Communicating online microfinance as an effective poverty alleviation tool: a case study of Kiva

Stuart Grant

Communication for Development
Degree Project
January 2018
# Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................................................................................................. 3  
Introduction.......................................................................................................................................... 4  
1. Background........................................................................................................................................ 5  
   1.1 Literature Review: microfinance as a poverty alleviation tool....................................................... 5  
   1.2 Case Study: kiva.org................................................................................................................... 7  
   1.3 Research Questions...................................................................................................................... 10  
   1.4 Online microfinance and conceptual offshoots........................................................................... 11  
2. Theory ............................................................................................................................................... 18  
   2.1 Theoretical Background............................................................................................................... 18  
   2.2 Critical hermeneutics: Ricoeur’s textual interpretation................................................................. 19  
   2.3 Chains of equivalence.................................................................................................................. 20  
3. Methodology...................................................................................................................................... 22  
   3.1 Communication for development............................................................................................... 22  
   3.2 Content analysis.......................................................................................................................... 23  
   3.3 Research Method........................................................................................................................ 25  
   3.4 Limitations and Reflexivity.......................................................................................................... 26  
4. Case Study........................................................................................................................................ 27  
   4.1 Borrower contextualisation.......................................................................................................... 27  
   4.2 Narratives...................................................................................................................................... 29  
5. Conclusion......................................................................................................................................... 39  
References............................................................................................................................................ 41  
Appendix 1 – Typical borrower profile............................................................................................... 44  
Appendix 2 – Data set........................................................................................................................... 45

## Acronyms

- **DFID**: Department for Internal Development, UK  
- **IDP**: internally displaced person  
- **ICT**: information and communication technology  
- **INGO**: international non-governmental organisation  
- **MFO**: microfinance organisation  
- **MFI**: microfinance institution  
- **UN**: United Nations
Abstract

Microfinance is a significant component of financial inclusion, which has come to the fore in contemporary developmental literature and practice. It has been used as a poster child of millennial development. The various conceptual offshoots that are either symbiotic or causal to online microfinance are laid out here to demonstrate that as a poverty alleviation strategy, the efficacy of microfinance is at best debatable. There is also a positive reflection of online microfinance both cultivating cosmopolitanism and as being representative of a democratization of development. The research here looks at the communication practice of online microfinance – using the largest online peer-to-peer lending site kiva.org as a case study – to see what representations exist.

Drawing on Ricoeur’s discourse and a textual application of Laclau’s chains of equivalence, a content analysis is used to identify what immediate and latent narratives are present. This considers the presence and absence of word chains to convey, construct and conflate meanings through the text. To achieve this, a quantitative and qualitative approach is used to look at the data gathered, and also to contextualise the data through the related concepts set out in the first section.

The analysis shows two representations of online microfinance: firstly, a homogenization of meaning that fits a neoliberal discourse, minimizing the problems with microfinance as a development intervention; and secondly, a decontextualization of borrowers, rendering them placeless and apolitical, with the loan itself being of more weight than the life of the borrower.

Keywords: online microfinance, Kiva, chains of equivalence
Introduction

Chapter 1 places microfinance into context, tracing its beginnings to the current iteration of online lending. This includes a review of the relevant literature on the subject as well as examining the development discourses attached to microfinance. The section also introduces Kiva as the case study and research questions for the paper.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework applied to the research. This is broken into two sections: how to approach interpretation of a text, and then how to apply an interpretative discourse. Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutical approach is used as the overarching method to interpret a text. To buttress this method, the theory of chains of equivalence is described as a suitable developmental discourse to apply to the research undertaken.

Chapter 3 states the methodology, research design, limitations of the paper, and the relationship with communication for development. A qualitative and quantitative content analysis is put forward as the best approach to fit in with the theoretical framework used.

Chapter 4 shows the research undertaken through the case study. The chapter starts with a contextualisation of the borrowers before moving into a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the narratives found. It considers the implications of the research questions, namely a homogenisation and decontextualization of borrowers.

Chapter 5 finishes with a conclusion of the research and reflections on future research possible.
1. Background

1.1 Literature Review: microfinance as a poverty alleviation tool

Microfinance was created in an offline world using development models to financially empower poor people in developing countries. Roy (2010) sets out three contrasting paradigms of microfinance: (1) the Yunus pro-poor approach. Yunus states that credit is a human right. This approach views microcredit as ethical economics, not just a development tool. Tierney highlights that Yunus's approach is simultaneously poor-centric but also anti-welfare (2006:14). It stresses opportunity over equality or redistribution in the application of microcredit. (2) Creative Capitalism. This approach frames the poor as a lucrative market for investment. Organisations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation would turn Yunus’s phrase around and state that opportunity, not credit, is a human right. Corporate responsibility over individualism can foster real change (Gates, 2007: 27; Chu, 2007; Bruck, 2006). Robinson (2001) and Prahalad (2004) highlighted how online mechanisms of credit provision have opened up new frontier markets for capital accumulation that aim to eradicate poverty through profit. Young (2012) and Roy (2012) argue that this frontier capital has become a major strand of development. (3) Rejection of microfinance as a poverty alleviation tool. This approach underscores the danger of viewing microcredit as a panacea for development intervention. Rosenberg (2006:1) states that there is little empirical evidence to back up the effectiveness of microfinance programs. Guerin, Labie and Servet (2015) argue that microcredit can worsen the lives of borrowers through financial mismanagement or corruption, furthering a cycle of debt, exploitative MFIs, and poorly informed business strategies. David Roodman (2012), through his due diligence review, found microfinance has totally failed in its stated objective of poverty alleviation. Moreover, a 2011 DFID-funded review found that 'microcredit provided no clear evidence for any positive impact.'

The internet 2.0 made it easy to set up payments, facilitate, and speed up the implementation of loans. Vikram Akula (2008) highlighted that the microfinance sector used this to minimise

1 https://www.givedirectly.org/pdf/DFID_microfinance_evidence_review.pdf
transaction costs, minimise the margin of administrative error, and standardise the products and procedures. Microfinance has dented the informal credit markets by undermining debt bondage. The availability of credit also 'smoothes consumption', where without credit availability, local market supply and demand is pushed towards disequilibrium (Chowdhury 2006: 8). In their analysis of the communication methods of online microfinance, Sengupta and Aubuchon went on to state how mass media exposure has made online microfinance 'as accessible to lenders as Grameen Bank made microcredit accessible to borrowers (ibid 2008:28).

As far back as 2005, the UN made it ‘the year of microcredit’, highlighting the growth of the industry as a socio-economic intervention. Internet-mediated microfinance is now a strand of ‘development from below’, where individuals have the capability of interacting with development from the home computer (Carr, Dickinson, McKinnon and Chavez, 2016; Black, 2009). This democratisation of development has incorporated individuals in the poverty alleviation landscape, diversifying it from traditional organisations such as the World Bank or even the Grameen Bank (Roy 2010: 4).

Financial inclusion models that have direct connection between lender and borrower face technological barriers to the extent that they can facilitate direct lending in developing countries. Zidisha\(^2\) showcase how loaning directly to a business can be done without the need for field partners, volunteers and extensive on-the-ground administration.

Kiva.zip (section 1.2 for detailed analysis of the lending model) is an example of a model used to cut costs to the borrower through the use of technology. Currently, issues with available bandwidth and technological resources prevent it from widening to other countries. It allows borrowers with poor credit scores, a lack of collateral, or rejection from traditional banking institutions to post loans. The functionality of this platform allows communication between lender and borrower through a direct messaging function. This direct interaction has a series of benefits: as there is no MFI involved, it removes interest payments and hard-fixed repayment schedules, and it increases the chances of a lender becoming involved with the business as either a customer or brand ambassador as a result of the direct communication. Andrejevic considers interactivity –

\(^2\)www.zidisha.org/about
both explicit and implicit – is communicated as empowering to both the lender and the borrower (ibid 2007: 9).

Mobile banking has offered new opportunities for MFIs. Where mobile banking infrastructure already exists in a country, it has proven to minimize MFI operational costs, allowing the lending organisation to pass on lower interest rates to the borrower, and to open up new financial services beyond credit to individuals (Kumar, McKay and Rotman 2010: 12). However, this relies on the technological infrastructure already being in place. The cost, time and complexity of setting up the infrastructure restricts MFOs utilising this in new areas (Owens, 2009; Hughes and Lonie, 2007).

1.2 Case Study: kiva.org

Structure and goals

Kiva is a non-profit microfinance organisation that allows people to lend money via the internet to low income entrepreneurs. It was established in 2005 with its headquarters in San Francisco. There are 1.6 million lenders subscribed to kiva.org (not all are actively lending) and 2.6 million borrowers across 86 countries, of which 81 percent are female. The total value of the loans given out is just over $1 billion dollars. Kiva currently boasts a repayment rate of 97.1 percent. These statistics are accurate as of December 2017. The most recent set of financial data (2016 annual report) shows that 82 percent of funding comes from online donations, the rest consisting of institutional grants and private offline donations.

Kiva do not select the borrowers, nor does it administer the loans directly. Instead, the entrepreneur is selected by a pre-approved field partner (MFI). This field partner screens the applicants, vetting them through certain criteria, allowing only suitable loan candidates through to the Kiva portal. Kiva outline this process as their 'social underwriting'. This involves the borrower

3 https://assets.brandfolder.com/oy59ky-g6krag-1bs4mw/original/Kiva_Annual_Report_2016.pdf
4 There is an option to lend directly to the borrower on the filter category section, however the vast majority of loans are implemented through a field partner. For example, in the research undertaken for this paper, no direct loans were available for Colombian, female entrepreneurs, nor were any direct loans available for individuals for the country writ large.
having to meet due diligence procedure; having either the endorsement of a Kiva trustee, supplying documents, having on-site visits or recommendations from a field partner\(^5\). This screening process is meant to be universally standardized but the exact nature of the requirements that applicants must meet isn’t fully transparent. For example, to qualify, a borrower should have a solid business plan, but the extent or thoroughness of this remains opaque (Gajjala, Gajjala, Birzescu and Anarbaeva 2011).

There are 6,630 field partners and trustees that Kiva work with to administer the loans. Once a borrower is on kiva.org, the lender can read about the entrepreneur, the repayment and length of the loan, the MFI risk, and other lenders committed to the entrepreneur. The lender can then submit an amount to loan to the borrower. There is no interest payments on the loan. Instead, the progress reports and electronic journal entries from the borrower can serve as the interest 'paid' to the lender (Sengupta and Aubuchon 2008). The MFI is responsible for uploading entrepreneur profiles to kiva.org. Moreover, although under no binding obligation, Kiva encourages its MFI partners to promote business skills to the borrowers.

The tag-lines of the organisation are “loans that change lives” and “to connect people through lending to alleviate poverty.”

Kiva.org is the main platform but there are other areas that offer opportunities moving forward to diversify their approach. As already out in section 1.1, kiva.zip, a pilot program launched in 2011, is a platform similar to Zidisha (one of the main alternatives in peer-to-peer lending online) that allows direct loans between the lender and borrower with no middleman. The main drawback of loaning direct to the borrower with no MFI, is the borrower has to wait for the loan amount to be raised by the lending community. With kiva.org, the MFI often allocates the loan before the lending community has committed money to it. This ensures that entrepreneur can access credit quickly. A lot of entrepreneurs rely on time-sensitive market opportunities that require speed in setting up, which often peer-to-peer lending cannot match. Kiva Zip requires a trustee who vouches for the borrower and scrutinises the business plan. However, the implementation of the model in Kenya in partnership with the UNHCR yielded some positive results\(^6\)

Funding provided from the technological sector has allowed Kiva to explore ways to make the

---

5  https://www.kiva.org/about/due-diligence/field-partner-role
6  http://www.unhcr.org/54edf4479.pdf
application of microfinance more flexible and effective moving forward. Kiva Labs focuses on supporting refugees and growing social enterprises. It has also made loan repayments more manoeuvrable where profits are seasonal (such as farming SMEs), offering longer term loans to be used for things such as student tuition fees, and providing clean technology to reduce the energy gap, and leveraging mobile technology by using ICTs in areas that have the infrastructure available⁷.

