

What Drives People to Participate in Online Communities? A Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Identifying the factors that motivate individuals to engage in online community activities is essential for fostering sustained participation and enabling contributors to collaboratively address complex tasks. Individuals possess diverse experiences and perspectives, and it is essential to integrate these contributions in a structured and efficient manner to foster creativity and innovation in problem-solving. Therefore, we investigate the impacts of various factors—such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, profession), and platform-related elements (e.g., reward systems, feedback mechanisms, user interaction—on crowd participation in both crowdsourcing and crowdfunding platforms through a bibliometric analysis of the relevant literature. This systematic literature review not only contributes to the academic understanding of the field but also serves as a reference for key stakeholders such as platform managers, investors, entrepreneurs, and innovators.

Keywords: Crowdsourcing, Crowdfunding, Crowd Wisdom, Participation

Jel Codes: D70, G10, G41, O16.

İnsanları Çevrimiçi Topluluklara Katılmaya Ne Yönlendiriyor? Sistemik Bir Literatür Taraması ve Bibliyometrik Analiz

Öz

Bireyleri çevrimiçi topluluk faaliyetlerine katılmaya motive eden faktörlerin belirlenmesi, sürdürülebilir katılımın sağlanması ve katkı sunanların karmaşık görevleri iş birliği içinde yerine getirebilmeleri açısından kritik öneme sahiptir. Bireyler farklı deneyim ve bakış açılarına sahiptir ve bu katkıların yaratıcılığı ve yenilikçiliği teşvik edecek şekilde yapılandırılmış ve etkin bir biçimde bütünleştirilmesi, sorun çözme süreçleri için gereklidir. Bu nedenle, ilgili literatüre yönelik bibliyometrik bir analiz aracılığıyla içsel ve dışsal motivasyon, demografik özellikler (ör. yaş, cinsiyet, meslek) ve platforma ilişkin unsurlar (ör. ödül sistemleri, geri bildirim mekanizmaları, kullanıcı etkileşimi) gibi çeşitli faktörlerin, hem kitlesel kaynak kullanımı (crowdsourcing) hem de kitlesel fonlama (crowdfunding) platformlarında kitle katılımı üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektediriz. Bu sistemik literatür taraması, alanın akademik olarak anlaşılmasına katkı sunmakla kalmamakta, aynı zamanda platform yöneticileri, yatırımcılar, girişimciler ve yenilikçiler gibi temel paydaşlar için de başvurulabilecek bir kaynak niteliği taşımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kitlesel Kaynak Kullanımı (Crowdsourcing), Kitlesel Fonlama (Crowdfunding), Kitle Bilgeliği, Katılım

Jel Sınıflandırması: D70, G10, G41, O16.

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1. Introduction

Advancements in information and communication technologies have fundamentally transformed organizational processes and decision-making practices over the past several decades. As a result of these technologies, individuals, firms, and governments now have more rapid access to information, knowledge, and actionable insights (Bahrini and Qaffas, 2019; H. Hong et al., 2020). The widespread availability of information has also enabled large communities to stimulate competition and foster innovation (Cennamo, 2021; H. Hong et al., 2020; Hoque,2024). In the contemporary business environment, organizations encounter intense competitive pressures; therefore, the discovery and implementation of innovative ideas are critical for maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage (Suen et al., 2022; Satar et al., 2025). Additionally, in recent years, artificial intelligence and data analytics have further accelerated this transformation by enabling faster knowledge extraction and more adaptive decision making processes across sectors (Doshi and Smith, 2024; Zhou et al, 2025)

The new digital age has significantly increased the influence of online reputation systems, while also highlighting the role of communities in digital decision-making processes (Kremer et al., 2014; Tausczik and Huang, 2020; Ahmed et al., 2024). As digitalization advances, individuals increasingly rely on user-generated content and collective feedback through platforms such as social media, review websites, and recommendation systems when making decisions related to education, healthcare, or consumer services (Kavoura and Borges, 2016; Liu et al., 2020). Simultaneously, organizations have begun to seek innovative ideas by engaging more structured and participatory online communities—commonly referred to as ‘crowdsourcing’—to support problem-solving and product development (Shuai et al., 2025).

