leaders “not only inspire those around them, they bring people together around a shared purpose and a common set of values and motivate them to create value for everyone involved” (p. 52). What sets transactional leaders apart from the others is that the relationship between the transactional leaders is based on the metaphor: “One good turn deserves another” (Avolio et al., 2009 p. 256).

Thus, when the employee performs well and completes their assignment on the agreed upon timeline, they would receive their reward. Therefore transactional leaders are expected to establish the goals and objectives and take necessary action to correct any issue that may arise (Toolshero, 2015). So, when the employees fulfill their obligation by meeting the leader’s expectations, they do not only receive the entitled bonus, but the leader would also positively recognize them in front of their peers. However, if their performance is not meeting standards and their tasks remain incomplete, then it is incumbent on the transactional leader to provide the necessary cultural adjustments, such as feedback and suggestions and utilize in increasing their positive performance participation (Toolshero, 2015). The transactional leader ensures that the employees feel supported in their activities and this euphoric feeling of positive stimulus helps to balance their work properly, thus achieving maximum efficiency in the organization.

Discussion of Transactional Leadership

Participants in this study were mainly entrepreneurs and investors, who embodied certain characteristics of transactional leaders given their focus on some form of attractive payoff. Rockwell emphasized the importance of creating a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign in soliciting interests from venture capital investors. Children Story Time would guarantee investors' payback by showing the numerical data needed to understand the vitality of the business, including number of users, time spent on the app, number of people signed up for service, and campaign goals. Love expressed, "let them know its coming. People are hungry for more news stories ...I would absolutely start preparing them early...." These participants expressed the transactional relationships they hoped to see between them and Children Story Time by emphasizing contingent reward and excellence in management (Northouse, 2016). Another participant, Mata Hari expressed no desires in investing or being a part of the development process for CreatiCUBE. She stated that if she wanted to have any success in receiving investment interest, she would rather concentrate on a successfully renowned company with proven toy experiences.

Transaction leadership is characterized by the two essential elements of reward and punishment or sanction (Avolio et al., 2009; Shirey, 2006; Northouse, 2016). Rewards can influence people to perform better on their tasks for the benefit of the organization. Using the reward element, the leader succeeds in getting the people motivated in fulfilling their assigned tasks. Transactional leadership can stimulate people to work harder because they can earn good rewards in exchange for laborious activities (Bass & Avolio, 1999). According to Avolio et al., (2009) the relationship between transactional leader is based on the metaphor: "One good turn deserves another" (p. 256).

Participant Rockwell emphasized his thoughts about the rewards of achievement. He argued that if CreatiCUBE or Children Story Time had a workable minimum viable product app,

more than 10,000 users and a successful Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign, then our request for funding would be a different story. He went on to specify that “If you accomplish these tasks and show us that you are on the path to secure \$100 million in revenue, then my company would be interested in capitalizing your venture.”

The other important influential element is punishment or sanction. Most participants expressed their desire to reward our success in our transactions. “But until we see these items at play, then we would not be interested”, said one potential investor. In other words, participants were ready to reward a successful company by investing in it; they would punish our start-up company by withholding their investment. Thus, when a person or an institution performs well and completes their mutually agreed upon assignments on time, then they would receive their reward. In transactional leadership, there are clear goals that are established, and the leader is expected to monitor the progress and take corrective action when necessary (Northouse, 2016).

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to analyze the major findings of this study by means of the theoretical lenses. Bourdieu’s (1984) study of habitus and its importance in the creation of cultural capital helped to analyze and comprehend the lack of participation of Midwest investors in CreatiCUBE and Children Story Times as start-ups. Bourdieu’s theory also brought to light the xenophobic culture of the Midwest as shown by their seemingly hesitation to funding start-up enterprises. The tenets of Flow Theory, Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975, 1990) (action, control, attention, curiosity, intrinsic reward) shed some light to the interest participants showed to the products presented them as potential market disturbing. What explained the participants’ flow was the real charms of both gamification tools in that they would enhance the learning abilities of both parents and children. Finally, Avolio & Bass (1999) study of transactional leadership

helped to understand the desired aspirations of participants and potential investors to receive valued economic compensation such as stocks and interests on revenue in exchange for their knowledge, social connections and time. In the next chapter, I summarize the study, discuss its implications, and offer recommendations.