The K-12 initiative, as part of KivaU⁸, introduced financial inclusion into the classroom. This project aims to move financial inclusion from an abstract concept to a practical day-to-day level. The curriculum ranges from kindergarten to tertiary education and educates students on financial literacy towards an holistic understanding of all services around becoming independently financially inclusive⁹. KivaU offers free educational tool kits and support to educators who want to bring financial inclusion into their institutions.

**Visual and textual communication**

Once a borrower has been approved to go up on to the Kiva portal, there are a set of factors that affect how they are represented. The MFI is responsible for uploading, maintaining and changing the profile page. This can lead to MFIs using a similar textual and visual blueprint across borrower profiles. This blueprint also has to fit into the wider web page layout of Kiva’s design. This restricts the variety of the profile pages, with all having a similarity of look and feel. The MFIs (and also the lenders) have more say in determining the representation of borrowers through their relative ease of online access. With this, lenders are more likely to be IT literate also. This can lead to borrower information following familiar tropes (Carr, Dickinson, McKinnon and Chavez 2016: 152).

There are several areas on the site aimed at connecting lenders. There is a gift shop where merchandise and gift cards can be purchased. The community forum is a space where lenders can

---

⁷ [https://www.kiva.org/about/impact/labs](https://www.kiva.org/about/impact/labs)
⁸ [https://www.kiva.org/kivau/intro](https://www.kiva.org/kivau/intro)

*page 9 of 59*
see and join different lending teams. Projects, memorials and testimonies are available here in what can be termed the wider Kiva community. This includes Kiva fellows. They are individuals or teams that add descriptions and narratives of the borrowers. The website also has journals where members describe, rate and recommend projects. The connectivity is aimed at consolidating lenders, bringing new ones in, and making the lending scene transparent through the sharing of information.

There are both explicit and implicit choices about the structure and layout of the website that affects borrower representation. Borrowers are categorised by geography, gender, business type, individual or group, loan amount, and loan deadline. Through these filters, borrowers are presented in a multi-profile results page. Using this design can help a borrower gain equal footing with similar borrowers. The negative aspect to that is certain categories fair better than others. Females, rural geographies, and agricultural sectors are more popular within their respective settings. For example, a female crop grower in rural Kenya would tend to secure a loan much faster than a male factory owner in Manila.

1.3 Research Questions

(1) In communicating peer-to-peer lending, is there a homogenization process of information?

(2) To what extent are borrowers decontextualized?

These research questions aim to examine the following subset of assumptions and questions:

i. Examine the narratives that link borrower representations to the concepts discussed around microfinance in section 1.4.

ii. What purpose would a homogenisation process have: what representations does this bring on both the lender and the borrower?
1.4 Online microfinance and conceptual offshoots

Financial inclusion and microfinance

After microcredit in the 1970s, microfinance followed, and within the last decade, financial inclusion became a main thrust of development practice.

Iyer (2015) defines financial inclusion as providing financial services to the poor at affordable cost. These services run the gamut from credit and transactions, to savings and insurance. Tangible and intangible digital technologies have been applied to positively affect inclusion. This includes online lending, mobile banking, and furthering internet connectivity. Despite the terminology of inclusion and the various financial services available, a main aspect of the sector remains the provision of loans.

Spivak stressed that looking at financial inclusion – through microfinance – as a development paradigm is fraught with imperial undertones. There is a neo-colonial framing of third world economic interaction (Spivak 1999: 3). Pointedly, looking at the financial inclusion of the poor through the social networks of online microfinance, many authors underlined the financialization of the poor in development contexts, with digital imperialism functioning through the digitalization of new finance networks, and the false sense of inclusion of the subaltern in the process (Gajjala and Birzescu 2011; Schwittay 2011; Roy 2010; Yartey and Birzescu 2015). Moreover, the use of ICTs in supplying credit has increased the information flow and required more inputs of the borrower. It has added layers of interventions to the borrower that were less pronounced or absent in offline microfinance settings. In accessing microcredit, face-to-face interaction has been superseded by a host of online transactions (Roy 2010, Schwittay 2011).

Bateman and Chang (2009) highlighted how microfinance ignores the role of scale economics. Supplying a glut of micro-enterprises can saturate an already hyper-competitive market. There needs to be a 'vibrant domestic market' where consumers' will spend cash (Pollin 2007). The domestic market may expand, but often not at the same rate as the number of micro-enterprises being added to it. The opportunity cost and relative returns of a new business operating in this environment are compounded by high interest rates set by the MFI (Huq 2004; Mosley 2001).
Providing access to credit to the 'financially excluded' is only one aspect towards inclusion. Looking beyond issues with domestic demand, there needs to be supply side support (Taylor 2012: 598). This includes business training, financial literacy education, entrepreneur workshops, money management classes and other services that will make the borrower more likely to succeed. Moreover, this has to go beyond economic intervention to the provision of social services related to health and education. To do this, many MFIs have widened their remit to become more holistic in the services they offer.

**Empowerment of women**

The academic language used around development is problematic. In deconstructing development discourse, Smyth shows how the term empowerment has been operationalized and reduced to a buzzword that takes away its original meaning. For example, the language of empowerment throughout the Millennium Development Goals is qualified to a restrictive sense that limits the understanding of empowerment. It is gauged in terms of wage employment or income potential and has become depoliticised (Smyth in Cornwall and Eade 2010: 145).

On a purely economic front, empowerment relates to the increased earning potential through the access to credit, leading to independent income generation. Beyond this, Duflo (2005) defines female empowerment as the improvement in the ability of women to access the constituent parts of development—such as health, education, earning opportunities, financial independence, rights, and political participation.

Microfinance as an intervention, projects the image of the empowerment of women. This is apparent in the visual representations of MFO websites and is also backed up through data. Eighty percent of kiva.org loans have been made to female entrepreneurs or female-led businesses in the five year period from 2008 to 2013, and sits at this consistent figure now (eighty two percent as of December 2017)\(^\text{10}\). Women hold a preferential status on Kiva. Ly and Mason (2010) studied how women will receive a loan faster and are more likely to go back for subsequent loans on the platform.

Microfinance is proposed as an important action in turning 'oppression to opportunity' in the book

\(^{10}\) [https://www.kiva.org/about/statistics](https://www.kiva.org/about/statistics)
and latter documentary 'Half the Sky' released in 2012. The book led to a movement that positions microfinance as a successful mechanism to give women an equal footing in patriarchal, poor countries. The movement also gained celebrity endorsement. Although celebrity advocacy in development has been cited as inauthentic, ineffective or weak (Brockington 2014; Kapoor 2012; Meyer and Gamson 1995), it is also true that such popular exposure undeniably increases audience to the issue (Cooper 2008, 2015).

In the traditional application of microcredit preceding the institutionalisation of the industry in the 1990s, women were typically given jobs or business roles that augmented domestic labour (Mayoux 1995:50). Complex gender dynamics in microfinance have been laid out by Karim (2011), Rahman (1999) and Rankin (2001). Moreover, the monies coming in (both the loan and the business-generated income) would be commonly controlled by the husband or male relatives (Lucarelli 2007: 83).

Opening up non-traditional financial channels to women, such as microcredit, had the appeal of changing or at least challenging patriarchal restrictions (Jain and Moore 2003:29). This image of female empowerment resonates with individuals in donor countries. It is a strong selling point that fits a favourable and expedient narrative of strong, independent, female entrepreneurs.

This empowerment can be misleading. Despite giving superficial empowerment to women – placing them at the forefront of MFO advertising, prioritising female-owned businesses, and cultivating awareness of oppression of women in poor countries – it is just that, superficial. The extent to which women face less patriarchal restrictions through microfinance has not been proven. In Malawi, Lonborg and Rasmussen (2014) showed there is a lack of robust data, not all the entrepreneurship is equal, and microfinance can harm women. Gobezie (2010) studied an increase in domestic violence, Li (2007) showed disempowerment and social ostracism, and Goertz and Gupta (1996) looked at husbands' appropriating monies and reinforcing patriarchal norms in their studies of female microfinance. Women have become a central force in the benefits of microcredit, but despite aspirations to changing/challenging the issues faced, it has just remodelled or altered the original state of play, little being changed. Dessy and Ewoudou (2006) highlighted how even through the easy access to microcredit, female entrepreneurs face a comparative disadvantage in operating in high-productivity activities due to the prevalence of patriarchal systems of regulations. Business credit is available but the opportunity to develop the

11 [http://www.halftheskymovement.org](http://www.halftheskymovement.org)
Democratisation of development and cosmopolitanism

Online microfinance platforms are an example of millennial development, where there is a democratization process: grass-roots movements that promote the (western) individual making the connection between their actions and how they can affect global poverty (Roy 2010:61). They communicate this message through an online space where individuals can be educated about development, participate through volunteering or lending, and remediate the information through their own networks. Chouliaraki (2013) marked the use of new technology furthering cosmopolitanism, where individuals become conscious of the lives and impact of others far removed from their own, and move from the digital space to real action to make changes.

The decentralisation of development comes through growing individual participation, an incremental diffusion of how decisions are made, and which actors make these decisions. Determining poverty capital is about the production and dissemination of knowledge (Roy 2010; Reille and Gilsoric-Mezieres 2009). The ability or ‘permission’ to speak can diversify where knowledge comes from (Spivak 1999: 191). Pablo Alejandro Leal stated that real development change requires a repoliticisation of the concept of participation. Crucially, this would need to happen outside of institutional development agencies and come from a grass-roots level (Cornwall and Eade 2010:96). Despite evidence of certain microfinance institutions becoming part of the institutionalised development industry rather than an alternative platform (Fejerskov 2015), there is a more pervasive aspect to it. By fostering a social movement at a grass-roots level, presenting the microfinance institution as an amalgamation of individual effort, supporting and raising awareness of poverty alleviation, it can further democratise the development industry through a cultivation of more globally minded citizens, furthering the cosmopolitanism of donor countries whilst simultaneously providing a voice for non-western actors. Cosmopolitanism is often conflated with humanism, the idea of ‘one family of man’ for example. This form of humanism presents a universal, one-world approach but leaves out the history and politics (Dogra 2012: 100). This fuzziness renders it apolitical and has lead many to suggest the need for a new liberal cosmopolitanism where the idea is less abstract and combines both the role of the individual but
also national/transnational institutions to cultivate cosmopolitanism (Gowan 2003; Calhoun 2003).

Online peer-to-peer lending is a form of 'lifestyle agency'. Chouliaraki stated that such light-touch activism fits into the daily, office-life of a western individual. Superficial solidarity is embedded through a public culture of consumption (2013: 178). Customer loyalty is built up through online marketing strategies that consolidate a global network of lenders that make it easy for individuals to find, research and lend to an entrepreneur. The process is simple and time-efficient. It represents a post-humanitarian communication practice that dualistically relies on the brand power of the MFO, and low intensity emotional communication, which focuses on the worth of the lender’s participation more than overtly emotive messages. Scott states this communication practice uses hypermediacy (text and images) through a simplistic mechanism that places the individual at the centre of the interaction, steering clear of emotional immediacy of other techniques such as shock effect imagery and suffering (Scott 2014: 154). The ease, convenience and utilisation of this online interaction satisfies the consumer's needs but simultaneously minimizes meaningful engagement with human vulnerability, creating what Chouliaraki would term dispositional irony: a marginalisation of both pragmatism (judgement) and privitism (empathy), with consumption subsuming conviction (Chouliaraki 2013: 180). Black stated that such interaction is little more than 'first world voyeurism' into development that is a hollow satisfaction afforded to a privileged few (Black 2009: 273).

