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Knitting Ladies Online

Joy and Community in Knitting Podcasts

Marja Leena Rönkkö

University of Turku

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8141-7366>

Henna Lapinlahti

University of Turku

Virpi Yliverronen

University of Turku

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5126-0684>

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Articles

Introduction

People across all cultures and stages of life have an innate need to create, as demonstrated by the practice of craft-making. Crafting combines skilled handwork and intellectual creativity to produce functional or artistic items. It has been handed down through generations and encompasses a wide range of activities, including knitting, crocheting, quilting, woodwork, and carving. Historically, crafting has been integral to societal development, serving both functional and aesthetic purposes, but it also represents a tangible connection to people's cultural heritage and often reflects the customs and values of a community.

Since the turn of the millennium there has been a notable resurgence in textile crafts that can be attributed to a growing desire for personal expression and a return to hands-on, sustainable practices in a digitally dominated era. Research has shown that a lot of practiced knitting is now not only a meaningful leisure activity for various demographic groups (Myllys; Rosner and Ryokai) but also associated with feelings of empowerment (Myzelev). Furthermore, several studies have underscored its profound impact on health, well-being, and overall quality of life (Adey; Fields; Mayne). While traditionally seen as a predominantly feminine craft, researchers such as Beyer, Desmarais, and Morneau have studied the masculine perspective of knitting.

Contemporary reasons for knitting can be categorised into three broad areas: personal motivations, group effects (knitting *with* others), and altruism (knitting *for* others; Rusiñol-Rodríguez et al.). Unlike many crafting projects that are bound to specific locations and tools, knitting offers the flexibility of a portable work in progress, allowing hobbyists to knit virtually anywhere at any time (Rosner and Ryokai). Traditionally, knitting communities, often organised around projects and events, were found in public spaces like cafes and libraries (Price). In addition, in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift towards knitting festivals and meet-ups (Orton-Johnson) that offer knitters opportunities to gather at events centred on yarn, fibres, and all things related to them (Gajjala; Orton-Johnson).

Knitting in Online Communities

It is quite common for virtual networks and environments facilitated by technological advancement to become an integral part of modern knitting practice (Myllys). A number of online communities focussed on knitting have emerged on content-sharing platforms such as blogs, podcasts, YouTube vlogs, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Orton-Johnson). Modern technology allows knitting to expand beyond the realm of material creation into an experience that can involve photography and blogging (Orton-Johnson) or sharing information with the recipient of the knitted item as the project progresses (Rosner and Ryokai).

The first English-language knitting podcasts were published in late 2005 as audio recordings that listeners could download (Bell). Video-format knitting podcasts have been available on YouTube since 2010, with the first episode in Finland appearing in autumn 2015. Today, YouTube offers a wide range of communication possibilities to content creators who frequently encourage their audience to engage with them (Frobenius). On YouTube, podcasts often delve into the daily intricacies of an individual's life, hobby, or lifestyle, enabling the creation of personalised content that resonates with others with similar interests (Rodríguez and Levido). Engaging with knitting podcasts, whether by watching episodes or creating them, can be viewed as the contemporary equivalent of traditional knitting gatherings (e.g., Shen and Cage). These podcasts not only allow viewers to interact through comments and video responses but also enable content creators to attract and cultivate a community of like-minded enthusiasts (Gauntlett).

Through various publishing platforms and Websites, knitters can share information about their own projects, make collaborative plans with others, enhance their skills, and be creative contributors to their communities (Rosner and Ryokai). That kind of online community plays a significant role in exchanging knitters' perceptions of self-esteem and fostering meaningful social connections that offer support and empowerment. The diverse social communication that emerges out of and occurs alongside the hobby might even facilitate the formation of life-long friendships (Mayne). This was significant, for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when crafting found new digital forms, and crafts were also learned through digital communication platforms in both hobby activities and in school education (Kouhia). On the other hand, transferring knitting practices from their historical, geographical, and cultural histories can lead to a loss of rich, contextual knowledge, as these practices are deeply intertwined with the traditions, stories, and skills passed down through generations and might not be fully conveyed in online spaces (e.g., Robertson and Vinebaum).

Knitting podcasts have been studied in terms of the benefits and drawbacks they provide their viewers. Gregg explored the impact of knitting podcasts on their viewers' knitting and video-watching motivation and found a clear connection between knitting motivation and video consumption: the social interaction on YouTube and the inspiration offered by podcasters drove viewers to knit more. Furthermore, several studies have identified video watching as not only motivating but also potentially addictive, making it a time-consuming activity (Balakrishnan and Griffiths; Chiang and Hsiao; Gauntlett). This study aims to elucidate the characteristics associated with the typical Finnish knitting podcast and its production. For this, a single research question was posed: What are the key characteristics of Finnish knitting podcasts?

The data was collected from a survey distributed in Facebook and Ravelry groups themed around knitting podcasts. All 19 respondents were female knitting podcasters, whom we refer to with pseudonyms (H1-H19) throughout this article. The data were analysed using theory-driven content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon). We delve into the research findings from the perspective of individual empowerment, knitting skills development, and online community.