Chapter 7: Summary, Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusions

In this chapter, I present a summary of the study, discussion of findings, and recommendations for future research. I pursued this study with a two-fold purpose: to understand what elements of gamification tools are needed to secure venture capital interest in providing Seed or Series A funding for my companies CreatiCUBE & Children Story Time, and to propose effective tools for other entrepreneurs to utilize in securing resources needed for their company's capitalization through crowdfunding and Seed or Series A funding solutions. This action research aligned with the analytical lenses of cultural capital, flow theory, and transactional leadership. While offering important insight into the knowledge of gamification, entrepreneurial start-up process, crowdfunding (i.e., Indiegogo & Kickstarter platforms), soliciting venture capital interests, and understanding the process of what it takes to secure these financial instruments.

Summary

To begin, I became interested in gamification as a method of securing a child's interest through my proposed educational devices for literacy development: CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time. My vocation led me to individuals who have varied experiences of advising and creating start-up enterprises. These individuals provided me with knowledge about several paths to obtaining venture capital support and helped to create avenues of detente with them soon, once we complete the prescribed tasks, including workable minimum viable product, more than 10,000 daily users, and successful Kickstarter campaigns. I requested that they all become my mentors and serve in some capacity on my advisory board for Children Story Time. The purpose was to entice them to familiarize themselves with both gamification tools, and ultimately contribute to financially investing in them.

I based my working assumptions on the several bodies of research noted in the literature review that cited multiple reasons on how gamification tools can be used to generate venture capital support from crowdfunding actions (Liu & Wang, 2018; Fleming & Sorenson, 2016). For example, crowdfunding can be regarded as a special form of crowdsourcing, which is a popular practice to “gather ideas for new products and services from a larger, dispersed ‘crowd’ of non-experts” (Bayus 2013, p. 237). Other researchers, Poetz and Schreier (2012) have shown that entrepreneur start-ups can offer higher novelty and customer benefits than those professionals who currently serve in some capacity as corporate representatives for new businesses. These professionals often follow a predetermined formula established by their corporate oligarchy in leading new business initiatives, which can often lead to these corporate professionals in making indomitable audacious mistakes. This system implied that CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time stood a chance to get the necessary funding to start up as a business. However, the results of this study have proven it to be otherwise.

The purpose of this study was to respond to the question: How gamification tools can increase investors’ participation in crowdfunding ventures. Within the qualitative research inquiry, I chose action research and used convenient sampling (Creswell, 2013) to select eight participants. They contributed to provide data. I used phone and face-to-face interviews with the eight people who have more than 100 years of collective experience in various facets of entrepreneurial methods. Additionally, I conducted informal focus groups and used field-notes to enrich the data. Since reflexivity is key to a successful action research (Anderson & Herr, 2005). I constantly relied on this technique to add to the thick data I collected.

Upon analysis of data, four themes emerged from the study: 1) No particular interest in funding; 2) Funding as a byproduct of market demand; 3) Children Story Time as a market

disrupting tool; 4) Strategies for securing venture capital investment, which resulted from the data analyzed from the participant interviews. The major theories I used to analyze these themes were Bourdieu's cultural capital, Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory and transactional leadership. They provided me with a theoretical framework to interpret the findings from the study. For instance, Bourdieu's cultural capital explained that the culture of Minnesota was opaque to consider funding start-ups such as CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time. Also, operates from Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory supported the importance of generating flow in entrepreneurship. Transactional leadership explained that the reward-based model under which participants operated, was not likely to yield financial support for CreatiCUBE, but it generated positive strategies to set Children Story Time in the marketplace.

Discussion

A total of eight participants participated in this study in finding several possible solutions in securing venture capital investment. It has been detected that venture capital investors are interested in possibly funding Children Story Time, if it achieves three main objectives. First, we must complete a workable minimum viable product mobile app that would showcase the main functionalities of system. Nucciarelli, et al., (2017) argue, "A reward based crowdfunding campaign acts as a platform because it brings together different stakeholders and allow them to interact" (p. 516). Nucciarelli, et al., continues, crowdfunding allows game developers to open their business models to different user communities that act as one (i.e., funders) and span its impact over a set of firm's activities (funding, co-development, technical and market testing). Second, we must secure ten thousand plus app users who are using the app with daily statistics. The digital game industry is a test bed for crowdfunding because it provides an ideal domain for exploring emerging trends (p. 517). Third, create and launch a successful Kickstarter campaign