Through a textual and visual analysis of Kiva with a subaltern theoretical approach, Yartey highlighted that paradoxically, through the web technologies that empower low income groups to speak - such as kiva.org - actually further social and economic inequalities through the use of said technology. The societal inequality that exists for these groups prior to online microfinance is not removed and in certain cases, worsens (Yartey 2017: 82).

**Difference and distance**

Development organisations and institutions are important carriers of material and cultural knowledge about global poverty. They both present but also constitute understanding of it in developed societies. They are seen as legitimate, proxy voices that present, represent and
disseminate understanding. Dogra (2012) looked at the way INGOs present development and identified common traits. Firstly, despite the massive scale and intricacy of global poverty, it is presented as much simpler, and as a technical or administrative issue rather than systematically political (ibid: 27). The communication messages are usually short-sighted organisational goals that include a range of assumptions. They have little wider assessment on public perceptions. There is an enhancement of distance and space between the majority world and the developing world. This exaggeration creates a modern, first world in contrast to an ahistoric, placeless third world. By doing so, the wider picture of how, where and why is not focussed upon as the problems of poverty are reduced through this dynamic. Dogra sums this up:

“The broader context – historical, social, political and economic – which explains (and often implicates) why such extreme poverty exists around the world and how it is connected to us remains unspoken” (Dogra 2012: 65)

Messages are often characterised by an oxymoron of 'difference' and 'oneness'. Across online MFOs (and INGOs also), there is a tendency to mimic each other and project a similar strategy of difference and oneness (Dogra 2012: 140).

When looking at online microfinance, this can be seen through the communication narrative between lender and borrower. The distance and difference between the two is exaggerated but at the same time, there is a cosmopolitan projection of 'oneness' to consolidate the lending culture. Cultivating a kinship between the two furthers a notion that the lender is not just involved financially but also emotionally. Moodie (2013) referring to Kiva, stated that the technological and visual connections between lender and borrower simultaneously fostered distance and closeness that minimized the financial relationship, promoting the emotional bond instead. The lender is given the illusion of being engaged in a mutual task. This relationship performs a social-emotional work creating a moral imperative that legitimises the unequal footing between the two. The risks the borrowers incur from the taking the loan are masked through this (Moodie 2013: 295).

An exaggeration of difference has been used to construct identities and narratives. Despite being an entrepreneurial, peer-to-peer lending site, White and Marsh (2006) noted how Kiva uses images and text to portray borrowers as a receiver of charity rather than as a business person.

page 16 of 59
Borrowers were presented as vulnerable and in need of help. Their study concluded that Kiva reinforces a development interaction that is paternalistic and which fosters an ideology of charitable progress.

**Microfinance and neoliberalism**

Internet-enabled microcredit is often vaunted as a neoliberal success story. It changed philanthropic development when it first arrived. It replaced donation with humanistic investment. It also personalised the distribution of aid. Oxfam and other large INGOs, would use online space to garner funding for *their* projects whereas Kiva and subsequent online MFOs gave the lender control. The lender could personalise interventions to where they saw fit. The notion of the poor being able to help themselves transform their lives through micro-enterprises is appealing to those who believe market liberalisation is key to social development. There isn’t the bureaucratic, top-down decision making of large aid groups. The lender gets value from their involvement in the process and the borrower can help themselves move out of poverty.

But it is not as clear-cut as this. Microfinance does not operate outside the influence of wider factors. It exists within a particular set of economic, social and political agendas. Development practices are seen as a movement of monies and resources from developed to developing countries. Clough (2016) demonstrates that this flow is not one-directional, and is not increasing as much as many would believe. Soederberg details various studies that approach individual debt through neoliberal development. She goes on to argue that debt relations facilitate capitalist social order. Debt is politicised as an agent of neoliberal policy that reinforces unequal power relationships between the developing and developed world. Through debt, the poor are integrated and consolidated into the financial sector where market-dependence on consumer credit is how basic subsistence needs are met (Soederberg 2013: 540). By incentivizing debt, it becomes an industry standard used as a poverty alleviation tool. Other authors have also stated that it exploits social disadvantage and isolation to fit in with the system of accumulation by dispossession (Rankin 2013; Shakya and Rankin 2008; Weber 2002). Detailing why the model is so popular in the development community, Bateman and Chang sum it well:

“The microfinance concept is linked to neoliberalism and the globalisation project. It is therefore
supported so strongly and uncritically because it is in agreement with the international development community’s preferred economic and societal model based on self-help and individual entrepreneurship” (Bateman and Chang 2013: 30)

Digitally mediated platforms have widened and deepened connectivity but this connectivity is power-laden and unequally spread. Visual technologies have the capacity to present partial, situated knowledge as total or full. They can do this through the presentation (and lack thereof) of particular messages that can lead the reader down a particular path. Brighenti (2012) argued that ICTs impose certain information flows that differ between online and real life spaces.

In appearing to enable and empower poor people through accessing credit, Kiva present connectivity as transparent and placeless. This raises a number of issues. Firstly, the transparency and connection the lender is afforded is a thing of misdirection. In their analysis of Kiva, Carr, Dickinson, McKinnon, and Chavez stated that the organisation offers a superficial connection. The lender’s capacity to 'do good' is replaced with a 'feel good' end (ibid: 154). This displaces other development interventions that can be less problematic. The ‘flattening’ of borrowers – using transparency and online connectivity to foster a positive image of microfinance whilst concealing the economic and political impact of debt on the borrower – results in a naturalisation of the coerciveness of debt. The narrative of microfinance, and the marketization of the industry writ large, downplays inequality across all spheres as it fits conveniently into a system that integrates the poor into the financial sector (ibid: 152; Soederberg 2013: 53).

2. Theory

2.1 Theoretical Background

This section looks at the theoretical framework that will be applied to the case study. The main concepts are explained and placed into a wider position where they can be used to inform the research. Critical hermeneutics is used to approach understanding of a text. The concept of chains of equivalence will be fleshed out to show how it will be applied to the research undertaken here.
2.2 **Critical hermeneutics: Ricoeur's textual interpretation**

The purpose of hermeneutical research is to provide a method to best identify the interpretation of a text. Ricoeur’s method of textual interpretation focuses on the comprehension of the text rather than the actual creation. There are four principles to this discourse: (1) temporal phenomenon. All discourse - both the writing and reading – take place in an historicised, social context. (2) Discourse as subjectivity: this reflects the subjectivity of the author, but also the host of other agents that are applied to the production of discourse. Subjective discourse, as Ricoeur stated, is inescapable but acceptable due to the fact that it is the conceptual over the practical world that frames understanding. (3) Discourse as an agent of change: Ricoeur stated that all discourse has a purpose to either describe or change the world we live in. It 'refers to a world which it claims to describe, to express, or to represent. It is in discourse that the symbolic function of language is actualized' (ibid: 96). (4) Discourse as a communicative act: all text, both written and oral, is part of a wider context where there is an audience beyond the immediacy of the message communicated. In this sense, a piece of text can be created to communicate with the interlocutor at a time, place, and with a specific meaning intended, but the discourse of that text can be interpreted regardless of time, place or intended meaning. 'In escaping the momentary character of the event, the bounds lived by the author, and the narrowness of ostensive reference, discourse escapes the limits of being face to face. It no longer has a visible auditor. An unknown, invisible reader has become the unprivileged addressee of the discourse' (ibid: 97)

There are three acts to happen through any speech or text: locutionary (a phrase as a message between the speaker and the audience), illocutionary (the interlocutor expects action from the message) and perlocutionary (the words in the message are actions themselves). Through these processes, the reader or listener can gauge understanding and elicit meaning. Here, there is an important departure between written and spoken language. Interpretations of a speech are restricted to the environment it was born to: to an extent, the speaker can frame or control comprehension of the words. Meaning is situationally derived. With written text, the author loses this ability, and the reader determines meaning. Illocutionary and perlocutionary function diminish significantly when words are written. The text's utility lies in its destination rather than its creation, rendering the reader as the ultimate authority.
This discourse places emphasis on the reader, not the author. Building on a semiotic approach, understanding cannot be drawn from the author's intent but from the reader's appropriation of the text. It is the reading not the writing of a text that is significant. There is a dialectic of “Erklärung” (explanation) and “Verständnis” (understanding, comprehension). This leads to what Ricoeur termed the social science methodological paradigm. In order to explain or further understand a phenomenon, the reader needs to have at least a partial understanding of what this phenomenon is prior to reading. Understanding pre-empts explanation; furthering understanding relies on pre-conceived strategies of explanation that colour the research. This in turn raises problems of the validity of the study (Ricoeur 1973: 104). In order to have something explained, the reader needs to have existing knowledge. This understanding and explanation dialectic can be approached by making a guess about a phenomenon and proving or disproving its validity. This gives the balance between objectivity and subjectivity where the interpretation leads to validification (ibid:107). Ricoeur termed this the hermeneutic circle. Through this way, interpretation moves forward from a basic understanding, where the reader has a superficial grasp of the text, to a more full understanding, where the reader can understand both the sections of the text in relation to the whole text, and vice-versa, the whole of the text in relation to its parts. In this way, Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation provides researchers with a method of developing intersubjective knowledge.

2.3 Chains of equivalence

Laclau and Mouffe used the term chains of equivalence in their discourse in hegemony and socialist strategy (1985). In it, a chain starts when a single demand or proposition moves beyond its immediate situation. In their terms, an anti-system message that bears no wider significance (the particular) transcends its position and is applied to a chain that bears a wider message (the universal). The particular message is co-opted into the universal message where the meaning of the particular is subsumed into the narrative of the universal. Despite each part of a chain having its own nuanced and particular meaning, these meanings are subsumed into a collective, universal meaning. Looking at populism, Laclau then went on to say how language is used as a specific mechanism to form these relations of equivalency. A piece of writing becomes textured through
recurring chains that lead the reader to take a particular homogenized understanding that breaks from the understanding that would be taken from the words/concepts if they were used outside of the apparent chain (Laclau 2005).

Laclau and Mouffe stated that discourse can be used like a toolbox to apply to different fields of research. Some tools will be of better use than others, and in the case of most applied research, there has to be both a useful object to use the tools on and a useful set of outcomes to justify the use of said tools (2008:3).

Taking this application on, Cornwall and Brock (2006:48), used this discourse as a basis to approach development language. Here, word chains are used to convey universal meaning that depart from the particular meanings of each word in a chain. The way that words are strung together in a text construct a particular meaning or set of meanings. The more words added to the chain, the more importance is attached to the linkage between them. Words that are congruous with other words in the chain will supersede more dissonant, challenging words. Despite each word having their own set of discourses attached to them, the overall message is singular.

In C4D literature and information, Cornwell and Brock highlighted how these chains lead to a process of homogenization, where consensus of meaning neutralizes challenging elements. Put another way, carefully selected words can combine in a text to convey a concept that is sanitized from its original meaning.

“Pared down to the elements that would permit coherence, the terms that form part of today’s development jargon are reduced to monochrome.” (Cornwall and Brock 2006:48).

