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A whole new world: Counterintuitive crowdfunding insights for female founders

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ABSTRACT

Female entrepreneurs are subjected to stereotypes that make it difficult to secure funding. Crowdfunding challenges many of the causes of this discrimination but we know little about if and how it changes optimal funding strategies for female entrepreneurs. Using a sample of 3191 crowdfunding campaigns by female entrepreneurs, we draw from signaling theory to develop and test a series of counterintuitive conjectures for female crowdfunding success. Our results contradict advice that may be derived from traditional entrepreneurial finance: women in crowdfunding should use their gender as advertising, use more female-centric language, avoid self-promotion, start businesses in male-dominated sectors, and ask for more money. These findings highlight new theoretical mechanisms in crowdfunding and develop recommendations for female entrepreneurs who want to raise funds.

1. Introduction

Women, a minority in entrepreneurship, have long struggled to fund their ventures (Brush et al., 2006; Jennings and Brush, 2013). Female entrepreneurs receive only 2.3% of venture capital (Bitter and Lau, 2021), smaller and less frequent loans from banks (Bardasi et al., 2011; Malmström and Wincent, 2018), and a mere 13–18% of government funding (Malmström et al., 2017). Underlying patterns of discrimination make female entrepreneurs attribute a failure to get funding to their gender (Buttner and Rosen, 1992), causing them to downplay their gender to avoid the “female minority entrepreneur” stereotype and improve their funding chances.

Crowdfunding, a method that allows entrepreneurs to raise money from the general public online, challenges many established patterns of entrepreneurial finance. Most notably, crowdfunding tends to reward investors with future products instead of equity. As a result, there are fewer professional investors chasing financial returns and more casual investors led by genuine passions and interests (Davis et al., 2017). These two investor groups behave differently: whereas traditional, return-oriented investors typically prefer profitable high-tech businesses (which tend to be male-dominated; Menzies et al., 2004), crowdfunding investors often back projects in fields they are passionate about such as film and music (Allison et al., 2015). This may counteract discriminatory factors and channel money to female entrepreneurs, who tend to gravitate toward business areas that connect to people’s passions (e.g., 77% of dance projects are led by women; Gafni et al., 2021). These changed dynamics might be the cause of female successes in crowdfunding (e.g., Mollick and Robb, 2016) that present a contrast to women’s relatively poor funding outcomes in traditional venture capital (Malmström et al., 2020a) and loan applications (Eddleston et al., 2016).

Applying signaling theory (Spence, 1973) to crowdfunding’s unique base of casual investors, we discuss insights from traditional

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entrepreneurial finance before developing counterintuitive conjectures for the specific context of crowdfunding. We test these hypotheses on a unique sample of 3191 female-led campaigns on the crowdfunding platform *Indiegogo*. The results are counterintuitive: 1) highlighting your female gender improves your funding results; 2) a female-centric perspective gets you more funds; 3) self-promoting language hurts your business, 4) women do better in male-dominated sectors; and 5) bigger goals raise more money.

Our study offers three contributions. First, we contribute to female entrepreneurship research by highlighting how the unique conditions of reward-based crowdfunding affect venture funding. Second, we add to signaling theory in describing how different signals relate to the gender of the communicator. Third, we give advice to actual entrepreneurs who intend to raise money via crowdfunding.

2. Literature background

We draw from signaling theory for our hypothesis development. Signaling theory (Spence, 1973) proposes that individuals' behavior under limited information is largely determined by the signals received from the provider of information. In crowdfunding, these signals are crucial because investor and investee do not meet in person but rely exclusively on signals in the online campaign. As a result, success is determined by campaign-specific signals such as communication style (Wu et al., 2015) and prior success records (Agrawal et al., 2014; Koning and Model, 2013).

2.1. Advertising one's female identity improves funding outcomes

Entrepreneurship has long favored men over women and blamed this on the behavior of female entrepreneurs (see 'entrepreneur-driven rationale'; Kanze et al., 2018). According to stereotypes, women lack leadership, autonomy, and endurance (Buttner and Rosen, 1992; Collins and Moore, 1964). Similarly, women are said to care less for financial profits (Manolova et al., 2008), making them more likely to prioritize personal life over work (Yang and Aldrich, 2014). Investors who only look at these factors may conclude that women are less worthy of financial support. As a result, female entrepreneurs tend to get less mentoring (Park and Westphal, 2013), are less likely to have applications approved (Bardasi et al., 2011; Malmström and Wincent, 2018), and receive less venture capital (<https://hbr.org/2021/02/women-led-startups-received-just-2-3-of-vc-funding-in-2020>) (Brush et al., 2001). This leads many female founders to conclude that investors reject them due to an inability to see past an entrepreneur's gender (Buttner and Rosen, 1992).