Crowdsourcing involves mobilizing groups of individuals to achieve objectives such as generating innovative ideas, solving problems, or completing specific tasks. The term was introduced by Jeff Howe in 2006 (Howe, 2006). In crowdsourced systems, individuals collaborate to create value for a defined purpose (Prpić et al., 2015). While crowdsourcing has been applied in diverse areas such as online content creation, and public opinion gathering, it has gained particular prominence in the context of idea generation and creative problem-solving (Brahm, 2009; Chiu et al., 2014, Dissanayake et al., 2025).

Human beings are at the centre of crowdsourcing. The wisdom of crowds is essential, especially for organizations in the effective use of crowdsourcing and its platforms. Surowiecki (2005) outlines the essential conditions for a crowd to exhibit wisdom as diversity, independence, and decentralization. Diversity implies that crowd members possess varying levels of knowledge and insight (H. Hong et al., 2020; Surowiecki, 2005). Hong and Page (2004) demonstrate that a group containing both highly intelligent and less intelligent individuals can almost always outperform a group consisting solely of highly intelligent individuals. Independence signifies that members can make their own decisions without being affected by others in the crowd (H. Hong et al., 2020; L. Hong and Page, 2004; Surowiecki, 2005). Decentralization refers to the distribution of power within the crowd, where most significant decisions are made by individuals rather than experts, ensuring that authority is not concentrated in a single central location (Hong et al., 2020; Surowiecki, 2005).

Most research on crowdsourcing focuses on understanding individuals since crowds generate significant value in today's information society. Scholars try to understand the underlying reasons or motivations behind the crowd's engagement in online community activities. Therefore, this study aims to reach a common judgement by integrating all these studies with a systematic literature review. Related studies examining crowd platforms and participation are examined to reveal how and to what extent they answered the following research questions:

RQ1: How can crowd participation be explained by behavioural or motivation theories?

RQ2: Do demographic features (such as gender, age, profession, and nationality) and psychographic features (such as values, personality characteristics, and interests) have an impact on crowd participation?

This study addresses the identified gaps in two specific areas. Firstly, we aim to introduce commonly specified theories of behaviour or motivation that enable people to be widely integrated into crowdsourced systems. Secondly, we investigate whether every person can exhibit the same type of behaviour with the same or similar incentive or motivation frameworks.

Research Methodology

Following the guidelines set by Webster and Watson (2002), and Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2015), we initiated our literature review with a comprehensive literature search. We selected the Web of Science (WoS) database due to its broad interdisciplinary coverage, indexing of high-quality peer-reviewed papers, and suitability for bibliometric analysis. The literature search was initiated in January 2023, covering journal articles published between 2018 and 2022. We searched the Web of Science database using the query TITLE (CROWD* AND PARTICIPAT*) to identify studies that examine any combination of crowd systems and participation. The search returned 88 articles.

We proceeded to review the title, abstract, keywords, and full text, where available, of each article. We screened whether these 88 papers were suitable for the scope of our study or not. This screening process was performed by the authors using the PRISMA Statement in Figure 1, which is a handy reporting guide for the reviewed papers and adapted from Moher et al. (2009). The PRISMA flow diagram outlines a four-step process for systematic literature reviews: identification of studies through database searches, screening for relevance, assessing full-text eligibility, and finally including qualified studies in the analysis. This ensures a transparent and methodical selection of literature. And then, we use the following 4 criteria developed by Morschheuser et al. (2017): 1) The full paper is obtainable. 2) The paper is written in English. 3) Crowd systems and their participation must play a substantial or pertinent role in the paper rather than being merely mentioned. 4) The paper is not a duplicate reporting the same study in multiple papers. Studies were excluded during the full-text eligibility phase due to reasons such as lack of direct relevance to crowdsourcing or crowdfunding participation, absence of empirical data or theoretical contribution, insufficient methodological rigor, or duplication of results reported elsewhere.

