
Creative Transactions: Exploring FinTech in the Creative Industries

Chris Elsdon

Design Informatics
University of Edinburgh
celsden@ed.ac.uk

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Abstract

In this paper, I introduce 'Creative Transactions' – a research project to examine new financial technologies and data-driven business models in the Creative Industries. In particular, this project seeks to explore how FinTech can create new 'special digital monies', that remediate relationships between creators and their audiences. The concept is practically illustrated through two brief fictional vignettes of new creative transactions for performing musicians.

Author Keywords

FinTech; Money; Creative Industries; Special Monies; Transactions

Introduction

In her seminal work on the 'social meaning of money', Viviana Zelizer develops the concept of 'special monies' [7]. Here, she argues that *"there are a plurality of different kinds of monies; each special money is shaped by a particular set of cultural and social factors and is thus qualitatively distinct."* For design researchers, Zelizer's work shows how the design of money – from the languages used to describe money, to its' physical representation – can profoundly shape the social relations and experiences around any kind of transaction. The contemporary relevance of this concept is highlighted by Kow et al. [4], in their discussion of how mobile money services create *"special digital monies"* and allow users to do important

Contexts for Creative Transactions

Creative Transactions may take place in a range of digital contexts:

Livestreaming

Many creatives have taken to 'performing' their work through platforms such as Twitch and YouTube, where viewers can offer live digital gifts to performers.

Crowdfunding

Platforms such as Kickstarter and Patreon allow performers to gain crowdfunding for one-off projects, and ongoing work.

Smart Ticketing

As tickets themselves turn digital, they could be embedded with all kind of 'smart' and programmable capabilities.

Streaming Platforms

Creative content is more freely accessible than ever through streaming platforms like Spotify – though artists see little direct income. Could more explicit financial transactions be supported through these streaming platforms?

relational work, through particular financial interactions. In this paper, we consider emerging forms of 'special digital monies' in the arts and creative industries. We term these '*Creative Transactions*'. This is a rich context to consider FinTech. Much of the arts sector is profoundly underfunded, and yet creative work is often considered priceless, or having values that transcend an economic valuation [3].

Specifically, we focus on the performing arts, and various means for financial interactions between performers and their audiences. Performers (from music and comedy, through to theatre and dance) depend upon delivering compelling experiences for audiences, often in a live context. Traditionally performers would earn the majority of their income through ticket sales – though these tickets of course could come in many forms, from a festival wrist band, to a mobile QR code. However, the emergence of livestreaming (especially amid the current closure of most performance venues) offers a new medium for creative transactions. Through a mixture of subscriptions, advertising, sponsorship and digital gifting, successful online performers craft new kinds of financial relations with their audiences (e.g. [2,6]). At the same time, audiences expect to receive recorded content for free, or very cheaply, through streaming platforms such as Netflix and Spotify. We also see many performers turning to forms of crowdfunding and crowd-patronage [5], where they cultivate a loyal and financially supportive fan base, to fund new work.

All of these platforms provide different kinds of 'creative transactions', and 'special digital monies'. The following two fictional vignettes explore the experience and implications of these transactions in some detail.

Vignettes of Creative Transactions

Vignette #1 Busking for Bits

Joelle had been a performer of one kind or another for years, but had always been busking. It's how she started, and even as she became a more established session musician, she found herself drawn to the idea of a spontaneous, public performance.

Of late however, these encounters were not on a bustling high street, but online, through a livestreaming website, Twitch. Originally a space for gaming communities, musicians had begun to establish a presence on the site.

In many ways, Joelle's act remained the same as it always had – original violin covers of popular songs. Her first online 'gig' had been as a guest on another friend's channel, but not long after she started playing her own sets. The numbers were small to begin with, but just like busking in the street, it wasn't really about drawing a huge crowd. But as she played more sets, there were some familiar faces popping up, and hanging out.