that would enable us to secure our crowdfunding goal. Massolution (2015) argues that “the prospects of crowdfunding are very promising” (p. 1). In 2015, the total size of crowdfunding market around the world had reached \$34.4 billion (Massolution 2015). According to a report developed by the World Bank in 2014, by 2025, the total size of crowdfunding market in the developing countries will reach \$93 billion, and the size of crowdfunding market in China alone will reach \$46 billion to \$50 billion (World Bank, 2014). The findings of this study ascertain the dichotomous strengths of resources that I as the entrepreneur discovered in my process of soliciting the involvement of various community members. These participants contributed to my development as an entrepreneur and interests in helping me to secure interests from potential venture capital investors. This includes the process of developing my action research study which provided a foundation of importance in supporting Children Story Time as an educational and learning tool. This study allowed the researcher to fully engage with potential investors by developing the framework of seeking investment capital through; the understanding of the nature of Minnesota Cultural Capital; Funding as a byproduct of market demand; Children Story Time as a Market disrupting Tools and the strategies to secure investment for start-ups enterprises.

Limitations

The limitations of this study show the lack of interest by the participants in providing a sufficient response to Research Question three, where we address the systemic issues of minority entrepreneurs’ securing venture capital investment. All interview participants were Caucasian middle-class males, whom lacked the insight to provide a sufficient response to the question. The xenophobic culture of white Minnesotan participants displayed a risk averse method of avoiding the question. These participants are experienced in working within diverse privileged positions in society, while maintaining their relationships with “other upper-class individuals who can parry

the forays of social scientists who try to infiltrate their midst” (Adler & Adler, 2002, p. 519). The interview process, especially interviewing using “standardized” methods, has always been problematic with respect to nonmainstream subjects, especially in the area of race (Dunbar, Jr., Rodriguez, Parker, 2001). According to Dunbar, Jr., Rodriguez, & Parker (2001) the “discussions of race currently center on how it plays out as a social construct, either in color-blind discourse and whiteness or from critical race perspectives and interpretations such as critical race theory, critical race feminism, Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit), Asian/Pacific Islander positions, Tribal Nation perspectives, and race's intersections with other aspects of identity and issues of power (Crenshaw et al. 1995; Delgado & Stefancic 1997; Ladson-Billings 1998; Lipsitz 1998; Omi & Winant 1994; Tate 1997)” (pp. 281 – 282). When asked the question directly about the potential of securing investment for minority owned businesses, the participants’ response was open-ended and ambiguous. Their responses mimicked their inward xenophobic culture and did not provide the researcher with direct responses to the question. Dunbar (2017) argues, “Yet another group of people who have commonly been difficult for social scientists to access are the advantaged, those in positions of wealth, status, and power” (p. 517). Hertz and Imber (1995) posit, “Few social researchers study elites because elites are by their very nature difficult to penetrate. Elites establish barriers that set their members apart from the rest of society” (p. viii). Unlike members of downtrodden populations, who can often muster few protections to prevent people from intruding on and studying them, “aristocrats in American society have many layers of shields that can keep social scientists at bay” (p. 520) (Adler & Adler, 2002). Therefore, the limitations of this research summarize the ambivalent responses of the participants, whereas the study’s weakness can be strengthened by more direct questions and responses in relation to Research Question 3.

Implications

The findings of this research lead to some implications for various constituencies whether they are closely or loosely connected to this study. These include the learning society, start-up entrepreneurs, family members and friends, the Twin Cities Community, and venture capital investors. I develop these implications in the section below.

Learning Community. This research infers that funding does not always go along with money and people can learn without money. Participants were able to contribute to the learning of CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time. They learned how these devices were created to combat illiteracy and limited development in early childhood for minority children affected by the achievement gap. They also understood the limitations of funding options and why these devices failed to generate the necessary traction in securing funding from venture capital investors. Participants were able to understand how the entrepreneur researcher developed his framework and why he wasn't successful in attracting the monetary investment from venture capital investors for CreatiCUBE.

Start-up Entrepreneurs. This research underscores the importance of Seed capital. Every start-up enterprise starts out slowly and needs Seed capital to kick off their operations, which might include a prototype, legal documents, patent & trademark applications, and more features. Once an entrepreneur gets his/her Seed capital, and then the internal structure of the organization and minimum viable products can be developed and launched. Participants in this study understood the importance of Seed capital and its role in securing additional funding resources from other suitable investors, including venture capitalists, angel investors, friends & family members, and crowdfunding events.