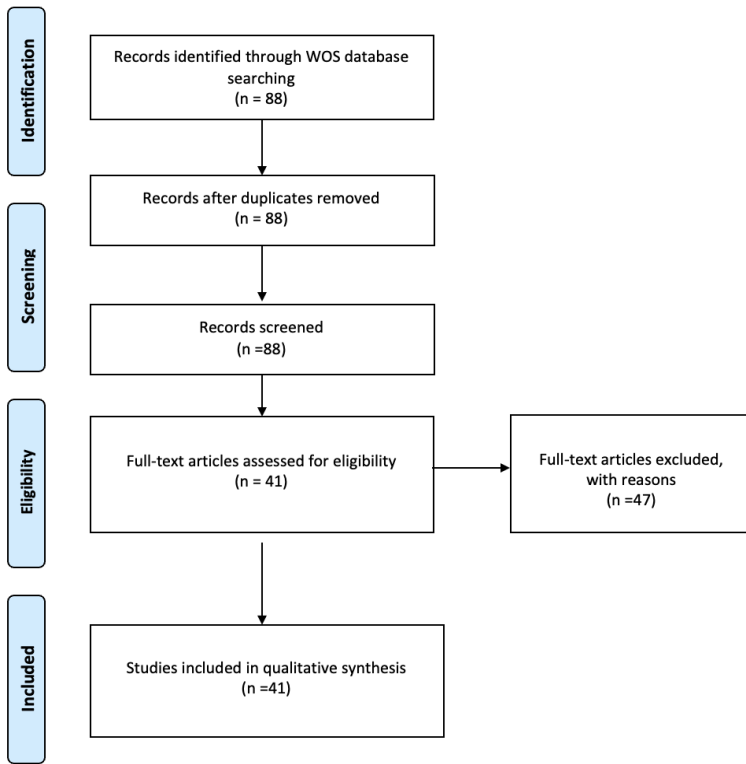


Figure 1: PRISMA Statement For The Article Inclusion Process Adapted From Moher et al. (2009)

After the full-text review, we excluded 47 studies that were not directly relevant to the scope of this study and then selected a final 41 studies. We examined each of the remaining 41 studies. In addition to this analysis, the research methodology involves the generation of related bibliometric maps to understand word clouds and word relations. We anticipated that this phase would provide insights into the research questions and the research gap. Bibliometric analysis ensures that when certain words frequently co-occur in studies, the concepts represented by those words are closely interconnected (Cricelli et al., 2022).

In this study, bibliometric analysis was conducted utilizing the Bibliometrix package—an R-based tool for comprehensive science mapping—alongside its Biblioshiny web interface. Drawing upon data extracted from the Web of Sci-

ence (WoS) database for the period 2018 to 2022, the analysis encompassed the construction of networks for co-citation, bibliographic coupling, scientific collaboration, and co-word analysis, with the objective of uncovering the intellectual, social, and conceptual structures underlying the research domain..

Finally, we conducted a comprehensive review of the literature in which articles were classified systematically to obtain an overview of the relevant studies addressing our research questions. This section forms the core framework of the study, serving as a detailed exploratory analysis.

Bibliometric Analysis

In the scope of this study, 41 articles reviewed for bibliometric analysis that were published in the WoS database between 2018 and 2022, included the terms crowd* and participant* in their titles, had the SCI-Expanded Index, and passed the PRISMA statement step. Figure 3 depicts the overall topic of these investigations. A thematic map, which is produced utilizing content information from the 41 articles mentioned, contributes to the research.

The thematic map depicts the keywords of the articles and their interrelationships. Notably, the theme of motivation appears to be prominent, with a dense network of relationships among the keywords associated with this topic. Specifically, terms such as motivation, knowledge, self-determination theory, trust, impact, behaviour, and performance appear to be closely interconnected. The main connection point of these terms is related to the theme of motivation. In Figure 2, the relationships between the themes that are frequently used in the studies are represented, while in Figure 3, the words that the studies focus on are summarized.

Table 1: Change in the Number of Articles by Years

2022	12
2021	5
2020	9
2019	8
2018	7

Table 2 categorizes the reviewed studies based on their primary research fields. The majority of the articles (n=14) are in the field of Business, indicating a strong managerial and organizational interest in crowd participation systems. Other prominent fields include Computer Science (n=7) and Information Science (n=6), reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of this research domain. Smaller contributions from Engineering, Social Sciences, Psychology, and Communication reveal that while the topic has diverse appeal, it remains more concentrated in business and technical fields.

Table 2: Research Areas of Studies

Computer Science	7
Business	14
Information Science	6
Engineering	2
Science	4
Social issue	1
Infectious	1
Medical information	1
Social Issues	1
Psychology	2
Communication	2

As shown in Table 3, among the 41 reviewed articles, 22 employed case study methods, while 19 used empirical approaches. The case studies often ana-

lyze specific platforms or communities, providing contextual insights, while empirical studies focus on quantifiable patterns in user behavior, often using surveys or behavioral data.

Table 3: Frequency of Research Methodology in the Reviewed Articles

Research Methodology	Frequency
Empirical	19
Case Study	22

Results And Findings

In this section, we highlight the findings by examining the studies through the research questions presented in this study.

