CultureCase

How street performers attract income online

This research was conducted by **Meg Elkins** and **Tim R. L. Fry** at **RMIT University, Australia**

Summary

This paper looks at how buskers and street performers can use a digital platform to attract donations for their work. This is increasingly important as digital transactions are replacing the exchange of paper money and coin – a trend accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The research is based on data from individual donations between 2015 and 2020 to 3,757 active buskers in 121 countries with profiles on the online platform ‘The Busking Project’. It found that both the number of fans on an artist's page and the amount of information in their profile increased both the chances of a donation as well as its size.

Some things increased the likelihood of a donation, while other factors increased the average size of donations; a small number of factors increased both

Musicians, clowns and circus performers were more likely to attract online donations than other types of artists, as were any artists located in the UK, USA or Canada. Attitudes to online busking among artists and audiences must have been changed by Covid-19 since performers who joined the platform after the start of the pandemic had ‘a significantly higher probability of receiving donations.’ Musicians tended to receive smaller donations than other artists. The researchers think this is because circus performers and theatre performers are ‘more easily able to prime their audience to tip through their entire performance while musicians are limited in their ability to break their performance to ask for tips’.

Fan behaviour online is consistent with fan behaviour in real life

Donors who provided an email address when making their donation were more likely to give more. This is consistent with other research showing fans' desire to join a community and build a relationship with an artist. Likewise, the likelihood and size of donations increasing with popularity of an artist (measured by the number of 'likes' on the platform) reflects the behaviour of audiences wanting to join a trend and act like others in their group.

Keywords

social media **busking** **revenue** **crowdfunding**

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