However, in crowdfunding, showing that one is a woman might also be an advantage. Equality is an increasingly prominent concern in crowdfunding, as casual investors are less likely to chase financial returns and more motivated by social causes. Women support other women because they remind them of themselves and the hurdles they have faced (Greenberg and Mollick, 2017), and men support women because they are interested in justice and want to level the playing field (Ouwkerk and Ellemers, 2002). If women signal their minority membership and resilience by tagging themselves "female founder", it may encourage investors to support them (Groza et al., 2020). This way, female entrepreneurs in crowdfunding may benefit from highlighting their gender.

Hypothesis 1. Highlighting one's female founder status is associated with better funding outcomes for female entrepreneurs.

2.2. A female perspective improves funding outcomes

The female perspective in entrepreneurship has been burdened with harmful stereotypes that suggest women's interests are less profitable (Klapper and Parker, 2011; Langowitz et al., 2006, p. 169) and that they found mere lifestyle businesses (Kanze et al., 2018). These stereotypes lead women to believe that their female perspective works against them (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007) and that they should downplay it to avoid stigmatization.

However, signaling theory suggests that applying a female perspective might also help female entrepreneurs' crowdfunding campaigns. Highlighting one's own personal experience or connecting with other women by addressing their problem in the venture pitch may make female entrepreneurs more authentic, thereby signaling legitimacy which women in leadership often struggle to obtain (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Frydrych et al., 2014). As such, emphasizing a female perspective may garner additional female support without turning away men, who rarely discount businesses due to female elements (Graves and Powell, 1995; Greenberg and Mollick, 2017).

Hypothesis 2. A more female perspective is associated with better funding outcomes for female entrepreneurs.

2.3. Promotion language worsens funding outcomes

Promotion language puts the focus on future improvements and the attainment of goals rather than safety and responsibility (Higgins, 1998; Higgins et al., 1997). This signals an ability to take the necessary risks to make a project successful (Crowe and Higgins, 1997), an important trait in entrepreneurship (Hmieleski and Baron, 2008). Women's poor venture funding outcomes have been partially explained by their lesser use of promotion language, leading researchers to suggest female entrepreneurs should use more promotion (Kanze et al., 2018; Malmström et al., 2020a, b).

However, promotion language in entrepreneurship is not always beneficial (Brockner et al., 2004) and might even hurt crowdfunding success. Promotion is less useful in a reward-based crowdfunding setting than in traditional equity-based funding because the funding model differs. In equity-based funding, investors take a share of the gains that were realized by taking risks, whereas in reward-based crowdfunding investors do not benefit from risks. If the business fails, then investors do not get anything; if it succeeds, then investors only receive the promised rewards. This asymmetric exposure to the downside (all the risk but no gain) might lead investors to avoid projects with promotion signals.

Hypothesis 3. More promotion language is associated with worse funding outcomes for female entrepreneurs.

2.4. Operating in male-dominated industries improves funding outcomes

Many business areas in entrepreneurship are dominated by one gender (Eagly and Karau, 1991; Smith et al., 1992). For example, women are unlikely to pursue careers in technology (Gardiner and Tiggemann, 1999) and construction (Smith et al., 1992), whereas men tend to avoid human resource jobs (Ackah and Heaton, 2003) and the care sector (Flensburg Jensen, 2017). Considering that underrepresented groups are seen as less competent (Graves and Powell, 1995) and experience a great deal of discrimination (Ceci and Williams, 2011; Gao et al., 2016), women are often advised to avoid male-dominated sectors (Gardiner and Tiggemann, 1999).

Although the gender distribution in crowdfunding sectors remains very unequal (77.3% of “Dance” but only 16.4% of “Technology” crowdfunding campaigns are founded by women; Gafni et al., 2021), avoiding male dominated sectors may not be necessary for female crowdfunding entrepreneurs. In the eyes of crowdfunding’s casual investors, a minority status might make an entrepreneur seem special. Starting a business as a minority in a sector signals courage, strength, and a genuine interest for the sector (Greenberg and Mollick, 2017). This may inspire casual crowdfunding investors to support a campaign.