RQ1: How can crowd participation be explained by behavioural or motivation theories? and RQ2: Do demographic features (such as gender, age, profession, and nationality) and psychographic features (such as values, personality characteristics, and interests) have an impact on crowd participation?

The First Research Question

Significant findings that provide answers to our first research question (RQ1) are obtained from studies that explain participation in online communities through the theories of motivation. In the selected articles regarding RQ1, we encounter numerous theoretical/conceptual frameworks. For instance, concerning crowdsourcing-related studies, Feng et al., (2018), Leung et al., (2021), and Yang and Qi, (2021) benefited from Self-efficacy Theory in their studies. Self-efficacy theory explains people's belief in their ability to execute a particular behavior. Individuals' self-efficacy influences their job coping skills and motivation. The Self-Efficacy Theory was used to explain participant behaviours in the study by Yang and Qi (2021). This theory holds that an individual's confidence in their ability to accomplish a task impacts their probability of achieving it. When the effects of task rewards and durations on participants' behaviours were investigated, it was discovered that high task rewards and long durations could improve participants' self-efficacy, and thus their task completion rates. It was also discovered

that as task rewards grew, so did participants' likelihood of participating in tasks, although this rise slowed after a certain point. Leung et al. (2021) noted that crowd workers who had strong self-efficacy showed greater intention to participate and sustained this intention over time. On the other hand, Liu and Liu (2019) and Wang (2022) discussed the Social Exchange Theory, which posits that social behaviour stems from exchanges within social relationships (Cropanzano, 2017). Some studies have leveraged behavioural theories to explore the impact of various variables on participation in various online crowdfunding platforms that mediate online communities to come together to fund projects. Baber (2020) examined the intentions of political contributions via crowdfunding using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which is based on ideas of attitude, subjective standards and perceived behavioural control that predict individuals' behaviour (Li et al.,2023). The study used a model of civic engagement and deliberate behaviour to manage participants' intentions regarding political crowdfunding. The reason why people volunteer as a social duty and citizenship is explained by the Citizen Volunteer Model (CVM) (Baber, 2020). The findings of the study revealed that the variables that had the greatest influence on participants' intentions were all three sub-components of TPB. CVM was also discovered to influence social responsibility perception. The results could help researchers better grasp the factors that influence participants' intentions in political crowdfunding campaigns (Baber, 2020). Similarly, Kusumarani and Zo (2019) created an integrated model to explain individuals' intentions to engage in online political crowdfunding by utilising the civic voluntarism model and Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Originally introduced by Festinger in 1957, this theory examines the factors influencing attitudes and beliefs, the internalisation of values, decision-making outcomes, the impact of interpersonal disagreements, and other significant psychological processes (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 2019). The model's analysis revealed that the perceived alignment between politicians and individuals is among the most significant motivators for participating in online political crowdfunding.

Pitchay et al. (2021) used Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in their research. Engagement corresponds to the three basic needs identified by self-determination theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the need for people to be able to make their own decisions, allowing donors to make donation decisions based on their own free will. Competence is the desire for people to feel competent, allowing participants to feel capable of participating.

The need for people to connect with others, which encourages participation and engagement with platforms, is referred to as relatedness (Suen et al., 2022; 1, 2021; Leung et al., 2021; Wu and Gong, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Pitchay et al. (2021), voluntary participation of individuals in donation crowdfunding will increase by being motivated by the donation itself rather than by receiving rewards, and internal factors toward donating will increase the intention to participate. As a result, it is critical for people to be sensitive to their autonomy, competence, and relatedness requirements and to derive their internal motivation for donation crowdfunding from the donation itself rather than from a reward. These elements can be incorporated into the design and marketing strategies of donation crowdfunding sites.

Additionally, Block et al. (2018) analysed Signaling Theory on equity crowdfunding platforms. This theory focuses on mitigating information asymmetries between two parties, where the better-informed party conveys a quality signal to the less-informed party. The analysis of this research indicates that while the simpler language in updates positively affects crowd participation, business models, product developments, and promotional campaigns, the length of updates and information about the start-up team do not significantly influence participation. Another key finding of the study is that while easier readability boosts crowd engagement the day following the update's release, this effect diminishes after a few days.