Words should be viewed as clusters rather than as individual. Placing a word within a cluster means that the collective meaning of the cluster is interpreted rather than the actual meaning of the words. A quote from Cornwall serves as an example of how this plays out in practical terms:

“Used in a chain of equivalence with good governance, accountability, results-based management, reform, and security, for example, words like democracy and empowerment come to mean something altogether different from their use in conjunction with citizenship, participation, solidarity, rights, and social justice. In either chain, other words that might be added – such as freedom – would come to mean quite different things.” (Cornwall in Cornwall and Eade 2010: 15 original italics)
Using this approach in the case study, the value and interpretation of word chains will be analysed to see if there is a deviation, flattening or homogenisation of meaning. Departing from the above approach, this study also looks at the significance of words/word chains that are not present, looking at the significance of their absence as well as their presence.

3. Methodology

3.1 Communication for development

Using online microfinance as a development practice is not what can be termed 'aid intervention'. It is not a charity. Individuals and groups give money to businesses with the result of getting their money back. They are encouraged to reinvest their money to another business once the loan has finished, but are not bound to this action. It is a loan not a donation. This approach sits at odds with traditional international development paradigms. It cannot be viewed as a direct subset of international development. The organisations are non-profit and work in tandem with larger institutions and agencies, but cannot be lumped in with the ascriptions attached to these macro-level actors as they operate in such a different manner. Placing them within a development practice is problematic. Offline microfinance predating the internet, such as the Yunus pro-poor approach, could be placed within ethical economics and redistributive development focused on social mobility and self-help. But online microfinance organisations work within a wider set of variables that preclude sitting it neatly within the development landscape. The concepts attached to online microfinance set out in section 1.4 outline what these issues are.

In approaching communication for development, how knowledge is both constructed and mediated is central to any understanding. Horst (2014) outlined how there has been a shift in C4D where knowledge is constructed and then communicated through different forms of interaction. A lot of this interaction happens digitally, with an opening up of possible interaction spaces in which to mediate information. Half-truths or partial knowledge presented as fully-fledged knowledge can be muddied in this arena. Before the internet was around, Haraway (1988) cited the danger of
coming technology to present information as infallible or total whilst ignoring its own partiality and reflexivity.

So when looking at C4D by organisations such as Kiva, there is a strangulation of information about the effectiveness of their interventions. Whilst not being dishonest about their roles, the lack of information about possible negative consequences of their interventions pushes them into disingenuous territory. An individual who went on to the Kiva website and did some research into microfinance (provided by Kiva in the links section on about us) would come away with a positive view of its efficacy as a poverty alleviation strategy. The negative aspects of microfinance are either alluded to or absent. Communicating development in this format presents change in a very deliberate and constructed way.

3.2 Content analysis

This section will introduce content analysis as a methodological framework, specifically, applying a summative content analysis to the case study. Both quantitative and qualitative methods will be applied to look at manifest and latent data. The concepts outlined in section 1.4 are used to buttress the qualitative approach to contextualise the findings. Not only the the observable text, but also the underlying meaning will be analysed.

Qualitative content analysis is a wide field. Denzin and Lincoln stated that on a basic level, it can be placed in a constructivist approach where there is no objective truth about reality (2000: 2).

Mayring stated that using qualitative content analysis requires contextualization that is open to interpretation. The researcher has to be aware of their own subjectivity in this regard. Moreover, the coding process is not automatic and this also needs an awareness of partiality in the construction of categories. Mayring suggests that to acknowledge this partiality, coding should be applied in a deductive way to the text (Mayring 2014: 30). The fact that content analysis in itself is independent of a theoretical framework does not preclude the need to approach the discourse of analysing the text. Julien sums this up as:

page 23 of 59
“Qualitative researchers using a content analytic approach recognize that text is open to interpretation, reflects multiple meanings, and is context-dependent.” (Julien 2008: 120)

Going on from this, Julien also identifies that the gathering of themes from the data can be both obvious and apparent, but also 'deeper inductive insights' inferred from iterative and recursive textual analysis (ibid: 120)

Identifying themes – both manifest and latent – is usually an iterative process: the text is read, categorised, then revisited and refined to flag any contradictions and falsehoods. A qualitative analysis has all of the hallmarks of a quantitative approach but with several added aspects. Mayring identifies the following as key: 1. the text has to be placed in a definite model of communication. 2. Rule-based analysis. All findings should follow a previously ascribed procedure. 3. Categorisation of the data is needed, as is feedback loops to re-examine the validity of the categories. 4. Qualitative analysis should be placed in a theoretical framework and should also be inter-subjective: the findings should be applicable to other related studies through triangulation to check reliability (Mayring 2003: 44).

The case study in this paper will follow Mayring's 3-step approach to content analysis to broach the research questions set out. This is summary, followed by explication, and finishing with structuring. In order to apply these steps, a flowchart diagram can lay out the process:
3.3 Research Method

The model implemented for the quantitative research focuses on keyword analysis. Here, the process is laid out following Mayring's method.

**Coding, summary, explication and structuring**

After formulating the research questions, the borrower story section of the profiles was chosen for analysis. Sections on the loan details, field partner, participating lenders and 'more information' section were not collated. This followed a deductive process determining text exclusively pertaining to the borrower to be used. A total of thirty profiles were taken in the study. During this point of the research, the online software Textalyser\(^\text{12}\) was used to conduct word frequency research on a smaller set of profiles to determine a sample which informed the validity of its use on a larger scale.

The text from the profiles analysed was drawn together as a single dataset and first put through Textalyser. The software sorts the words into occurrence and frequency through a percentage of the full text.

The data was then exported through the program KNIME\(^\text{13}\). The program functionality allows for removal of unwanted terms to streamline the data. For example, conjunctions, pronouns and possessive pronouns (such as *but, and, she and her*) were flagged and not taken forward as relevant information for the analysis/interpretation stage. The selection and deletion of words was informed through an interpretative process that would yield more useful data.

The 'tokenization' function in the software allowed for words to be colour-coded and placed under user-defined categories to be separated accordingly. The number and frequency of each word was collected. Then, categories were drawn up under initially broad headings to place the high-frequency words under. Once complete, the category headings were revisited and refined to better focus upon the research questions set out. To include latent data linked to the research question, categories that had few or no keywords were retained to inform wider narratives of missing or

\(^{12}\) [www.textalyser.net](http://www.textalyser.net)

\(^{13}\) [www.knime.com](http://www.knime.com) As the research undertaken was small-scale, a lot of the functionality the software has was not used. The full dataset and research design did not require using semantic analytics or advanced textual analysis functions available.
underused words in the qualitative analysis section. In practice, this meant keeping a category of socio-political keywords despite a lack of keywords to place under this heading. Their absence was an important pattern.

After this process was complete, the keywords under each heading were then revisited to see what word chains were present under each profile (or across profiles). Chains of words were then bracketed across categories to see what patterns could be found. For example, words from the family category being used in the same sentence as words from the finance category.

**Information, analysis and interpretation**

Themes and patterns were drawn from the data. As the research undertaken was very small-scale, word chains were hard to find and difficult to present as robust data. Following Mayring’s validity procedure, a rule-based research design was implemented. The usage of word chains was limited to when repeatable examples of the same chain were found in more than 20 percent of the data (six borrower profiles or more). To be consistent with this rule, word chains found were only included in the paper when they met this parameter. To overcome this issue, in the qualitative analysis, the absence of word chains was analysed to feed into wider narratives observable by the lack of certain chains in addition to their presence.

### 3.4 Limitations and Reflexivity

One of the major limitations of using both a quantitative and qualitative content analysis is balancing the immediate and latent information; focussing too much on the former can mine a lot of data but can sacrifice on wider concepts. Conversely, looking primarily at latent narratives can miss more obvious points, and there is always a danger in trying to join dots that are not there, conflating narratives incorrectly, or constructing straw man arguments. Striking a good balance can be a hard path to follow when the data researched is small. The conclusions here draw from a limited sample and as a result, the paper would of benefited from a larger pool of data.

This ties in to another issue. In conducting qualitative analysis, it is difficult to set aside knowledge that has been picked up through the literature review of the subject. Ricoeur underlines this point when stating that new research is always tied up to previous understandings. Reading dozens of
journal articles about specific traits, narratives and patterns in online microfinance is going to weigh heavy on any new research into the subject. In the small-scale research undertaken here, it is was impossible not to be consciously aware of looking out for these traits, even when there was a lack of quantitative data to draw conclusion from. During the research stage, there was a subliminal 'tuning in' towards concepts flagged in other papers that was hard to tune out. Having an awareness of this limited it, but it was difficult to remove completely, conveying a subjectivity to the findings.

Other methods could have been applied to the case study. For example a textual analysis of both all the text and pictures of a smaller sample would of given a deeper but narrower conclusion. Here, pictures, videos and non-textual data were not looked at. A semiotic analysis of the images on Kiva would work well in addition to the study undertaken here. A further, more in-depth study would benefit from its inclusion.

Online loans on Kiva are time-sensitive. They vary in length, but many borrower profiles will be removed as soon as the loan amount target is hit or the loan expiry date has been reached. They are no longer accessible on the website. This makes it difficult to research. A borrower page that was studied will disappear within a month for example. The coding agenda stage of research had to be done in a condensed period of time as entrepreneurs will be removed on short notice. This limited the verification and revisiting of data to a tight time frame. After the dataset was gathered, it was impossible to space revision over an extended period. This curtailed the ability to reflect on the data gathered. Everett highlights this issue when conducting Internet research. The non-permanent, fleeting information on websites “necessitates the immediate downing and printing of those sites” (2009:11). Following Everett's approach the data gathered here was screen captured and saved offline to counter this issue.

4. Case Study

4.1 Borrower contextualisation
The profiles were selected by gender, geographical location, business area and individual/group entrepreneur. To narrow down the analysis, the following borrower filter was applied:

*female, individual Colombian entrepreneurs in the retail/agricultural sector.*

There were several reasons for choosing this set of filters. There is a strong narrative around microfinance as a mechanism for female empowerment. By focussing on women, the analysis can open up how this is specifically communicated to the lenders, and how the borrowers are represented. Moreover, choosing individual businesswomen mitigates other variables that would come up when looking at groups. Patriarchal control over finances is difficult to analyse when there is more than one entrepreneur to a business. Personal history and individual backstories are either omitted or bundled together in group business profiles. Individuals have a more detailed account in this regard.

Colombia has a set of social, political and economic factors that made it a suitable study area. The country has a significantly high number of IDPs. As of January 2017, 2.7 million people have been internally displaced. In the first six months of 2017, there had already been 79,000 displaced through conflict, violence, and natural disasters. There are no displacement camps in the country. Most displaced persons are from rural areas and move to informal housing in the cities. Over a third of IDPs live along the Pacific coast where the geographic location has one of the highest number of landmines per-square mile and also a propensity to have natural disasters. A report by Refugees International found that female IDPs in Colombia are disproportionately impacted. Many being unable to apply for government benefits and registering for the victims' registry for post-peace agreement policies aimed at resettling displaced persons. The country had a six-decade civil war which was brought to an end with the disbanding of the rebel groups in the last few years. However, IDPs often find their home territories difficult to return to due to fear of continued rebel insurgency, crime, large-scale land acquisitions, and illegal mining. This makes it a hostile environment for resettlement.