Hypothesis 4. Starting a business in male-dominated sectors is associated with better funding outcomes for female entrepreneurs.

2.5. Bigger goals improve funding outcomes

Female entrepreneurs may be inclined to ask for smaller loans for their ventures because larger loan applications by women tend to be declined (Bardasi et al., 2011; Malmström and Wincent, 2018). To avoid rejection, women therefore often set smaller goals to increase their likelihood of raising any capital at all (Gafni et al., 2021). This has also been confirmed in traditional venture finance and negotiation (Ewens and Townsend, 2020; Hernandez-Arenaz and Iriberry, 2019).

However, large goals can also signal quality. Goals serve as “anchors” that backers use as a starting point when valuing a company (see anchoring-and-adjustment heuristic; Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). When presented with an anchor, investors try to think of ways to justify the valuation (Barbosa and Fayolle, 2007; Epley, 2004; Mussweiler and Strack, 2001). In crowdfunding, raising large amounts signals to investors that the project is of high quality (Dai and Zhang, 2019). This may help female founders avoid the stigma of founding what could be considered a “modest lifestyle business” (Kanze et al., 2018, p. 590).

Hypothesis 5. Higher goals are associated with better funding outcomes for female entrepreneurs.

3. Method

We collected data from the crowdfunding platform *Indiegogo*, an American crowdfunding platform founded in 2008. *Indiegogo* is the ideal funding platform for this analysis. It is the only major reward-based crowdfunding platform that allows campaign owners to tag their project with a “female entrepreneur” tag. Moreover, *Indiegogo* allows entrepreneurs to set flexible goals and to keep raised funds even if they fall short of their goals, permitting a more tactical use of campaign goals as an anchor (Indiegogo, 2020).

We collected data by scraping all *Indiegogo* projects between May 2010 and May 2020. First, we excluded all campaigns started in non-OECD nations. Next, we dropped all campaigns that were represented by a company instead of an individual. We then excluded all campaigns that did not include any text, project information, project categories, or names of the founders. Next, we used the entrepreneurs’ names to identify their gender (for a similar approach, see H. F. Chan et al., 2021). All campaigns with founders whose name-associated gender was ambiguous were dropped. Next, we dropped all pitches from the “health” category as these are often not entrepreneurial businesses but charity campaigns asking for support in paying someone’s medical bills. This left 8566 venture pitches (3191 by female and 5375 by male entrepreneurs). The female share is 37%, which is close to the general gender ratio in entrepreneurship (e.g., 34.7%; Gafni et al., 2021). We only use the 3191 projects by female entrepreneurs for our main analyses; projects started by male entrepreneurs are only used in the post hoc analyses.

3.1. Main variables

3.1.1. Funding outcome

In line with prior research (C. R. Chan et al., 2018), we operationalize our dependent variable as the natural logarithm of funds pledged by investors in USdollars.

3.1.2. Female founder tag

A binary variable indicates whether the project was tagged “female founder” (not tagged = 0; tagged = 1). Of the 3191 female-led projects, 832 (26.07%) were tagged as “female founder.”

3.1.3. Female perspective

We conducted an LIWC text analysis (Pennebaker et al., 2015) over all campaign texts to identify the degree to which they engage in female language (female language is included in the original software as a category).

3.1.4. Promotion language

We conducted an LIWC text analysis (Pennebaker et al., 2015) over all campaign texts to identify the degree to which they engage in promotion language by using words such as “accomplish”, “expand”, and “advancement” (for the dictionary, see Gamache et al., 2015; Kanze et al., 2018).

3.1.5. Male-dominated sector

Gender diversity research suggests that the critical mass of gender diversity is reached at 30% (Joecks et al., 2013). We therefore defined male-dominated sectors as those with less than 30% women.

3.1.6. Funding goal

When starting a campaign, entrepreneurs set a goal amount for their campaign. In line with other crowdfunding studies, we use the natural logarithm of the goal amount in US dollars (Gafni et al., 2019; Mollick, 2014).

