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# **Cultural Value in Edinburgh: how the city's cultural sector communicates its value and values**

Vikki Jones

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## Abstract

This research explores concepts and negotiations of cultural value in the City of Edinburgh's cultural sector, examining its status as a cultural destination and 'Festival City'. Using practice-led approaches and action research methodologies, it centres on the study of communications about culture and its value.

The thesis demonstrates how the practices and outputs of communications work act as a productive lens for exploring the circumstances and values of cultural work and creative justice (Banks, 2017). Communications are defined in the context of the practice of marketing cultural events, but also more broadly in terms of the ways in which places, organisations, artists and audiences convey their perceptions of culture and cultural value.

A distinction is explored between ideas of cultural 'value' in the singular as a state of being or a quality that culture holds, and cultural 'values', defined as the principles and beliefs that underpin the rationale for what cultural products are delivered, how, and to whom. In examining these ideas with cultural sector practitioners and the communications they produce; the research approaches the value and valuing of culture as a practice that is negotiated and fluid. It shows how the practice of bringing together sometimes conflicting notions of cultural value and values through a lens of creative justice might be operationalised to contribute to exposing and addressing inequalities in cultural audiences and workforces.

During the research, case studies were conducted with two of the eleven festivals which collectively form the Festivals Edinburgh "strategic umbrella organisation"<sup>1</sup>. These include quantitative and qualitative computational analysis of datasets collected from Twitter and from these organisations' websites, alongside semi-structured interviews with members of each one's marketing and communications teams. Findings from these case studies, further computational content analysis of festivals

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/about> [Accessed 1 May 2023]

communications, and the literature review, informed the programming of a hybrid in-person and online symposium on the future of culture in Edinburgh in September 2021, built around an action research methodology.

The use of participatory research through the lens of the cultural work of communications reveals interoperating situations of value and valuation in cultural policies and practice. Economic and political imaginaries relating to ideas of creative cities, creative classes, creative industries, and creative destinations are interrogated through the framing of an 'Edinburgh Imaginary', in which the city acts as a physical and digital landscape with attributes that are both unique to Edinburgh, and act as examples of the challenges associated with the logics of creative and cultural destination economies.

In addition, the focus on communications practice allows not only for the study of the digital and social media platforms through which cultural organisations attempt to reach and talk to their audiences – and which were also suddenly central to delivery of cultural events during the COVID-19 pandemic – but also of the way these platforms are used and the challenges they present to practitioners. Again, this research demonstrates a negotiated and fluid practice of communicating cultural value and values through the inherently imbalanced logics and power asymmetries of platforms and their economies. It considers similarities between inequalities of access to culture in digital spaces and physical ones. Finally, the thesis proposes that the further study of communications work in the cultural sector would support more detailed interrogation of the valuation and evaluation towards developing actions and practices towards creative justice.



## Lay Summary

This research explores how the cultural sector in Edinburgh uses communications to talk about its work and its value.

The thesis presents comparative case studies conducted in 2019-20 with communications teams from two of the eleven festivals which form the Festivals Edinburgh “strategic umbrella organisation”<sup>2</sup>. It considers social media datasets from Twitter, texts from these organisations’ websites, and texts from interviews. The case study findings inspired further empirical research conducted through a research symposium – *Future Culture Edinburgh* – in 2021.

The research shows how studying the practices of the work of communications in the cultural sector can offer unique understandings of how ideas of cultural value and values appear in patterns of cultural production and consumption. The distinction made between cultural ‘value’ and ‘values’ is used to expose the complex negotiations around inequalities of access to culture in audiences and workforces. The inequalities and assumptions embedded in economic and political ideas of culture and creative industries are examined for Edinburgh, and more broadly, through an idea termed the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’.