Seed capital is also important because it alleviates the stressful monetary commitment that the entrepreneur needs to succeed in its early stage development. Venture capital investors also look for start-ups to have Seed funding investment prior to the initial Series A investment, because it shows them that there are more people who believe in the product and are willing to commit a financial investment for the company. For new entrepreneurs, this system can start to build the trust needed to secure the venture capital partners.

An entrepreneur's success is not always granted, nor guaranteed and just because you have a great idea; it doesn't mean that it will guarantee funding support. Our participants fully engaged with both CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time, but they were hesitant in helping to capitalize either business venture. What this study presents is that in general every entrepreneur has great ideas, but what investors are looking for is that entrepreneur to build a team and execute the first stage of project management, which is completing the m.v.p. prototype (minimum viable product) and generating enough start-up capital in testing the product market capabilities. Participants also learned that for success to happen, leaders must always remain engaged and keep pushing their agenda, no matter what obstacles get in the path. Leaders must find ways to overcome these obstacles.

Family Members and Friends. The findings of this study have some implication regarding the importance of securing the emotional and financial support of family upbringing and friends. The family and friend unit are usually the first investors for any new start-up enterprise. They help to raise the necessary start-up capital and push your product in the marketplace to make it a viable product. They constitute the strongest brand ambassadors for the company whose early involvement is essential. For example, when we had our first prototype launch for CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time over 200 people attended the event. A few

months later and with more resources at our disposal, we decided to expand our invitation list and invite three times as many people, but we neglected to extend the invitation to the researcher's close family and friend's network. Because of this aberration, less than a third attended the event, and even less people participated in the CreatiCUBE crowdfunding campaign. It is safe to infer that community of friends and family are key players for to the success of crowdfunding events for start-up campaigns.

Twin Cities Community. This study had helped to understand that the physical location of the Minnesota Twin Cities is not favorable to promote startup enterprises. The Midwest culture is somehow xenophobic (as understood by Bourdieu, 1975), reserved and reluctant to participate in start-up venture funding initiatives. This is especially true for minority owned enterprises. Because of these limitations, Minnesota lags far behind other states that provides enough resources for start-ups to succeed in the marketplace (MN Small Business Investment Tax Credit, 2017, §§116J.8737). However, Minnesota has the potential to launch great products. Because social change takes time, Minnesota is in danger of missing great opportunities for change in the entrepreneurial sphere. This study provides evidence because Minnesota may not easily change its xenophobic culture (Bourdieu, 1975), then entrepreneurs ought to find environments that have the capacity to support their endeavors.

Venture Capital Investment for Minority. The importance of venture capital investment in minority enterprise start-ups is paramount given that most minority entrepreneurs do not come from wealthy ancestries. Participants in this study alluded to the importance of establishing the connection of venture capital participation in minority owned enterprises.

Recommendations

Twin Cities Minnesota. Minority entrepreneurs who do not have access to friends and family network connections become dependent on local resources and if the Twin Cities continue to operate in their current xenophobic culture, then the entrepreneur will fail to address the needs in developing their start-ups. There are laws that favor investors' participation with start-up activities (MN Small Business Investment Tax Credit, 2017, §§116J.8737). An example is the Minnesota Angel Tax Credit that provides investors with a 25% write off on their taxes if they invest in a Minnesota start-up. Another service is the Minnesota Minority Business Investment Act that allows investors to write off an additional 25% write off on their taxes (MN Small Business Investment Tax Credit, 2017, §§116J.8737). All combined, the investors can save 25%+ or more in write offs for investing in new start-up enterprises or minority owned businesses.

Venture Capital Companies. Fortune 500 corporations should create business incubation programs dedicated to providing resources for minority-owned start-up companies. Business incubation programs grow start-up businesses by providing them with financial services and technical support. These programs should work with local universities and institutions in further developing this unique partnership. Minnesota has one of the most diverse economies with a \$5 billion surplus in revenue per year. Companies can use some of their revenue proceeds to create programs dedicated to sponsoring and supporting minority owned business.

Venture capital companies should create Seed funding programs that focus on developing early stage and start-up enterprises, especially minority or veteran owned businesses. These venture institutions have many years of developing and capitalizing companies in different stages of growth, but the number of minority owned businesses and entrepreneurs are minimal, compared to their white counterparts.