---

14 [http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/colombia](http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/colombia)
16 [http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=country&docid=584eae0d4&skip=0&category=COI&coi=COL&searchin=title&sort=date](http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=country&docid=584eae0d4&skip=0&category=COI&coi=COL&searchin=title&sort=date)
Financing the poor in the country through microcredit draws heavily from this demographic. Geographical upheaval, a lack of credit history and forced work replacement mean that microfinance is a feasible option for individuals looking to start or build on new settings. By looking at both the retail and agricultural sectors, there are both rural and urban entrepreneurs to analyse. Retail being largely urban, agricultural businesses being predominantly rural. Moreover, these two sectors make up the majority of all Colombian, female borrowers on Kiva.

The borrower profiles are standardised to fit the page design. Each borrower profile shares a similar display. The length is between 150 and 200 words. The structure follows a pattern. First, there is an introductory paragraph. This section will give the name and a brief backstory of the entrepreneur. Next, the area of business is laid out. Here, usually the work history and length of time the entrepreneur has held the business is stated. The justification for the business can often be found here. For example, the reason why the entrepreneur started the business or why they are working in that market. The market area is then described. This looks at where the entrepreneur will work and who the customers will be. This is followed by a section on what the loan is for; what materials or services are required to start/grow the business, and how this will be implemented. The profile then signs off with a single sentence explaining the USP of the loan under the tag-line 'this loan is special because'. Appendix 1 shows a typical borrower profile.

4.2 Narratives

In the hermeneutic analysis of word chains that are present or absent through the profiles, the interpretation of the text is anchored to the subjectivity of the author, and to both its discourse as an agent of change, and as a communicative message. Ricoeur determines that all written text is created in a specific social and historical setting, with a particular message meant to be taken from it. However, this intention of meaning can change depending on who reads it and when it is read. Looking at the text here as an agent of change, it is a linear process of engaging lenders to give money. The communicative message used is the deployment of word chains to construct repeating narratives to achieve this end. Written text is limited to perlocutionary function. Both locutionary and illocutionary capacity are minimised as the words are not spoken, but written. As such, meaning is situationally derived.
Chains of equivalency are used through the profiles to reduce possible contrasting interpretations. The more standardised the message is, the lesser the departure away from the author’s intended message is likely. However, when approaching the interpretation of the word chains analysed here, there has to be reflexivity of an important factor, namely, the role of translation. Originally in Spanish, the information submitted by the borrower has been translated into English. By converting the information to another language, the translator has to represent the original meaning as best as possible. Words in Spanish that are directly translated into English can have a nuanced or noticeable difference in meaning. A study of the original message in the language intended may throw up a different set of results. This brings in yet another level to the interpretative approach. The process of interpretation can become a theoretical rabbit hole, where it is difficult to draw a line as to how far to go in without losing sight of a practical application. As each profile states that the text is a translation, and also offers the original language profile, this interpretation issue is set aside through the analysis.

Family

Word chains – strong family, mother, daughter, household

Each profile has content relating the borrower directly to a concept of family. Sixty percent of the profiles used both words 'family' and 'children' in the opening paragraph. In the other cases, there were at least two words linking the borrower to a family unit. 'Mother', 'household', 'daughter', and 'sons' appear regularly. Applying a chain of significance here, Cornwall and Brock (2006) suggest that words used in conjunction with particular other words convey a singular, meaning. Here it was common to see 'family' be used with 'strong'. The borrower is often placed as part of a strong family. But what a strong family actually means is a little hazy. The reader is left to use prior information.

18 A representative word chain on family. Available as the heading under the 'lend women' filtered page: https://www.kiva.org/lend/women
understanding of what a strong family is. In a Ricoeurian definition, this prior understanding will always colour any new understanding gained through a text. The reader has to contextualise what a strong family is. This usually leads the reader to term it through their own experience and understanding. However, is the meaning of a strong family universally standardised? A nuclear family unit in a developed country with a dual-parent income would have a different definition than a displaced, single mother in a developing country. There are cultural issues that borrowers face that inflect what a strong family may mean. For example, there are issues of appropriation of monies through patriarchal norms in many areas. Does the fact that a husband or male relative take control of the finances make it a strong family? The absence or minimal presence of other chains of words ties into this. Only 17 percent of the profiles contained the word 'husband', 'spouse', 'partner' or a word that linked the borrower to a relationship. And where this did exist, a proportion of the use of a partner was to explain a separation, divorce or death. There is a promotion of a strong family, but at the same time no prominent role for a partner within this representation. Applying the word 'strong' with family or the household gives off a less physical and more theoretical meaning of strength in contrast to a physical or practical application that would be inferred from its use with other words.

A strong family places the borrower living in a healthy home environment. Strong has more stability to it than just family. By adding this positive description of family, the lender is lead to believe that the borrower is part of a close family unit where the connection between members is tight. The narrative given is that the borrower can run a small business whilst not sacrificing this healthy home environment. The loan is presented as an investment in the individual but also having positive repercussions for the family. However, there is no further information to validate this conclusion. This particular word chain allows for assumptions to be made about borrowers that can not be proved or disproved.

Despite the narrative of family being the dominant one across a majority of profiles, there are examples when this is not the case. Looking at the following profile for example, despite having many word chains relating to family, it cannot be placed under the narrative outlined above:

“Rosa, 44, lives in the city of Barranquilla. She lives with her partner and is the mother of two children, 8 and 9 years old. She is a pastry chef and learned this profession from her brother. With the goal of earning income, she learned even more in order to offer more diverse, quality products.
Rosa tends to events, businesses, and specific individuals who have previously requested all types of cakes.” (borrower profile 7)

Here, despite giving information about her family, it is not used as a reason to help the business. The main goal is to earn more income, not stating clearly that this will be used for the household. A lender could connect more income to be spent on the future of her children, but the text does not state this. The loan is to help a business-savvy entrepreneur, who learnt and developed her skill-set to meet customer demands. This profile is representative of a minority of those studied where despite the presence of word chains around family, the narrative given could not be categorised as the same (borrower profile 1,7, 16, 19, 21). In these cases, the loan is to expand the business, making it more profitable. However, even in these cases, there is still information about the family, but there isn’t the same explicit linkage to the loan benefiting the household.

Bringing family members in to the loan justification has an emotional appeal. The loan is presented as not just for the entrepreneur alone, but for the welfare of the household. This framing differs from the use of children in communicative messages of suffering or shock therapy outlined by Scott (2014:154). Here, children are used to justify the investment in the business to secure a stable future for them. The mother is described as 'loving', 'caring' or depicted in an involved, affirmative capacity in the welfare of the household (borrower profile 2, 9, 20, 22, 28). It is a positive message that widens the appeal of the loan beyond the individual borrower. This appeals to what White and Marsh termed the prototype Kiva lender, who is middle class, recently retired, and with a paternalistic charity-giving nature (2006:890). An excerpt from one borrower shows how profiles fit this communicative narrative:

“She hasn’t had an easy life and the economic situation has always been a problem, but she works hard to give her family a good life, but especially to save money so she can pay for a good education for her children.” (borrower profile 1)

There is an under-representation of words that portray the borrower as a modern, connected individual. As businesses in the agricultural sector are based in rural areas, they have a proclivity to use farming nomenclature which steers away from technological, modern terminology. The retail sector however, which is predominantly urban, has a low number of word chains with this area also. Across all profiles examined, the words 'mobile', 'technology', 'modern' are absent,
'telephone' 'computer' and 'internet' appear only once (the latter two on the same profile, borrower 9). The phrasing of the businesses present it as simple or basic, with a similarly easy to understand marketplace. No wider variables other than the materials needed for the service or the clientele is given.

Dogra states that development communication messages use an enhancement of distance and space between the developed world and the developing world. This exaggeration creates a modern, first world in contrast to an ahistoric, placeless third world. Tech-savvy lenders in rich countries using Kiva are in contrast to the borrowers who might have access to certain technologies and connectivity (to a far lesser extent), but are not presented as such.

**Finance**

Word Chains - *debt, credit, sustainable, help*

As the goal of the borrower profile is to incentivize the lender to commit money to the business, it is not surprising that finance is the most prominent theme throughout. Aside from the profile itself, the page is full of information regarding the implementation of the loan, the risk of default, repayment schedules and field partner details. But the focus here is what contextualisation exists on the past, present and future role of finance on the borrower, and what meaning can be taken from the specific words used. Here, the word chain of debt is significant through its absence.

The loan given by the lender puts the borrower in debt. This is a basic principle of the interaction. However, on all the profiles examined, the word 'debt' is completely absent. It does not feature once. There is also an under-representation of words synonymous with debt. In its place, the word chains of 'credit', 'credit history', 'provision of credit' along with 'capital' were found in a large minority of cases. Under the loan USP, credit can be found as a justification for loaning:

“This loan is special because: it provides loans to entrepreneurs with no credit history in Colombia.”

(borrower profile 5,11,14,23)

Debt is the basic interaction of a loan but is not directly addressed. It is inferred as assumed knowledge. By doing so, it becomes naturalised as a mechanism to help despite the problems of this approach outlined in section 1.4. The risk that debt can cause the borrower is not immediately
apparent. Risk is attributed to the lender not the borrower. Moodie echoes this, stating that the focus is on the financial exposure of the lender (2013:296). Even on the due diligence section of Kiva, risk information is attached to the lender almost exclusively. The impact of a loan defaulting is framed as exposure to the lender, not the loanee. There is no mention of the risk debt causes an increase in violence and poverty to female borrowers, or the chance of defaulting due to unsound businesses causing a spiral of debt and indebtedness. The life of the loan to the lender is engaged with at the expense of the impact debt has on the borrower.

Helping the business reach and build on an established customer base is stated as a main reason for loaning. Many of the borrowers have a business already operating and are looking to grow. There is usage of the word chain 'sustainable', 'profitable', 'consolidating', 'competitive' or 'stable' when referencing the business or entrepreneur directly. However, there is little depth to this. Sustainable - by an isolated definition - refers to maintaining something over a long period of time. The meaning of it here, when applied to a borrower, is reduced to a much more immediate and limited definition. The marketplace in which the business operates is dealt with in brief, simplistic terms. A sustainable or competitive business is a concept that a lender can identify with without being provided what this entails. As this excerpt from a borrower profile demonstrates:

“She’s always working hard to make sure all her growing can turn out good quality products. She wants to push forward her business so she can be more competitive and can make it sustainable. She’s asking for a loan to buy fertilizers and to pay for a workforce for her growing and also to buy caña flecha to make handcrafts” (borrower profile 28)

Across the profiles, there isn't detail about what happens if supply exceeds demand, seasonal changes affecting the customer base, impact of drought, disease and natural disasters on agricultural produce or long-term business sustainability. The immediacy of the need for funds is laid out, but there is no further detail about medium to long term impacts. Sustainability is used as a descriptive buzzword to give off the appearance of longer term business stability, but there is little to no information to justify this.

Kiva does not posit itself as a charity. Its mission is to give agency to individuals through the
provision of credit to improve their lives. The word 'help' is present on a large majority of borrower profiles and often exists on multiple occasions on the same profile. It is used as a direct call for action. For example, 'help her achieve her dream', 'help her now' 'help her with this loan'. Over two thirds of profiles researched either have help as a direct call to action or place the borrower in need of help. It is also used as an overarching narrative. For example, the loan is positioned as special as it helps reach individuals in remote regions (borrower profile 25, 27, 29).

This fits in with a neoliberal approach that sees individuals helping themselves out of poverty: a loan helps individuals take control of their lives, participating in a market economy without the need for macro-level institutional assistance. But White and Marsh (2006) noted how Kiva use textual and visual techniques to portray borrowers as a receiver of charity rather than as a business person in need of credit. Borrowers are presented as vulnerable and in need of help. By doing so, this pushes a development interaction that focuses on paternalistic help from rich to poor which fosters an ideology of progress through charity.