3.2. Control variables

We control for a series of variables connected to funding outcomes but that lie outside of our theoretical model. First, we control for the duration of the campaign in days because longer campaigns offer a greater timeframe for people to support the project (Mollick, 2014). Second, longer elaborations raise interest, which we control for with the length of the campaign in words (Parhankangas and Renko, 2017). Third, we control for whether the project contains a video because videos are associated with effort expended on the project and tend to raise more funds (Frydrych et al., 2014; Mollick, 2014). Fourth, control for the venture stage because early-stage projects tend to be riskier (Ruhnka and Young, 1991). Fifth, we control for the industry (e.g., software, environment, and business services) because sectors raise different amounts of funds (Mollick, 2014). Sixth, we control for the country because different crowdfunding markets are not equally developed and may attract different crowds.

4. Results

Table 1 reports all means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables included in this study (excluding categorical variables for project category and geographical location). The variables are not highly correlated and the highest model mean VIF is 1.12, staying within acceptable limits (O'Brien, 2007). This suggests that multicollinearity is not a concern (Aiken et al., 1991).

4.1. Main analysis

Table 2 presents the results of the regression models. Model 1, the baseline, contains only the control variables. Model 2 evaluates Hypothesis 1, which proposes a positive relationship between projects tagged “female founder” and funds raised. The results for Model 2 show that the “female founder” tag is positively associated with funding outcomes ($\beta = 0.44, p = 0.000, n = 3191$). This model explains 21% of the variance in funds raised and the likelihood-ratio test shows it improves significantly on Model 1 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.01, \Delta LR \chi^2 = 16.3, p = 0.000, n = 3191$). This supports Hypothesis 1. Model 3 tests Hypothesis 2, which proposes a positive relationship between female-centric language and funding outcomes. The results confirm that the association is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.06, p = 0.031, n = 3191$). This model explains 21% of the variance in firm-level radical innovation and the likelihood-ratio test shows it also improves significantly on Model 1 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.01, \Delta LR \chi^2 = 2.4, p = 0.000, n = 3191$), thus supporting Hypothesis 2. Model 4 tests Hypothesis 3, which proposes a negative relationship between promotion language and funds raised. The results from Model 4 confirm that the relationship is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.08, p = 0.009, n = 3191$). This model explains 21% of the variance in firm-level radical innovation and shows it also improves significantly on Model 1 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.01, \Delta LR \chi^2 = 3.5, p = 0.000, n = 3191$), thus supporting Hypothesis 3. Model 5 tests Hypothesis 4, which proposes that creating a campaign in a male-dominated sector leads to better funding outcomes for female entrepreneurs. We find a significant positive relationship between founding in a male-dominated industry and the funding outcome (ln) ($\beta = 0.47, p = 0.048, n = 3191$). This model explains 20% of the variance in funding raised and supports Hypothesis 4. Because the explained variance is already captured by the industry control, including whether the sector is male-dominated does not improve the R^2 of the control model. However, its substantial effect size shows that it is a meaningful inclusion. Model 6 tests Hypothesis 5, which proposes a positive relationship between the size of the goal and the funds raised. In this linear model, we find a positive association between the funding goal (ln) and the funding outcome (ln) ($\beta = 0.56, p = 0.000, n = 3191$). This model explains 26% of the variance in firm-level radical innovation and the likelihood-ratio test shows it improves significantly on Model 1 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.06, \Delta LR \chi^2 = 24.6, p = 0.000, n = 3191$). This result supports Hypothesis 5.

Lastly, we introduce all variables simultaneously in Model 7. The “female founder” tag (H1), using less promotion language (H3), operating in a male-dominated sector (H4), and setting higher funding goals (H5) stay statistically significant. Applying a female perspective (H2) becomes insignificant but maintains the positive sign of its coefficients.

4.2. Post hoc analysis

To test the degree to which our findings are exclusive to female entrepreneurs, we also tested our hypotheses with a sample consisting of male entrepreneurs ($n = 5375$). Hypothesis 1 cannot be tested with this sample (the “female founder” tag sends a different signal when used by a man and *Indiegogo* offers no male equivalent). Hypothesis 2 (using female-centric language) is insignificant for

Table 1
Correlation table.