Government and Universities. Government institutions, local colleges and institutions, private and non-profits corporations should work together and align their resources with entrepreneurs and start-up organizations to create specialized contests or events that is community driven. These events should allow the start-ups to highlight their products, while getting together with their community institutions to help spread the word about the local economy.

Universities should include different kind of financial capital raising vehicles in their courses. What the researcher learned through this process is that there are many different forms of capital and debt funding an entrepreneur should know prior to going into business. Understanding the basic parts of finance can transform the entrepreneur's knowledge of capital raising (i.e., bank loans, crowdfunding (equity & reward), Seed & Series A-E financing) and allow the entrepreneur to grow with his/her business.

Start-up Companies. Start-ups should be required to test their products locally and accomplish all three prescribed tasks for venture capital raising (i.e., prototype, audience successful Kickstarter campaign). This recommendation can work with recommendation #4. Venture capital wants to see a ton of data prior to committing to any investment. In addition, it is nearly impossible to get notice by venture capital. They hire teams of people whose sole job is to analyze new start-ups and look for things that doesn't fit within their prescribed comparison matrix for investing in start-ups. You would have a better chance at being struck by lightning before you could connect with venture capital.

Every entrepreneur should make sure that they research their perspective-investing partners prior to pitching their startups for monetary capitalization. Many entrepreneurs make the mistake that their ideas are the most original idea, so therefore all venture capital will invest in

their product. This is the biggest misconception about capital raising! Venture capital investors are extremely busy, so their attention span usually lasts half the time when entrepreneurs make their first pitch.

Recommendations for Future Research. I recommend conducting a longitudinal study of the investment potentials in the gamification tools (CreatiCUBE and Children Story) when the company could produce the necessary prototypes of the tools.

This study was of a qualitative nature. A quantitative investigation of the extent to which ventures investors could fund start-ups could yield another set of findings that would be beneficial for the academia and for practitioners.

Additionally, a quantitative research on the funding strategies to attract venture capitals and other business people to invest in such gamification tools as CreatiCUBE and Children Story time might yield findings that could complement the current study.

Conclusions

My personal journey of finding innovative solutions to funding my entrepreneurial start-ups CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time is what inspired me to make this explorative qualitative action research study into the insights of other seasoned entrepreneurs. These participants were able to connect me to a pathway of securing venture capitalization by communicating with investors and mentoring me through the process of understanding the diverse layers of financial capitalization for new start-ups. In general, this study contributes to the funding mechanisms, venture capital investor expertise, and reflective practitioner knowledge. My interpretive eyes as a researcher brought the experiential narratives of the participants to the forefront.

Furthermore, this study taught me the importance of securing localized support from family and friend connections as well as various institutions, (schools, businesses, non-profits) if I wanted to ensure financial success in receiving crowdfunding support through Indiegogo or Kickstarter. More specifically, this study discloses the material requested from venture capital investors in funding new start-up initiatives with engaging visual demonstratives (PowerPoint presentation, data sets intelligence, etc.), provisional recollections from the participants' experiences, and funding capitalization methods. These devices are important if I want to ensure the participation from venture investors. In addition, these mentors were able to provide the researcher with explicit definitions that describes the understanding of financial literacy through their habitus practice.

I also learned that as a leader, it is important to be authentic and transparent while working with other people. The mere idea of CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time did not translate into the attraction of venture capital investors' support. One should also take into consideration the social capital of the potential investors. In the specific case of the Midwest, this social capital might have included the xenophobic culture (Bourdieu, 1985). Although the research reveals that Children Story Time has better chances for success, it remains as a good start-up idea. These products have potential, but they need to create positive traction to secure venture capital interest.

Whether an entrepreneur's initial focal point is on obtaining start-up capital from traditional institutions (venture capital firms, banks, etc.) or finding different solutions to capitalize their enterprises (crowdfunding events, family and friends connections, etc.), this study shows that the entrepreneur has options that could be utilized in securing the necessary Seed capital from venture capital investment. On the one hand, this study based on seeking funding

sources to support effective gamification tools did not yield the expected funding. On the other hand, the research provided the entrepreneur with a foundation to make connective decisions in understanding the parameters that venture capital investors require to secure their financial support. Above all, this study underscored the importance of CreatiCUBE and Children Story Time as two learning tools that are likely to contribute to enhancing children's and parents' ability to play together while learning as a family.

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