Knitting Podcasting as Individual Strength

According to our data, producing knitting podcasts can be an empowering hobby that enables individual development in both skills and identity. Knitting podcasters felt that during the hobby they gained self-confidence and that their knowledge of their strengths had grown. They better understood their potential and developed not only tangible skills but also their mental capacity through the hobby. Knitting podcaster H13 mentioned that her self-esteem was strengthened by the positive feedback her recordings received. On the other hand, H18 highlighted that by recording her knitting podcasts, she felt that she had made like-minded friends: "recording is quite therapeutic for me, as I don't really have live friends to chat with about knitting or anything else".

Upon starting their knitting podcasts, knitters often felt that their expectations were soon met. Podcasters could express their identity by producing content that reflected their own lives and by showcasing their knitting to others. They also found that they could bring joy to others with the content they produced and had the opportunity to share their passion for knitting with like-minded individuals. By watching other knitting podcasts, hobbyists found topics that they could address in their own podcasts. Individual self-expression conveyed personal values, which is

possible in such a setting. H3 highlighted how wonderful it was to find individuals whose style matched her own and how much fun it was to follow podcasters with completely different styles:

I have gotten so many ideas from others! Many patterns might go unnoticed, but when you see them on a "live" model, you might find knits that suit you. It's also wonderful to find individuals whose style matches mine. It's also fun to follow those whose style doesn't match – I often get inspiration from them too.

Both similarities and differences can thus motivate individuals, simultaneously influencing the development of each person's distinctive taste and style.

Showcasing One's Skills and Learning from Others

Based on the survey, making knitting podcasts allows enthusiasts to learn new things, show off their skills, and celebrate their personal growth with others. The podcasters felt they had gained confidence during the whole process of producing knitting podcasts. The knitting podcast community was described as a welcoming and uplifting place, where everyone is always keen to help others. Perhaps the most tangible benefit of the knitting podcast hobby was mentioned by a podcaster who, after starting to create podcasts, became so passionate about video editing that she now regularly uses that skill in her professional life. Creating a knitting podcast was motivated by the desire to produce diverse content, share one's own creations, and inspire others to try recently developed materials or knitting techniques. For example, H6 described her motivation as follows:

the opportunity to speak and share information about a hobby that's important to me. ... I get to share my passion for crafts. Additionally, [there are] viewers' comments on the videos and a few live meetings. Especially when someone says my videos inspired them or helped them try something new, it motivates me to continue making videos.

Feedback and positive comments from viewers about their own ideas encouraged podcasters to continue with the hobby and engage in discussions. Enthusiasts mentioned being delighted when someone commented on being inspired by the topic of a knitting podcast or perhaps used the videos to try something new and to learn. H3 was particularly pleased by this: "it's wonderful to hear when people say they got inspired by something I did".

In the present study, we observed that among knitting podcasters, dedication manifests itself in the all-encompassing nature of the hobby: someone who produces knitting podcasts is also likely to watch podcasts made by others. Indeed, enthusiasts said that watching other knitting podcasts is an integral part of the hobby. Many respondents reported often ($n = 13$) or sometimes ($n = 6$) watching other knitting podcasts. Knitting podcasters knit extensively so they have content for their podcasts, and while knitting they often watch other knitting podcasts, partly to enjoy virtual knitting companionship and partly for inspiration. H9 described the importance of watching knitting podcasts for themselves as follows: "knitting is a solitary activity, but when you watch podcasts, you always have knitting company".

Some enthusiasts mentioned simply enjoying watching other knitting podcasts because they found that activity pleasant and interesting. By watching others' knitting podcasts, enthusiasts stayed informed about current topics, such as ongoing collaborative activities, new releases, and

fashion trends. They felt they had learned new things about knitting and related topics, such as patterns, yarns, tools, and techniques. From other knitting podcasts, the podcasters also reported gaining peer support for their crafting, especially when they felt the need for it.

All those who created knitting podcasts were inspired to start their own hobby after watching podcasts made by others, which is typically an integral part of the knitting podcast hobby. Viewers often seek knitting companionship alongside their own projects and inspiration from new content. Every knitting podcast has its own publishing timeline, influenced by the different stages of knitting projects, other information to share (for example, related to upcoming events), and the constraints of podcasters' personal lives.

Some (five respondents) highlighted that the pressure to publish and unmet goals within the hobby diminished their motivation for podcasting. These pressures arose from a lack of time or the hobby becoming routine. H12 describes the situation as follows:

podcasting takes a tremendous amount of time, and after doing it for several years, the process begins to repeat itself and turns into a routine in the wrong way. I also don't feel that making unedited videos is my thing, so these factors together first diminished my enthusiasm and then I think I quietly stopped altogether (though I haven't announced it anywhere). It felt like podcasting took more from me than it gave.