	Variable	Mean	Median	Min	Max	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	VIF
1	Funding outcome (ln)	7.30	7.35	0.69	14.56	1.81									
2	Female founder tag	0.19	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.39	0.17**								1.09
3	Female perspective	0.37	0.00	-6.80	9.62	1.23	0.05**	0.17**							1.04
4	Promotion language	0.23	0.17	0.00	4.55	0.28	-0.06**	-0.03	-0.02						1.01
5	Male-dominated sector	0.29	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.46	-0.02	-0.01	-0.06**	-0.02					1.01
6	Funding goal (ln)	8.82	8.73	0.01	16.12	1.42	0.32**	0.14**	0.01	0.04*	-0.01				1.18
7	Campaign duration	42.26	41.00	1.00	167.00	18.27	-0.20**	-0.01	0.04*	0.06**	-0.01	0.15**			1.04
8	Campaign elaboration	769.78	629.00	1.00	7054.00	568.93	0.25**	0.11**	0.01	-0.06**	0.01	0.27**	-0.02		1.10
9	Contains video	0.38	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.49	0.27**	0.21**	0.06**	0.00	-0.05**	0.24**	-0.05**	0.16**	1.12

Note: *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. * indicates $p < 0.05$, ** indicates $p < 0.01$, *** indicates $p < 0.001$.

Table 2
Regression models.

Dependent Variable: Funding Outcome (ln)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Control Variables:							
Campaign duration	-0.345*** (0.036)	-0.343*** (0.035)	-0.348*** (0.036)	-0.341*** (0.036)	-0.345*** (0.036)	-0.444*** (0.035)	-0.438*** (0.035)
Campaign elaboration	0.449*** (0.037)	0.433*** (0.037)	0.448*** (0.037)	0.443*** (0.037)	0.449*** (0.037)	0.310*** (0.037)	0.293*** (0.037)
Contains video	0.671*** (0.063)	0.616*** (0.064)	0.665*** (0.063)	0.674*** (0.063)	0.671*** (0.063)	0.484*** (0.062)	0.443*** (0.062)
Product Stage 1	-0.358 (0.263)	-0.423 (0.262)	-0.362 (0.263)	-0.342 (0.263)	-0.358 (0.263)	-0.399 (0.253)	-0.434 (0.252)
Product Stage 2	2.020*** (0.299)	2.094*** (0.298)	2.026*** (0.299)	2.040*** (0.299)	2.020*** (0.299)	1.825*** (0.288)	1.913*** (0.287)
Product Stage 3	2.932*** (0.583)	2.881*** (0.580)	2.929*** (0.583)	2.929*** (0.582)	2.932*** (0.583)	3.132*** (0.561)	3.084*** (0.558)
Product Stage 4	3.365*** (0.751)	3.366*** (0.747)	3.373*** (0.750)	3.355*** (0.750)	3.365*** (0.751)	3.094*** (0.722)	3.093*** (0.719)
Industry (25 categories)	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Country (91 categories)	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Direct Effects:							
Female founder tag		0.442*** (0.079)					0.348*** (0.077)
Female perspective			0.055 ^a (0.025)				0.039 (0.025)
Promotion language				-0.076** (0.029)			-0.087** (0.028)
Male-dominated sector					0.470 ^a (0.237)		0.466 ^a (0.227)
Funding goal (ln)						0.556*** (0.035)	0.549*** (0.035)
Log likelihood	-5995	-5979***	-5993***	-5992***	-5995**	-5871***	-5852***
AIC	12,241	12,210	12,238	12,236	12,241	11,994	11,963
Adj. R2	0.20	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.20	0.26	0.27
Num. obs.	3191	3191	3191	3191	3191	3191	3191

^a indicates $p < 0.05$, ** indicates $p < 0.01$, *** indicates $p < 0.001$.

men, both for actual female language ($\beta = 0.00$, $p = 0.978$, $n = 5375$) and the equivalent “male language” ($\beta = -0.05$, $p = 0.118$, $n = 5375$). Hypotheses 3–5 are significant (H3: avoid promotion focus, $\beta = -0.06$, $p = 0.021$, $n = 5375$; H4: founded in male-dominated sectors, $\beta = 0.99$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 5375$; H5: set larger goals, $\beta = 0.47$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 5375$); however, for all three hypotheses, the relationship is less strong for male than for female entrepreneurs (H3 moderation: Promotion language x Gender $\beta = 0.06$, $p = 0.049$, $n = 8566$; H4 moderation: Male-dominated sector x Gender $\beta = 0.26$, $p = 0.001$, $n = 8566$; H5 moderation: Funding goal x Gender $\beta = 0.47$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 8566$). This supports the special relevance of our findings for female entrepreneurs.