**Business and Personal Background**

Word chains – *hard-working, small businesswomen, independent*

Government intervention and the perceived bureaucratic nature of large institutions are viewed as hindrances to a neoliberal development approach that sees access to credit and the market economy as engines of progress. Bateman and Chang (2013) highlight that the model of online microfinance fits into this approach as it reinforces a development interaction that focuses on self-help through entrepreneurship. It is also reflective of a development interaction or 'lifestyle agency', where an individual in a rich, western country can take an active role in helping distant others whilst not doing this through a large-scale INGO or government (Chouliaraki 2013).

Government, macro-level institutions and aid agencies (other than the field partner) are not included in profiles. The field partner – the largest institutional level involved – is given significant attention throughout the profile. Ratings, reviews and links are all available to shine a spotlight on the organisation. This ensures the lender has transparency, trust and confidence in working with it.
Beyond this, the mention of aid or outside help is limited to the family or community level. The support of friends, neighbours and family members take up this space. There is a presentation of the borrower as independent from larger level help. The individual is placed in a local setting, having local ties and relationships. This locality is in contrast to the absence of non-local words throughout.

There are representative word chains used to describe the entrepreneurs' personality and business background. 'Hard-working' and 'small businesswoman' are present to reflect the business as responsible and independent:

“She's a responsible and hard-working woman who has a raising-pigs business. She started the business in 2001, because she always wanted to be an entrepreneur so she could have her own business and could support her family better.” (borrower profile 27)

There is an homogenisation of borrower profiles that present a hard-working, small businesswoman, working individually and independently within her means, to carve out a successful future for her family without help from the government. The absence of words regarding outside help beyond the community level reinforces this.

A majority of microfinance loans are given to women. This is to empower females, helping them escape poverty. To loan is to help the woman become financially independent. The empowerment of women through microfinance has a mixed track record. As shown in section 1.4, it can be effective as a poverty alleviation tool, but also detrimental. The term itself, is used as an appealing catchphrase in development practice that tends to give lip service to the issues it wants to represent.

Looking at the cases studied, 'freedom' and 'independence' are linked to women or to the business. To lift an expert from a profile:

“Maria is a creative woman. She is a persistent person that wants to get ahead, be useful to her family, and achieve financial freedom in order to be able to fulfill her needs and wishes.” (borrower profile 11)

This profile is indicative of a loan used to empower the woman. Both the usage of 'persistence' and 'being able to fulfill her needs and wishes', cultivates the loan as an empowering conduit in which the woman can achieve her aspirations, that at present, are unfulfilled. Achieving a dream is also
present across a lot of profiles. The word 'dream' is deployed in a particular meaning. Sometimes used as a verb ('to dream' or 'she is dreaming') and sometimes as a noun (dreamer or dream). The difference may be down to the translation of the original profile, or the preference of the person who wrote the profile. Yet this incidental difference alters the interpretation. Used as a noun, 'dream' can be a synonym of goal or target. It can be interpreted as a future ambition that the entrepreneur is working towards. Used as a verb, the meaning cannot be taken strictly in the same sense. Instead of the dream being the focus of the sentence and interpreted as such, it places the woman at the centre of the action. She is actively dreaming about something that is currently unavailable. “She dreams of having her own house.” (borrower profile 29). Written as such (instead of 'her dream is to have her own house’) makes the sentence a lot more emotive and gives the woman an active rather than a passive voice in the sentence.

Social and Political Context

Word chains – *internally displaced, conflict, violence, community*

This loan is special because:

**It helps internally-displaced people in Colombia rebuild and sustain their livelihoods.**

(borrower profile 2, 28, 30)

There is a section on the website that allows the lender to search by special features of the loan or the population it serves. This includes filters such as refugee/displaced, conflict zones, disaster recovery, vulnerable groups and rural exclusion. This gives the lender the ability to find loans that focus on individuals living in difficult social and political environments beyond only economic hardship. This lets the lender focus on a wider social issue.

As Colombia has a high rate of IDPs, the borrower profiles reflect the needs of these persons to rebuild and sustain their livelihoods. The loans of many borrowers use the difficulty of making a
livelihood in a new setting as a reason to help. They include the word chains 'rebuild', 'sustain' and 'displaced'. This places the borrower in special need for credit due to the political instability that exists. The fact that they are categorised as internally displaced gives credence to Kiva addressing this as a large issue in need of redress and vocalising it as such.

A small minority of the profiles examined went beyond an immediate description and would contextualise the reason for displacement. When this was present, the wording would shift the focus of the displacement beyond where the entrepreneur would operate. By doing so, the social or political upheaval is not linked to the current situation, but to another area. For example:

“Eunice travelled to Venezuela and worked as an operator in a sewing factory and due to the social problems that there were in the neighbouring country, returned to Colombia 3 years ago.”

(borrower profile 8)

The wider context of the reasons why people have been displaced are not available across nearly all profiles. This leads to an analysis of the word chains that are not present, and why they are absent. Stemming from the 1960s, the Colombian civil war forced people to flee their homes for many reasons. These include: landmines, extortion, threats and pressure to collaborate with armed groups, forced recruitment of children by rebels and drug syndicates, and sexual and gender-based violence. The conflict saw gross violations of human rights by rebel groups, paramilitaries and government forces such as kidnapping, forced disappearances, detention and torture, and extrajudicial executions.19

There is a supposition that lenders would be disincentivized to give money to a borrower if they knew the business operated in a rebel-controlled region (or a region with businesses forced to collude with narco-criminal organisations). The legacy of the civil war in post-conflict areas and the continuation of dangerous social settings are absent from the profiles. The word 'displaced' or 'internally displaced' serves as a catch-all term to sum up the wider issues attached. With a hermeneutic approach, the reader will contextualise what a displaced person is. The interpretation will depend on the reader's knowledge and experience of the subject. This varying situational knowledge of the social, political and geographic climate that the reader has will infer why the entrepreneur has become an internal refugee. The profile doesn’t delve into what the reason for the displacement is, only giving the general term, prompting the reader to fill in the how, where or

19 http://www.refworld.org/country,COI,UNHCR,,COL,,577a185d4,0.html

page 38 of 59
why. By doing so, the profiles can bypass loaded or polarising words that may taint the lenders' prospective involvement. By reducing the complicated and diffuse reasons for internal displacement to a singular, catch-all word, it simultaneously addresses the issue, but also sanitises it, making it as apolitical as possible.

5. Conclusion

In answering the research questions set out, there is a marked homogenisation of borrower information across profiles. There is definite textual shape and consistency to the profiles that achieves a standardised set of information conveyed through repeating narratives. The use of word chains across profiles reinforces themes whilst constricting the scope for different interpretations. This homogenisation through chains of equivalence promotes themes of family, independence from larger level help, sustainability and empowerment, whilst simultaneously not using words that stray from this representation. In turn, this decontextualises the borrowers. There is little space for the social, political and economic environments they work within, despite this being central to the efficacy and sustainability of the loan. The emphasis on the loan itself - risk attributed to the lender over the loanee, and the tacit normalisation of debt - prioritise the importance of the loan over the wider environment the borrower exists in.

To look at the reasoning for both this decontextualisation and homogenisation of information, there is a plain point to be made. Kiva communicate microfinance as an effective poverty alleviation mechanism as they need lenders to buy in to the concept, and as such, need an effective communication strategy to achieve this. Communication messages that have immediate, short-term goals rely on employing effective narratives and a range of assumptions to meet their targets. Little space is afforded for reflection on public perceptions of these assumptions. The goal on Kiva is to loan entrepreneurs money for their business. The communicative message used to achieve this relies on a standardised narrative of a borrower as the best way to do this. The consequences of this are secondary; the short-term goal of securing a loan is prioritised over more deeper issues with representations of the borrowers. The prototype borrower is a hard-working
female, from a strong family, trying to get a loan to build a stable business to secure a good future for her children. This trope is used as the best way to motivate lenders to commit money.

Loan – the term itself – is applied in a specific way. It is not to be understood in the basic definition of giving someone money and getting it back at a later date. Online microfinance institutions employ the term to be symbiotic with charity, or at least charitable investment, without explicitly saying as much. Loaning money on this platform is presented as the same as any other loan (although no interest is earned from the loan), but it is to be understood differently.

The tag-lines of Kiva 'loans that change lives' and 'lending to alleviate poverty', present change in a very specific way. This change integrates the poor into debt. This debt is naturalised as an effective development intervention and occludes other types of development being used. Poverty capital financializes the poor into an existing economic system that limits the scope for other forms of change to be implemented. Change through this framework is a narrow, limited development intervention, but also a limiting intervention as it takes the space of alternative approaches. Borrowers come from economically challenged demographics, usually with bad or no credit history. As such, the options of institutional credit provision are limited; banks and credit unions are untenable. This isn't to say that microcredit is the only solution for them, but it is pushed as a feasible mechanism for help, displacing other development interventions that could tackle poverty whilst circumventing the coercion of debt on the individual.

Looking at further research, it would be beneficial to explore the decision-making and organisational practices that lead to these communicative messages. Do Kiva and other MFOs have a grounded policy in the creation and wording of profiles, or is there creative licence available? The uniformity of themes and information would suggest the former over the latter. Whether there is an internal contestation of decision-making and whether there is scope for change would be worth pursuing.

Moreover, examining the role of field partners vis-a-vis the borrowers and their relationship with Kiva would be worth pursuing. For example, all female entrepreneurs in the agriculture sector studied in this paper were through the same field partner. Does the borrower have an alternative field partner to use if they find the terms unfavourable, or is this field partner the only route to
securing a loan? If it is the only route available, then having a monopolistic control on the provision of credit gives this field partner power to implement whatever terms they see fit. This is reigned in by the conditions the field partner have to meet set out by Kiva, but it would be worth exploring what impact field partners have on borrowers in situations like this where it seems the borrower is led down this single road, and whether Kiva limits its association with a single partner in an area or business category.

References


Carr, Chávez, Dickinson, McKinnon (2013) 'Kiva.org, person-to-person lending, and the conditions of intercultural contact' Howard Journal of Communications 24 (4), 327-347


Chowdhury, Anis (2009) Microfinance as a Poverty Reduction Tool – a Critical Assessment DESA Economic and Social Affairs Paper


Flannery, Matt and Shah Premal (2014) rebuttal to Hugh Sinclair Article http://nextbillion.net/kiva-responds/


Kumar, McKay and Rotman (2010) Microfinance and mobile banking: The story so far - Focus note, 2010, no. 62


Mayring, P (2014) Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution, Forum Qualitative Social Research Volume1, No.2, Art.20


Owens, John (2009)“The Role of Partnerships and Strategic Alliances to Promote Mobile Phone Banking at the Bottom of the Pyramid.” MicroSave Briefing Note #68.


Shah, Premal – Kiva President interview with Forbes Magazine (2013) available online
Sinclair, Hugh (2014) 'The Kiva Fairytale' article available online:
http://nextbillion.net/nexthoughtmonday-the-kiva-fairytale/


**Appendix 1 – Typical borrower profile**

---

**Rosario's story**

Rosario, 52, is a small businesswoman from Cartagena who started her convenience and stationery store with the goal of earning additional income for her family. In the year 2012, she opened the doors of her home to the public and in the living room of her house, she installed glass cases with all types of beauty items, details and pottery in general. This business idea came from the need to pay for her children's education since her partner's income was not enough to pay for her two children's higher education.