Because the research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, the thesis also shows how the immediate adaptations to communications and cultural events this period required offer longer term insights into practices and perceptions of digital technologies in the cultural sector. The thesis proposes that the further study of communications work in the sector would support more detailed interrogation of valuation and evaluation towards addressing inequalities through creative justice.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/about> [Accessed 1 May 2023]

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## Table of contents

|                                                                                             |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Abstract.....</b>                                                                        | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Lay Summary.....</b>                                                                     | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Acknowledgements.....</b>                                                                | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Table of contents.....</b>                                                               | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>List of tables and figures.....</b>                                                      | <b>10</b> |
| Tables .....                                                                                | 10        |
| Figures .....                                                                               | 10        |
| <b>Introduction.....</b>                                                                    | <b>13</b> |
| Reflections on this project .....                                                           | 13        |
| About this research.....                                                                    | 17        |
| Research methodology .....                                                                  | 20        |
| Thesis structure.....                                                                       | 22        |
| Chapter 1: Literature Review .....                                                          | 22        |
| Chapter 2: Iterative Methodologies and Practice-Led Research.....                           | 23        |
| Chapter 3: Research Findings – the value of communications and communications of value..... | 24        |
| Chapter 4: Discussion and Summary of Findings.....                                          | 26        |
| Conclusion.....                                                                             | 26        |
| <b>Chapter 1: Literature Review.....</b>                                                    | <b>28</b> |
| Introduction .....                                                                          | 28        |
| Exploring the history and definitions of cultural value.....                                | 28        |
| Towards a definition of cultural value and values for this thesis .....                     | 34        |
| Value theories .....                                                                        | 37        |
| Valuation and measuring value.....                                                          | 42        |
| The problem of participation .....                                                          | 49        |
| Imaginaries, intermediaries and industries: culture, creativity and cities .....            | 54        |
| Edinburgh: Creative, Festival, City .....                                                   | 60        |
| Communications, creative work, and cultural value and values .....                          | 65        |
| Organisational perspectives on communications work.....                                     | 71        |
| Considerations for cultural sector communications on digital platforms .....                | 77        |
| Creative communications work and creative justice .....                                     | 81        |
| <b>Chapter 2: Iterative Methodologies and Practice-Led Research .....</b>                   | <b>86</b> |
| Research questions .....                                                                    | 86        |
| Introduction .....                                                                          | 86        |

|                                                                                                                                              |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Practice-led research .....</b>                                                                                                           | <b>89</b>  |
| <b>Research participants.....</b>                                                                                                            | <b>91</b>  |
| <b>Case studies .....</b>                                                                                                                    | <b>92</b>  |
| Introduction .....                                                                                                                           | 92         |
| Rationale for case study organisation choices.....                                                                                           | 92         |
| Edinburgh Science.....                                                                                                                       | 95         |
| Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society .....                                                                                                      | 97         |
| <b>Exploring digital and social media research methodologies .....</b>                                                                       | <b>100</b> |
| Digital methods and engagement with platforms.....                                                                                           | 101        |
| API research .....                                                                                                                           | 103        |
| Social media research and measuring audience engagement .....                                                                                | 106        |
| Research on commercial platforms .....                                                                                                       | 108        |
| <b>Exploring value and values messaging through content analysis .....</b>                                                                   | <b>109</b> |
| Introduction .....                                                                                                                           | 109        |
| Scraping and analysing communications using Voyant Tools .....                                                                               | 110        |
| Moving towards further iteration of research methodologies .....                                                                             | 112        |
| <b><i>Future Culture Edinburgh: a practice-led, action research approach .....</i></b>                                                       | <b>117</b> |
| Introduction .....                                                                                                                           | 117        |
| Aims of Future Culture Edinburgh .....                                                                                                       | 119        |
| <b>Conclusion: on practice-led mixed methods research .....</b>                                                                              | <b>124</b> |
| <b>Ethics.....</b>                                                                                                                           | <b>126</b> |
| Introduction .....                                                                                                                           | 126        |
| Data management .....                                                                                                                        | 127        |
| Case studies .....                                                                                                                           | 127        |
| Computational data analysis.....                                                                                                             | 129        |
| Live events in a pandemic .....                                                                                                              | 129        |
| Conclusion.....                                                                                                                              | 131        |
| <b><i>Chapter 3: Research Findings – the value of communications and communications of value.....</i></b>                                    | <b>132</b> |
| <b>Introduction .....</b>                                                                                                                    | <b>132</b> |
| <b>Case study: Edinburgh Science .....</b>                                                                                                   | <b>133</b> |
| Introduction .....                                                                                                                           | 133        |
| Methodology .....                                                                                                                            | 134        |
| Defining the research protocol .....                                                                                                         | 134        |
| Interviews: reflections from Edinburgh Science on the work of communications before and during a global pandemic.....                        | 140        |
| Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset: quantitative analysis .....                                                                               | 157        |
| <b>Case study: Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society.....</b>                                                                                    | <b>174</b> |
| Introduction .....                                                                                                                           | 174        |
| Methodology .....                                                                                                                            | 175        |
| Defining the research protocol .....                                                                                                         | 176        |
| Interviews: reflections from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society on the work of communications before and during the global pandemic ..... | 177        |
| Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Twitter dataset: quantitative analysis.....                                                                | 188        |
| Quantitative analysis of the @edfringe Twitter timeline .....                                                                                | 196        |
| Conclusion.....                                                                                                                              | 201        |
| <b>Exploring value and values messaging through content analysis .....</b>                                                                   | <b>203</b> |
| Introduction .....                                                                                                                           | 203        |