In another study explaining the relationship between behavioural theory and participation, Zvilichovsky et al. (2018) investigated how different campaign parameters and informational notifications affect consumers' decisions to support a crowdfunding project considering Herding Behaviour, which is defined as the behaviour of individuals in a group collaborating without centralised direction.

Additionally, the Two Factor Theory (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman 1959: 111), which describes how values interact to enhance participation satisfaction or cause dissatisfaction, is applied by Medina-Molina et al. (2019) to investigate the factors influencing participation. The analysis identified two intrinsic factors linked to engagement in crowdfunding initiatives. Similarly, in the study by Kim et al. (2020), Attribution Theory, which elucidates how individuals use information to form causal explanations for events (Xie et al., 2022), and Trust Theory (Ma and Orgun, 2006), which seeks to identify the traits or values

necessary for participants to trust platform systems, were utilized. The goal was to understand why individuals engage in tourism incentive crowdfunding by developing an integrated theoretical model that examines the connections among antecedents, attribution, trust, and behaviour.

Some research referred to behavioural theories while examining the impact of various factors on engagement in various crowdsourcing platforms or contests, such as Self Determination Theory. Suen et al. (2022), Leung et al. (2021), Wang et al. (2020), and Wu et al. (2023) discussed the Self Determination Theory in their studies. Suen et al. (2022) found that needs based on SDT positively influence intrinsic motivation for engaging in crowdsourcing activities in their study. SDT needs are used as a framework to understand and promote crowdsourcing involvement, and it has been demonstrated that meeting these needs can increase participation and motivation (Leung et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2023). Furthermore, Gao and Jin (2021) used signal theory to understand user behaviour on crowdsourcing platforms in their research. They showed that increasing user online reputation and task rewards are required to promote more user participation on platforms. Improving task information quality and reducing information overload also have a beneficial effect on user participation. To guarantee platform sustainability, senders must provide high-quality tasks, and participants must engage more on the platforms.

The Second Research Question

When it comes to Research Question 2 (RQ2), which examines whether demographic features (such as gender, age, profession, and nationality) and psychographic features, such as values, personality characteristics, and interests) have an impact on crowd participation, we encountered several studies, such as Jakositz et al. (2019), Liu et al. (2020), Lorenzo-Romero and Constantinides(2019), Newlands and Lutz (2021), Upadhyay et al. (2022) explored the answers to this question in various aspects with different approaches. For example, Jakositz et al. (2019) revealed that participants were not driven by the cash prize offered for a public project to monitor water quality. On the other hand, when the demographic features of the participants were analyzed, it was revealed that older citizens and people who have children under the age of 6 were more willing to participate in such a project. Liu et al. (2020) investigated the impact of collected ideas on participation to increase the number of women in infectious disease

research fellowships. Lorenzo-Romero and Constantinides (2019) and Newlands and Lutz (2021) analyzed the effects of settlement on participation. As a result of this analysis, it was revealed that geographical differences have different effects on participation. In addition, Upadhyay et al. (2022) considered the generation and age differences to increase participation and worked on the factors that affect participation in online platforms.

Most studies address the types and factors of motivation to effectively engage participants on a crowdsourcing platform. Many articles have investigated motivational factors as the most important factors that enable participants to remain active on the platform. Motivational factors may include many elements such as rewards, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, feedback, and crowd voting. In the studies of Suen et al. (2022), Zhang et al. (2022), Wang (2022), Yang and Qi (2021), Zhang and Chen (2021), Leung et al. (2021), Chen et al. (2020), and Feng et al. (2018); investigations have been carried out on reward systems as a means of motivating participants in crowdsourcing platforms. Similarly, Acar (2018) aims to investigate how monetary rewards affect customer engagement and their level of creativity in firms' crowdsourcing communities. Acar (2018) found that financial rewards (compared to no financial benefits at all) can be advantageous in generating increased participation in crowdsourcing initiatives and driving users to produce more useful ideas, provided the rewards are substantial enough. However, even big payments have little effect, and smaller rewards might even be harmful in terms of promoting novelty and encouraging customers to come up with multiple ideas. It can be stated that large rewards increase participation more for short-term tasks, but this effect diminishes for long-term tasks (Shi et al., 2022). Platform administrators can encourage greater contribution from participants by designing appropriate reward systems (Chen et al., 2020; Gao et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2021; Suen et al., 2022; M.-M. Wang, 2022; Yang and Qi, 2021; Zhang and Chen, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). When designing a reward system, ensuring fairness in reward distribution is one of the emphasized points for increasing participation (Djelassi and Cambier, 2022; M.-M. Wang, 2022). In addition, factors such as community interaction and collaboration positively affect participants' motivation levels and sustained engagement (Wu et al., 2023).