Joelle knew you could make money on Twitch, but wasn't really sure how to actually ask anyone to throw money, or 'Bits' in her virtual hat. In fact, the first time a viewer sent her any Bits it was quite unexpected. She was just about to take a break, when '*ChetBakerLives123*' sent her 100 Bits and thanked him for the "good vibes".

As her channel grew in popularity – and as Joelle started to devote more time to learning new songs, and engaging with some of her regular subscribers – the

money she earned through digital gifts began to feel more like an income, rather than just some spare change. She became more aware of the kind of songs and conversation that held attention. Sometimes she would even check the data, or watch back the stream to replay moments when a flurry of gifts or subscriptions had come in. She also knew now that he couldn't rely on the implicit invitation of an open violin case, but had to let viewers know how they could support her work – if they wanted to of course.

It felt good to have an audience: to know them, and to feel rewarded and acknowledged by them. Her shows were less casual than busking had been, but then, she had more skin in the game now. Streaming had become a job, rather than a hobby, and so she had to take it more seriously.

Busking in the street had become a rare occurrence. The last time had been on a beautiful day, when she was travelling with her kit to record a session across town. On her way back, an empty bench caught her eye; a perfect spot. Her case was propped open – to signal an intention, but of course with no real financial ambition. She couldn't remember what she had played that day. She remembered being more engrossed in the music, but detached from her audience. They had faces, but no usernames; one or two paused, but most were in a hurry. No one could 'subscribe', though perhaps she would play here again someday. She made £4.62 and bought an ice cream.

Vignette #2 Tickets that Talk

Now that fans simply scanned a QR code for access to the gig, most of the box office staff seemed rather surplus to requirements. The tickets were bought and stored on the Ted Sheeran app – and it certainly cut out some of the touts who normally hovered by the venue, hawking. But through the app, these tickets could do much more than get fans through the door.

Up to 24 hours before the gig started, fans could submit the songs they wanted to hear – they could even 'promote' their choices if they had any credit. The credit was returned if their songs weren't played in the end. Sometimes Ted himself would put out a poll for what song to open with, or which songs to play as part of a stripped-down acoustic set.

The credit fans could use to take part in these interactions could be bought with the ticket, or earned, through posting to social media sites, and wearing official merch. Fans who left highly rated reviews could also earn credit; or if they had to scan out of the gig early, they could have some credit refunded.

Not every fan went in for these interactions. A gig was a gig, and they didn't want an app for every artist they saw play live. But for some, the app became an extension of the physical venue: a place to build the hype, and perform their fandom.

Ted didn't need to manage the app himself. Mostly he let his management take care of it, and let him focus on the gig. He realized that he could now know more about his fans than ever before. Sometimes he would know how a gig was going to go before he stepped off

the tour bus. It might be a little formulaic, but at least he knew how to give his fans what they came for.

Reflections

Each of these vignettes suggests how new currencies, and 'special digital monies' [4] could underpin rich relationships between creatives and their audiences. There are opportunities to bring fans closer to an artist, giving them new ways to more directly support creative work. However, these transactions could also represent a commercialization of the fan experience, where many interactions become 'pay-to-play'. It's clear that there is a role for designers to understand the interactions and experiences these new currencies and data would afford, while mediating and bridging a range of values between audiences and performers [1].

These vignettes also raise considerations for the value and uses of transactional data. This data could give an artist remarkable insight into the nature of their fans support. A streamer could see precisely which parts of a song attracted the most engagement and payments from their supporters. Artists could learn a lot about a crowd before they even arrive at a venue. But of course, there is considerable potential for this engagement to become a surveillance of the audience experience. Through such technologies it could be trivial to identify 'high-value' fans, and seek to engage with them more directly to boost revenues. Of course, it may not only be artists themselves who can benefit from this data, but mediating platforms or management companies.

The design of creative transactions hence requires thoughtful mediation of how financial transactions can configure a rewarding relationship between creators

and their audiences. However, requires careful consideration of the wider financial and technical infrastructures within which these transactions take place, to ensure they reflect the values, of those involved.

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