In addition, one could suspect that Indiegogo is more “pro-women” than other crowdfunding platforms and that the results are unique to the platform. To test this theory, we collected a similar dataset from Kickstarter, the world’s largest crowdfunding platform. The data differ in two regards: first, founders cannot tag themselves “female founder,” making it impossible to test [Hypothesis 1](#). Second, Kickstarter does not offer the same information on the stage of development so we could not control for it. The remainder of methods is identical. We find that most of our results also hold for Kickstarter, where only female perspectives become insignificant but keep their positive sign. The other three testable hypotheses remain highly significant: less promotion language ($\beta = -0.15$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 20,331$), founding in a male-dominated sector ($\beta = 1.26$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 20,331$), and larger goals ($\beta = 0.30$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 20,331$) are all associated with more funds raised.

5. Discussion

We show that the mechanisms behind a successful crowdfunding campaign differ from those of traditional venture funding settings in counterintuitive ways. Unexpected success factors are highlighting your gender, using more female-centric language, using less promotion language, founding in male-dominated sectors, and setting higher campaign goals.

This contributes to female entrepreneurship research. We show that rather than blindly transferring insights from traditional entrepreneurial finance to crowdfunding, researchers must consider the boundary conditions of crowdfunding. While the overall goal of investment campaigns is identical (raise money for ventures), differing investor demographics require us to reevaluate prior insights from traditional entrepreneurial finance.

Moreover, we explicate how various signals—*background signals* in the form of a female founder tag, *speech signals* in language, and *anchors* in the form of large goals—link to the entrepreneur’s gender identity. This suggests that even though useful conjectures can be derived from signaling theory, future research should apply a different theoretical lens: the signals’ emphasis on female identity gives

cause to investigate these phenomena in the context of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), which has already found some application in crowdfunding (Gerber and Hui, 2013; Kromidha and Robson, 2016). This will require researchers to go beyond an analysis of entrepreneurs and investigate the interplay of gender identity of the signal sender (entrepreneur) and the signal receivers (crowdfunding investors). These identity elements are especially important in crowdfunding because its demographics differ from traditional venture finance: while only 9% of venture capitalists and 15% of business angels are female (Brush et al., 2004; Harrison and Mason, 2007), women make up 44% of crowdfunding investors (Marom et al., 2014). This bolsters activist choice homophily (Greenberg and Mollick, 2017), a behavior whereby individuals combat self-perceived discrimination by supporting others who face similar obstacles (Greenberg and Mollick, 2017; Jetten et al., 2011). Crowdfunding's casual investors, paired with more female "activists" supporting each other, may aid female entrepreneurs. We therefore join the call "to develop a better understanding of the circumstances and extent to which activist choice homophily is developed and invoked" (Greenberg and Mollick, 2017, p. 366), emphasizing signaling in crowdfunding.

The generalizability of our research also deserves discussion. While we found support for our hypotheses and our robustness test suggests they also apply to other reward-based crowdfunding contexts, there may be constraints on generality. Future research could investigate if and how our findings transfer to equity crowdfunding (e.g., ASSOB, see Ahlers et al., 2015) and peer-to-peer lending platforms (e.g., Kiva.org, see Moodie, 2013).

Lastly, we believe the results of our research also offer advice for practice by highlighting the unique boundary conditions of crowdfunding. Rather than simply applying lessons from traditional entrepreneurial finance to crowdfunding, practitioners may want to use the findings from this study as a first suggestion of how to proceed.

6. Conclusion

Our study provides counterintuitive insights on securing funding in crowdfunding. Rather than follow traditional advice, women should highlight their gender, use more female-centric language, use less promotion language, found in male-dominated sectors, and set higher campaign goals. All these factors provide specific advantages to female entrepreneurs, allowing them to level the playing field of venture funding.

Credit author statement

Henrik Wesemann: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Project administration, Funding acquisition **Joakim Wincent:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Non-author contributions: **Florian Schabus** (Research Assistant): Investigation, Data Visualization **Dr. Candace Pettus** (Professional Editor): Editing.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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