The joy and satisfaction that an individual gets from the activity itself are referred to as intrinsic motivation, whereas external motivation refers to the indi-

vidual's behaviour based on the anticipation of reward or punishment. Some of the studies examined the impacts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on participation, along with the interplay between these two types of motivation. (Allah Pitchay et al., 2022; Shi et al., 2022; Suen et al., 2022). Other variables such as feedback and crowd voting have also been investigated in some studies (Chen et al., 2020; Gao et al., 2021). Beyond these studies, some of the studies analysed the effect of different factors on participation in online communities, such as gamification (Feng et al., 2018); platform trust (Djelassi and Cambier, 2022; Kim et al., 2020; Rodriguez-Ricardo et al., 2019; Si et al., 2020; M.-M. Wang, 2022; Wu et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022), fairness in a platform (M.-M. Wang, 2022), and how mobile devices act as both enablers and constraining factors for crowd work (Newlands and Lutz, 2021). Furthermore, fairness, financial rewards, and trust positively affect the willingness to continue participating in crowdsourcing (Huang et al, 2020; Wang, 2022; Rodriguez-Ricardo et al., 2019, Kim et al.,2020).

Intrinsic motivation factors, particularly personal growth, originality, autonomy, and hedonic motivation, as well as external motivation factors such as rewards, recognition, social status, social relations, experience, and career advancement, increase participants' motivation and positively affect their engagement in crowdsourcing activities (Shi et al., 2022; Suen et al., 2022). On the other hand, according to a study performed by Pitchay et al. (2021), intrinsic motivation increases participants' long-term involvement, whereas extrinsic motivation encourages short-term participation and is less effective in sustaining motivation eventually. Furthermore, community dedication enhances the relationship between intrinsic motivation and participation behaviour. Suen et al. (2022) found that intrinsic motivational factors have a greater effect than extrinsic motivational factors. As a result, developing intrinsic motivation is more essential than increasing external motivation. On the other hand, social factors (commitment, interaction, belief, status, etc.) have been found to have a substantial effect on participation (Shi et al., 2022; Suen et al., 2022).

According to Xiao et al.2022, the government positively influences platform adoption and participation in the crowdsourcing logistics platform through environmental protection policies and incentives.

Rodriguez-Ricardo et al. (2019) provided findings that address both our research questions RQ1 and RQ2. They discovered that internal locus of control

(LOC), which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to influence the outcome of events, enhances intrinsic motivation to participate in crowdfunding. On the other hand, crowdfunding is a Web-based phenomenon with a great deal of uncertainty, so trust plays a crucial role in crowdfunding. The study concludes that the influence of these personality traits on participation is mediated by trust in crowdfunding.

It has been demonstrated that both altruism, defined as concern for others, and an internal locus of control have a positive impact on the intention to participate in crowdfunding. Trust plays a mediating role in this effect. Specifically, individuals with higher levels of altruism and an internal locus of control are more inclined to trust the crowdfunding platform, thereby enhancing their intention to participate in crowdfunding. Similarly, regarding social exchange theory, Wang (2022) emphasized in the study that social beliefs substantially affect participation intention. Recognition, social status, job advancement, work experience, post-work benefits, work relationships, and social relationships boost participants' involvement in crowdsourcing initiatives.

Discussions and Conclusions

6.1. Discussion

This systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis contribute to the growing body of research examining motivational, behavioural, and contextual determinants of participation in online communities—particularly in crowdsourcing and crowdfunding environments. Synthesizing the findings from 41 high-quality studies published between 2018 and 2022, the results reveal that a dynamic interaction between psychological motivation, platform design, and sociodemographic diversity predominantly shapes online participation behaviour. The evidence points toward the convergence of motivational and behavioural theories as a robust framework for understanding the complexity of participation in digital communities.