Her suppliers are found in the city of Barranquilla and in the hives of the Basurto market in Cartagena and generally all of her products are sold for cash. Rosario is managing her first crediKiva to invest in stock of clothing, bags and shoes for the December season and she needs to improve the inventory with the goal of obtaining good sales. Support her with this loan.

Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Kate Divjak View original language description

---

**This loan is special because:**

**It provides loans to entrepreneurs with no credit history in Colombia.**
Appendix 2 – Data set

(1) Alba María’s story

Alba is 38 years old and is a resident of Barranquilla. Her business is a neighborhood store where she sells a large variety of products that make up the family shopping basket amongst them: rice, sugar, oil, chicken, meat, vegetables, eggs, coffee, sweets, drinks, salt and stationary items. She has eight years of experience in this business and she works together with her husband. Their merchandise is sold for the main part in cash and a smaller quantity on credit for some very select customers.

Alba is requesting her first loan from Kiva so she can stock up on personal hygiene products and drinks (soft drinks, juice, malt drinks, etc.). Support this hard-working woman with her business!

*Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer leonardo.View original language description.*

This loan is special because:
It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.

(2) Leidy Johana’s story

Leidy is a 33-year-old merchant who lives in the municipality of Yarumal, a post-conflict zone.

Leidy is married and has two lovely princesses, ages 13 and 8, who are her inspiration, her source of energy. As a mother, she wants the best for them, she wants to give them an education and a quality life.

Leidy has a business selling costume jewelry, purses, and a variety of accessories. She works hard to strengthen her store since there is strong competition.

The borrower asks for a loan to purchase display cases, and an assortment of chains, earrings, bracelets, purses, and others to sell in the end-of-the-year season.

If you want to know more about the entrepreneurs and the loans from Interactuar, you can join the Lending Team called: “Friends of Interactuar Colombia”: http://www.kiva.org/team/interactuar_colombia

*Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Wendy Harris.View original language description.*
This loan is special because:

**It helps internally-displaced people in Colombia rebuild and sustain their livelihoods.**

(3) Katherin Johana’s story

Katherin, 20, is a young entrepreneur who makes a living selling beauty products, cologne, and personal-care products. She’s the single mother of an 11-month-old daughter whom she supports with her job. Her customers are people in the area and friends from her neighborhood, which is located to the south of the city of Barranquilla.

She wants to increase her sales and is negotiating her first Kiva loan to increase her stock for her business to buy cosmetics, cologne, lotions, and costume jewelry with the goal of improving her stock and making the most of the holiday season.

Help her with her loan.

*Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Catharine Wall.*[View original language description.](#)

---

This loan is special because:

**It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.**

(4) Nayibis Esther’s story

Nayibis linked up with the commercial life in order to spend more time with her daughters and be able to provide them with a stable upbringing and education. She started her own variety store because of the advice of a friend. In some display cases that she has exhibited on the terrace of her home, located in the municipality of Puerto Colombia, she offers beauty products, office supplies, and candy. She opens early every day so passersby, neighbors, and friends from the area can make their purchases.

As her capital is insufficient to meets the current demand, she is applying for her first Kiva loan through Fundación Mario Santo Domingo that she will invest in a general assortment of accessories, gifts, packets of personal care products, school supplies, body creams, baby colognes, candy, etc. Her business goal is to build her working capital and ensure the financing of her daughters’ professional education. Support her.

Translated from Spanish.[View original language description.](#)

---

This loan is special because:

**It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.**
(5) María Isabel's story

María, age 30, sells assorted merchandise. She started her work through a friend who provided her code to request items by catalog. She thought this work was very profitable, and that through it she could support her partner with household expenses so that she could be involved.

Her customers are located in the neighborhood where she lives in the city of Soledad, as well as in the villages of the area. She carries out her sales through orders and some through cash, depending on the customer. She sells colognes, perfumes, deodorants, powders, etc. as well as pens, ice, water, and soft drinks.

She is currently seeking her first Kiva loan with the intent to purchase various merchandise like colognes, perfumes, deodorants, powders, etc. to benefit from the demand at the end of the year.

Support her.

Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Emily Griffith. View original language description.

This loan is special because:
It provides loans to entrepreneurs with no credit history in Colombia.

(6) Aura's story

Aura became involved in the business life with the end of generating her own income and being with her family for more time, so to offer them a stable upbringing and education. She began her own variety store eight years ago, in which she offers beauty products, cosmetics, costume jewelry, office supplies, and toys, in a neighborhood of the country's capital and she daily opens at the first hour of the morning. In this way, passersby, neighbors, and friends in the area can make their purchases.

With her capital, she does not have enough to respond to the current demand. She is applying for her first Kiva loan, through the intermediary of Fundación Mario Santo Domingo, which she will invest in a general assortment: accessories, perfumes, body creams, cosmetics, and more. Her business goal is to have a well-known supermarket in her area and to improve her quality of life. Support her.

Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Wendy Harris. View original language description.

This loan is special because:
It helps train entrepreneurs to start their own business.
(7) Rosa María’s story
Rosa, 44, lives in the city of Barranquilla. She lives with her partner and is the mother of two children, 8 and 9 years old. She is a pastry chef and learned this profession from her brother. With the goal of earning income, she learned even more in order to offer more diverse, quality products. Rosa tends to events, businesses, and specific individuals who have previously requested all types of cakes.

Currently, she needs the financial help of the Fundación Mario Santo Domingo to invest in ingredients such as flour, eggs, yeast, fruits, and other items to take care of customer requests. Help her.

*Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Amy Polenske.* View original language description.

This loan is special because:
It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.

(8) Eunice Dolores’s story
Eunice is a 54-year-old tailor who has done this work since she was 15 years old. She learned from her mother who had a sewing shop in her house and helped her in the process.

Eunice traveled to Venezuela and worked as an operator in a sewing factory and due to the social problems that there were in the neighboring country, returned to Colombia 3 years ago. She began her shop in the living room of her house and her sister supports her. Together they sew clothing for the family, uniforms, and do small repairs.

Her providers are textile warehouses in the center of the city and her customers are family members, friends, people referred to her, and schools in the area. Currently she is applying for her first Kiva loan with which she will purchase a manufactured flat sewing machine. This equipment will allow her to have better finish on her work. Support her in her loan.

*Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Wendy Harris.* View original language description.

This loan is special because:
It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.

(9) Yuranis Cecilia’s story
Yuranis is a 33-year-old woman. She lives with her partner and is the mother of two children, ages 13 and 7. She began her business in internet service, photocopying, transcriptions and other
services upon returning from Venezuela, a country where she lived for 10 years.

She decided to support her partner with the household expenses and offer her children better living conditions, so she was motivated to open her business. Currently she is applying for her first Kiva loan with which she will purchase new computer equipment to expand her capacity and generate more income. Support her in her loan.

*Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Wendy Harris. View original language description.*

---

This loan is special because:
*It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.*

(10) Dilcia Del Carmen’s story

Señora Dilcia lives in Arjona and works selling beef and viscera. She buys her products from the butchers in the municipality and always keeps a good supply: different cuts of meat, liver, rennet, blood sausage. Her clients are people from the neighborhood: friends, neighbors, relatives. She knows them very well and therefore she knows to whom she can give credit. She has more than ten years’ experience in this activity, as an alternative to generate income to cover her expenses, because she is a single mother, separated from her husband, and has the support only of her children.

Now she is requesting her first Kiva loan to invest in the purchase of meat. She also will buy merchandise (clothing) to offer her clients and to obtain additional income. Please support her loan.

*Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer joann stephan. View original language description.*

---

This loan is special because:
*It supports single mothers that are sole contributors to their household income in Colombia.*

(11) Laura Isabel’s story

Laura is a young woman at 20 years old who got started in the shoe business in 2015 with the goal of improving her family income. She lives with her partner in the city of Barranquilla, and her customers are mostly made up of neighbors, friends, family and referrals.

Currently, her capital is very low considering the requests she receives, and her suppliers are footwear wholesalers and warehouses that she has to pay up front. That is why she is requesting her first Kiva loan to purchase women’s footwear: ballet flats, sandals, high-heeled shoes, sneakers and platforms. Please support her in obtaining the loan with which she will improve her shoe
This loan is special because:
It gives youth without prior credit history the opportunity to start or expand a business.

(12) Maria Del Carmen's story

María is a creative woman. She is a persistent person that wants to get ahead, be useful to her family, and achieve financial freedom in order to be able to fulfill her needs and wishes.

She works selling food. She started her business with some furniture from her home. She bought two parasols and started to sell fried snacks in the streets, something to admire.

She is applying for a loan because she wants to take one step further toward success. She will use all the money to buy ingredients to prepare lunches, something new she hopes results in good profits that help her to achieve the dream of having her own house.

If you want to know more about the entrepreneurs and the loans from Interactuar, you can join the Lending Team called: “Friends of Interactuar Colombia”:
http://www.kiva.org/team/interactuar_colombia

*Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Santiago Mejía Dugand. View original language description.

This loan is special because:
It comes with a very innovative business-training package.

(13) Rosario's story

Rosario, 52, is a small businesswoman from Cartagena who started her convenience and stationery store with the goal of earning additional income for her family. In the year 2012, she opened the doors of her home to the public and in the living room of her house, she installed glass cases with all types of beauty items, details and pottery in general. This business idea came from the need to pay for her children's education since her partner's income was not enough to pay for her two children's higher education.

Her suppliers are found in the city of Barranquilla and in the hives of the Basurto market in Cartagena and generally all of her products are sold for cash. Rosario is managing her first crediKiva to invest in stock of clothing, bags and shoes for the December season and she needs to
improve the inventory with the goal of obtaining good sales. Support her with this loan.

Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Kate Divjak. View original language description.

This loan is special because:
It provides loans to entrepreneurs with no credit history in Colombia.

Sirley Johana's story

Sirley is thirty-three years old and has charisma and an enviable amount of energy. She says that she overcame situations in her life with difficulty and that her three children are her main motivation. She sells seasonal merchandise, stationary, cosmetics, and items for every occasion. She also offers a telephone calling service. These are the businesses that have generated the income she needs to sustain her home.

She didn’t deviate from her business ideas even during the middle of her separation with her spouse. Being a single mother, she can’t depend on someone to help with expenses. Her sense of responsibility and commitment to her business is enormous which is why she works ten hours a day.

Sirley plans to take advantage of the end of the season and offer a wider variety of products. That’s why she’s in the process of applying for her first Kiva loan with the Mario Santo Domingo Foundation. She plans to invest the funds in buying clothing, shoes, toys, and other products that her customers want.

Her dream of prosperity is growing her business, generating higher revenues every day, and providing a good education for her children

This loan is special because:
It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.

Sandra Patricia's story

Sandra is 41 years old. She is a happy woman and a hard-worker who lives with her spouse and children in the city of Cartagena. She inherited her mother’s fast food business and manages it with much wisdom. Her customers are mostly neighbors and people from the area. She offers a wide menu of meals, including the following: hot dogs, hamburgers, salchipapas (potatoes with sausages), roasted meats, and other specialties. Every day her business is open from 4:00 pm to 11:00 pm. On the weekends she has better depending on the people traffick. She is requesting a Kiva loan in order to buy supplies and ingredients for her fast food business: meat, chicken, pork, sausages, etc. She will also remodel her hotdog stand and add new chairs. Support her via this loan.
This loan is special because:
It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.