Community as a Key Point

Our study's findings show that knitting podcasting serves as a way to connect, make friends, and share individual skills and knowledge. Those who make and watch knitting podcasts form an online community where everyone can find a sense of belonging. In this study, knitters initially hoped to experience a sense of belonging to a community before starting their hobby, as they wanted to share their passion with others. Nearly all enthusiasts emphasised the importance of social relationships in their decision to start a knitting podcast; they wanted to connect and interact with fellow knitting podcasters and knitters who watch knitting podcasts. Indeed, starting the hobby brought a wealth of positive and motivating experiences, which encouraged the participants to continue. Through podcasting, female podcasters were able to strengthen their social networks and positively influence one another while participating in traditional crafting skills and adding their interpretations to them.

Many knitting podcasters felt they had achieved meaningful milestones during their podcasting journey, foremost among which were matters related to social life, such as making friends and being heard. While knitting podcasts are often created alone, at its best it can be a hobby that involves a great deal of social interaction with others. Enthusiasts felt that the knitting podcast hobby allowed them to be seen and even become the centre of attention on their own terms. These women reported having achieved a status in the community through their hobby that enabled them to positively influence those around them. Almost all respondents saw the sense of community and/or finding knitting friends and acquaintances as the most significant reason for publishing knitting podcasts:

Community and the friendships I've formed through making my podcast and watching others. (H12)

Knitting meet-ups and related events; encountering other knitting enthusiasts both in comments and in real life. (H14)

Sharing their own creations emerged as a major motivator among enthusiasts: some felt that their other close friends were not as interested in listening to hobby-related details as they were eager to share them. Podcasters saw knitting podcasts as an opportunity to share even the smallest details of their own work with an enthusiastic audience: “engaging and interacting with people. I’ve gotten to know new people who are interested in the same things. Receiving feedback and personal growth” (H8).

Knitting podcasters were very dedicated to their hobby and strove to engage in life activities in a way that brought joy and contentment. Doing so was experienced as inspiring, productive, and captivating. Knitting podcasters feel that they gained benefits from their hobby and derived joy and pride from their achievements. One enthusiast (H14) stated that the hobby was important to her because it gave her an opportunity to talk with others and share information. H19 echoed this sentiment, saying that the hobby provides “an opportunity to bring something good to people and to oneself”.

Conclusion

The present study has revealed that knitting podcasts can be a highly motivating hobby for female podcasters, driven by factors like empowerment and self-confidence, skill enhancement, and recognition (e.g., Myzelev). The respondents in this study had experienced similar feelings and meanings in their hobby, that Seo and Jung and Kennedy, for example, reported in their studies. Most developed their knitting and recording and editing skills through their podcast hobby. When starting out, podcasters might begin with simple accessories, and they end up showcasing large, complex, and technically challenging garments. It is part of the excitement of the hobby: learning new things oneself and realising that others also want to learn through the posts one creates.

There is a culture associated with the hobby that revolves around collective activities, such as group knitting sessions and organised joint initiatives; it emerged from mutual excitement about something and the desire to work together as a community (e.g., Feger; Mayne; Törhönen et al.). It is precisely the collective nature of the hobby that meant the most to the respondents of this study. According to the study, communities built around knitting podcasts are formed based on collaborative interests and passions, facilitating a sense of belonging and mutual support among members. Podcast creators and viewers were seen as knitting friends, becoming an essential part of these women’s lives, sometimes even beyond the Internet (e.g. Mayne). It particularly highlights how women use the Internet to navigate and foster these communities, leveraging digital platforms not only to share knowledge and skills but also to create spaces for empowerment, collaboration, and social interaction. Furthermore, online communities provided women with unique opportunities to connect, learn, and grow together, transcending geographical boundaries. However, for some, this sense of community and the pressure to post led to excessive stress in everyday life. This resulted in having anxiety about meeting everyone’s expectations and often made the motivation to create more content disappear.

This research has raised but not answered questions regarding the role of masculinity in knitting hobbies and related podcasts, as it focusses exclusively on podcasts produced by women,

suggesting a potential area for future research. Additionally, exploring the experiences of crafters in physical local crafting groups would offer valuable insights.

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Author Biographies

Marja Leena Rönkkö, University of Turku

Marja-Leena Rönkkö, PhD, is a professor of craft, design, and technology education at the Department of Teacher Education, University of Turku. Her research centres on the importance of design and crafting, emphasizing cultures integrative approaches to crafting instruction for all age groups. Additionally, she has a keen interest in clothing and knitting research, motivated by her desire to advance pedagogical methods and deepen our understanding of various crafting.

Henna Lapinlahti, University of Turku

Henna Lapinlampi, B.Ed., is about to graduate with a Master's degree in craft, design, and technology education. She works as a craft teacher at a children's science school. Her Master's thesis addresses the motivation of knitters in producing podcasts

Virpi Yliverronen, University of Turku

Virpi Yliverronen, PhD, is a senior lecturer of craft, design, and technology education at the Department of Teacher Education, University of Turku. Her research interests focus mainly on craft and technology education in early childhood education and preschool education from different perspectives. Research into other topics brings meaningful variety to her scholarly efforts.

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