A significant theoretical insight emerging from this review is the predominance of motivation-based theories — particularly Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Self-Efficacy Theory, and Social Exchange Theory — in explaining user engagement across various online platforms. The reviewed literature consistently emphasizes that intrinsic motivational factors—such as autonomy, competence,

relatedness, personal satisfaction, and self-expression—significantly influence user participation. On the other hand, extrinsic rewards such as financial rewards or social recognition can temporarily increase engagement,

In parallel, behavioural theories such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Signaling Theory, and Attribution Theory have provided explanatory mechanisms for understanding cognitive processes behind participation. These theories illuminate how individuals evaluate perceived behavioural control, trust, and risk before engaging in collective action online. The interplay between perceived competence, social confidence, and platform transparency emerges as a critical determinant of engagement intention and retention. Notably, studies employing Signaling Theory highlight how information quality, simpler language, and easier readability mitigate information asymmetry between project initiators and participants, thus fostering trust-based participation.

Furthermore, the bibliometric and thematic analyses show a clear clustering of research around motivation, trust, system design, and knowledge sharing, indicating that platform architecture and governance mechanisms play a decisive mediating role between individual motivation and actual participation.

When analysing the impact of demographic and psychographic variables, the evidence suggests that participation patterns vary significantly between these variables. Given that demographic and psychological features impact motivation, they are essential for shaping participation in online platforms. As a result, it is seen in most studies that motivation emerges as one of the most determining factors.

6.2. Implications

The study offers significant implications for both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, this review consolidates fragmented motivational and behavioural perspectives into an integrated framework, positioning online participation as a multi-dimensional construct influenced by intrinsic motivation, perceived self-efficacy, and trust-mediated social exchange. From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight actionable insights for platform designers, innovation managers, and policy-makers. Designing platforms that nurture autonomy, competence, and relatedness while ensuring fairness and transparency can significantly enhance user retention. Moreover, incorporating adaptive reward

systems that balance extrinsic and intrinsic incentives, alongside community feedback mechanisms, can foster long-term participation. For organizations leveraging crowdsourcing or crowdfunding, understanding demographic diversity and psychographic traits can enable the customization of engagement strategies—especially in cross-cultural or multi-generational contexts.

6.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its comprehensive scope, this study is not without limitations. The review focused exclusively on peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in the Web of Science database between 2018 and 2022, potentially excluding relevant literature or emerging studies from alternative databases. Additionally, the bibliometric analysis was limited to keyword co-occurrence, which, while revealing conceptual structures, may not fully capture deeper theoretical nuances. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the temporal range, incorporating multiple databases (e.g., Scopus, IEEE Xplore), and employing mixed bibliometric-textual analyses (e.g., topic modelling or content clustering). Moreover, longitudinal and cross-cultural empirical studies are needed to further validate the relationships between motivational drivers, platform affordances, and sustained participation.

Future studies could further investigate the link between the two research questions which examine the RQ1 with RQ2 - how particular theories—such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) interact with demographic and psychographic variables. For instance, SDT emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as intrinsic motivators for participation. These needs can manifest differently across demographic lines. Similarly, TPB's components—attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—may be influenced by cultural background, gender, and professional roles. Psychographic characteristics such as altruism and internal locus of control (Rodriguez-Ricardo et al., 2019) also may shape how motivational constructs (e.g., trust, intention) operate within these theoretical frameworks. Thus, RQ2 findings may supplement RQ1 and illustrate how behavioral theories operate differently across demographic and psychographic segments, underscoring the need for contextually tailored engagement strategies on crowdsourcing and crowdfunding platforms. This demonstrates the need to customize interaction techniques based on user attributes to maximize participation and effectiveness.

6.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this systematic review demonstrates that participation in online communities is a phenomenon embedded in demographics, psychology, and social factors, driven by the interplay among many factors. The findings emphasize that there is no single, linear way to increase participation in online communities, as engagement behaviour is inherently multidimensional. Recent studies reinforce this multifaceted perspective. For instance, Cyron et al. (2024) showed that participation patterns depend on social and structural characteristics. Similarly, Lingnau et al. (2025) revealed that supporters in subscription-based crowdfunding are primarily driven by altruistic, image-related, social comparison, and recognition motivations, which differ significantly from those in traditional time-limited crowdfunding. Moreover, Siamtanidou et al. (2025) emphasized that gamification and social interaction mechanisms effectively sustain engagement in data-driven crowdsourcing environments. Shen et al. (2024) indicated that supporters' crowdfunding intention varies by project type and perceived value and risk, highlighting that participation reflects both motivational and cognitive dimensions.

Together with the findings of this review, these recent studies provide converging evidence that online engagement is shaped by factors such as the interaction among psychological motivation, platform design, and socio-demographic diversity. Therefore, effective participation strategies should be adapted to the multidimensional nature of engagement.

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