(16) Esperanza Del S.'s story
Esperanza, 64, is a happy woman who captivated Cartagenans with her fast and typical food. She started her restaurant three years ago when she arrived in the city of Cartagena in search of employment. But due to her basic level of education, she didn't find work opportunities that satisfied her aspirations. Her enterprise was her best card and since then she has has been at the front of her food business with excellent results. She requested a crediKiva from Fundación Mario Santo Domingo, economic support to improve her inventory: packets of potatoes, breads, cold meats and to maintain a cash fund for investment. Support her. It will be a success.

Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Kate Divjak. View original language description.

This loan is special because:
It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.

(17) Yenny Patricia's story
Yenny is a businesswoman from the town of Barranquilla. She earns her living selling candy wholesale or in small quantities. She is a very cheerful and friendly woman who started this work with the goal of generating income for her household and improving her children's standard of living. Yenny's customers are mainly local inhabitants and street merchants. Her sales are for cash.

Yenny is now seeking a loan, her first with Kiva, to buy packets of potato chips, banana chips, chitos, and various types of candy and snacks as stock for her store. Please help her with this loan!

Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Jane A. View original language description.

This loan is special because:
It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.

(18) Clementina's story
Clementina is a 56-year-old businesswoman who lives in the city of Cartagena in the company of her husband and their two children who are 27 and 22 years old. She was connected to sales through specialized catalogs due to a friend who convinced her to make her own income.

She has more than 20 years of experience in this business and with the passing of these years, she

page 52 of 59
has managed to gain an ample customer base and connect many more people to this business method, consolidating herself as the sales leader.

She wishes to take advantage of the seasons of high sales between now and the end of the year. Because of this, she requested her first Kiva loan to invest in creams, perfumes, makeup, and jewelry, among other items in high demand.

Support her with this loan.

Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Sarah Tyler. View original language description.

This loan is special because:

It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.

(19) Midarlis María's story
Midarlis is 29 years old. She is a woman who discovered her entrepreneurial spirit when she was left unemployed. With her spouse, they decided to create their own work taking advantage of their knowledge in shoe making. With a little capital, they began making shoes that between the two of them, they sold in the shoe store. Little by little, the business has grown, and currently she has seven employees in addition to her husband.

Midarlis wants to project herself as a successful business woman; therefore, she has clear goals that she plans to make happen by taking advantage of the opportunities that she has access to through Credikiva with the Fundación Mario Santo Domingo.

With the loan, she plans to acquire raw materials such as soles, leather, studs, threads, buckles, and more products that help her to increase her production and generate better income that in the future will allow her to put together the necessary saving to get her own house.

This loan is special because:

It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.

(20) Nini Yojana's story
Nini is 37 years old and lives in the municipality of Rionegro. She has three beautiful children that mean the world to her because she’s a selfless mother. She works selling products from different catalogs. It is an activity she started four years ago because she wanted to give a better life to her family as the economic situation hasn't been the best.

She already had a loan that tried to get funded through Kiva, and unfortunately it expired, but she’s back with the confidence that this time she will find people who believe in her dreams and want to support her. She’s asking for a loan to buy cosmetics, body lotions, beauty products, and other items to have more to sell.

Support this dreamer and loan now.
If you want to know more about the entrepreneurs and the loans from Interactuar, you can join the Lending Team called: “Friends of Interactuar Colombia”: http://www.kiva.org/team/interactuar_colombia

This loan is special because:
It comes with a very innovative business-training package.

(21) Nelly Del Carmen’s story
Nelly is 57 years old. She lives with her spouse in the capital of Atlántico. She is the mother of two grown children. She is a food vendor: she sells pork, cheese and yucca. She started this activity with the help of a friend who lives on San Antonio mountain. She works with her by shipping the food. On Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., she sells these foods. She charges for them up front, although her most faithful customers have the privilege of easy payment plans. Right now, she wants to increase sales, and that is why she is taking out her first Kiva loan with the Fundación Mario Santo Domingo to buy pork, cheese and yucca in large quantities. With this loan, she will attract new customers and her profits will be better. Support her with this loan, do it!

“Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Ellen Donohue. View original language description.”

This loan is special because:
It helps train entrepreneurs to start their own business.

(22) Ruth Balbina’s story
Ruth is an enthusiastic mother who began her business selling goods with the objective of offering her children a better future. When she arrived in the town of Barranquilla, coming from Monteria, she established very good relations with her neighbors. Soon, she made an investment in a very moderate amount of various goods that she later showed her neighbors in the south of Barranquilla. Her business idea was a success. She also considered that it would be an opportunity to offer the products to her acquaintances in the town of Monteria and eventually managed to expand to more municipalities in the department of Cordoba. This empirical merchant has improved the living conditions of her family through her business and intends to continue with great commitment to realize her dream of prosperity: to finish building her house. Ruth will make some purchases of clothing, accessories, bed sheets, towels, and underwear, orders that her customers have made, and intends to finance a loan through the Fundación Mario Santo Domingo. This loan will allow her to obtain very good profits and with them continue to contribute to the education of her three children, two of whom are still minors and are pursuing academic studies.

This loan is special because:
It provides borrowers in micro businesses with affordable loans.
(23) Claudia Patricia’s story

Claudia is a 41-year-old woman who is separated and who in retail found the business opportunity that would allow her to work for herself.

She lives in the city of Barranquilla and inherited a talent for sales from her mother. She started a general store on the terrace outside of her home and sells a wide range of household, stationery, beauty and personal hygiene products as well as others. Claudia also sells mail order products which help to increase her income.

Claudia needs to improve her sales and in order to do this she is applying for a loan through Fundacion Mario Santo Domingo. It is her first Kiva loan and she will invest it in buying household items such as sheets, kitchen utensils, clothes, pyjamas and other products.

Support this working woman in her loan application.

*Translated from Spanish by Kiva volunteer Andrew Thow. View original language description.*

This loan is special because:

It provides loans to entrepreneurs with no credit history in Colombia.

24. Yaned Cecilia’s story

Yaned is 42 years old and lives in the municipality of Medellin. She’s a divorced woman who has two beautiful daughters who mean the world to her. She’s a very humble woman who works raising chickens, a business she started five years ago thanks to her parents’ help, because they taught her how to do it and how to manage it.

She hasn’t had an easy life and the economic situation has always been a problem, but she works hard to give her family a good life, but especially to save money so she can pay for a good education for her children. She would like to improve the sales and to have more clients, so she’s asking for a loan to fix the barn and to buy more chickens to raise.

Support this humble mother and loan now.

If you want to know more about the entrepreneurs and the loans from Interactuar, you can join the Lending Team called: “Friends of Interactuar Colombia”:
http://www.kiva.org/team/interactuar_colombia

This loan is special because:

It comes with a very innovative business-training package.
25. Eliben's story

Eliben is a 31-year-old man who works growing cane and coffee. It is a business that he learned from his parents. He is passing it on to his children so that they continue with this noble profession which benefits, not only his family, but all of the people who enjoy his products. Eliben has two children, ages 14 and 8, who are his greatest inspiration. With his work, he gives them the best quality of life possible.

Eliben is requesting a loan to purchase farm supplies and pay labor costs for his cane and coffee crops. Supporting the client will mean a boost for the agricultural community that strives daily to stock the market.

If you want to know more about the entrepreneurs and the loans from Interactuar, you can join the Lending Team called: “Friends of Interactuar Colombia”: http://www.kiva.org/team/interactuar_colombia

Translated from Spanish. View original language description.

This loan is special because:
It reaches borrowers in remote regions.

26. Cindy Milena's story

Cindy is just 23 years old and lives in the municipality of Tierralta. At her short age she’s already the mother of 2 amazing kids and a great entrepreneur. She started raising pigs last year because she wanted to be independent so she could improve the income and to spend more time with her children, and that’s what motivated her the most.

She wants to give her children a better life than the one she had when she was little, because her family was really poor. She wants to leave that poverty circle by working very hard. She’s asking for a loan to buy more pigs to raise and food for them to increase the production and to improve her business.

Support this young mother and loan now.

If you want to know more about the entrepreneurs and the loans from Interactuar, you can join the Lending Team called: “Friends of Interactuar Colombia”: http://www.kiva.org/team/interactuar_colombia

This loan is special because:
It supports young business owners between 18 and 25 years-old.
27. Diva’s story

Diva is 47 years old and lives in the municipality of Mariquita. She’s a responsible and hardworking woman who has a raising-pigs business. She started the business in 2001, because she always wanted to be an entrepreneur so she could have her own business and could support her family better.

She would like to fix her house, because she wants her family to live better, because they mean everything to her. She works hard, to give them a good quality of life.

She would like to take her business to the next level, so she can sell more and she can be profitable. She’s asking for a loan to buy supplies to fix the pigsty roof and floor, because they have some damaged areas. Support this incredible entrepreneur and lend now.

If you want to know more about the entrepreneurs and the loans from Interactuar, you can join the Lending Team called: “Friends of Interactuar Colombia”:
http://www.kiva.org/team/interactuar_colombia

This loan is special because:
It reaches borrowers in remote regions.

28. Perseveranda Maria’s story

Perseveranda is 50 years old and lives in the municipality of Sahagun. She’s happily married and she has four children, a family that she loves and what she feels most proud of. She’s a hardworking woman who started farming three years ago in order to help her husband with the household because they were going through a rough time.

Dry [conditions] sometimes affect her growing, but she’s always working hard to make sure all her growing can turn out good quality products. She wants to push forward her business so she can be more competitive and can make it sustainable. She’s asking for a loan to buy fertilizers and to pay for a workforce for her growing and also to buy caña flecha to make handcrafts.

Support this loving mother and loan now.

If you want to know more about the entrepreneurs and the loans from Interactuar, you can join the Lending Team called: “Friends of Interactuar Colombia”:
http://www.kiva.org/team/interactuar_colombia

This loan is special because:
It helps internally-displaced people in Colombia rebuild and sustain their livelihoods.
29. Ana Isabel's story

Ana is 39 years old and lives in the municipality of El Carmen de Viboral. She’s a very professional woman, who is also a great entrepreneur. She works raising chickens and selling their eggs, a business she inherited from her family 3 years ago. She’s managing it very well, because it had some problems before and she has been able to push it forward.

Her discipline and organization have helped her to do much better, but she still has many things to improve, in order to make her business more successful and profitable. She dreams of having her own house, and that’s why she wants to start selling more to make more money. She’s asking for a loan to buy 50 chickens to raise and food for the birds, to increase the production.

Support this hardworking woman and lend now.

If you want to know more about the entrepreneurs and the loans from Interactuar, you can join the Lending Team called: “Friends of Interactuar Colombia”:
http://www.kiva.org/team/interactuar_colombia

This loan is special because:
It reaches borrowers in remote regions.

30. Myriam Elena's story

Myriam is 50 years old and lives in the municipality of Tierralta. She’s a happy, kind, helpful and responsible woman who has been working as a farmer for 20 years. In this business she not only grows different products, but she also raises chickens and breeds fish, because she’s always finding ways to do better and to improve her family's quality of life.

She already had a loan funded through Kiva and thanks to that she was able to start her business raising chickens, which is doing really well right now. She’s very grateful for all the people who supported and believed in her and she’s confident that she can still find people who believe in her again, so she’s asking for a new loan to buy fish to breed, food for her animals, fertilizers for growing and to hire some workers.

Support this hardworking woman and loan now.

If you want to know more about the entrepreneurs and the loans from Interactuar, you can join the Lending Team called: “Friends of Interactuar Colombia”:
http://www.kiva.org/team/interactuar_colombia
This loan is special because:
*It helps internally-displaced people in Colombia rebuild and sustain their livelihoods.*

Field partner: Interactuar

([https://www.kiva.org/about/where-kiva-works/partners/177](https://www.kiva.org/about/where-kiva-works/partners/177))