|                                                                                                                            |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Methodology .....                                                                                                          | 204        |
| Contextualising and building on case study findings .....                                                                  | 205        |
| Exploring a possible ‘values gap’ .....                                                                                    | 206        |
| Twitter data .....                                                                                                         | 209        |
| <b>Aligned research.....</b>                                                                                               | <b>217</b> |
| <b>Future Culture Edinburgh .....</b>                                                                                      | <b>223</b> |
| Introduction .....                                                                                                         | 223        |
| Methodology .....                                                                                                          | 225        |
| Findings .....                                                                                                             | 227        |
| Conclusion.....                                                                                                            | 236        |
| <b>Chapter 4: Discussion and Summary of Findings.....</b>                                                                  | <b>241</b> |
| <b>Introduction .....</b>                                                                                                  | <b>241</b> |
| <b>Communicating cultural value and values .....</b>                                                                       | <b>241</b> |
| <b>The work of communicating cultural value and values .....</b>                                                           | <b>249</b> |
| <b>Exploring the immediate and ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on<br/>communications of value and values.....</b> | <b>257</b> |
| <b>The role of research in addressing challenges and inequities in Edinburgh’s cultural<br/>sector .....</b>               | <b>260</b> |
| <b>Exploring a values-led cultural sector for Edinburgh .....</b>                                                          | <b>262</b> |
| <b>Conclusion .....</b>                                                                                                    | <b>266</b> |
| <b>Introduction .....</b>                                                                                                  | <b>266</b> |
| <b>Contribution to knowledge .....</b>                                                                                     | <b>266</b> |
| <b>Communications and cultural value .....</b>                                                                             | <b>268</b> |
| <b>Creative Justice .....</b>                                                                                              | <b>272</b> |
| <b>The Edinburgh Imaginary .....</b>                                                                                       | <b>274</b> |
| <b>Bibliography.....</b>                                                                                                   | <b>279</b> |

## List of tables and figures

### Tables

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <i>Table 1: Search term frequency breakdown of close reading dataset, selected from the full Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset, 10 March–26 April 2020 .....</i>                                                                | <i>163</i> |
| <i>Table 2: Frequent terms word clouds and most used hashtags from case study Twitter datasets from Edinburgh Science and Edinburgh Festival Fringe, analysed in RStudio210</i>                                                 |            |
| <i>Table 3: Word clouds and terms network diagrams from 'About Us' content taken from Edinburgh Science and Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society websites. Text analysed and visualisations generated using Voyant Tools .....</i> | <i>213</i> |

### Figures

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <i>Figure 1: a visual representation of the interrelating concepts of value and values in this thesis .....</i>                                                                                                    | <i>37</i>  |
| <i>Figure 2: Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset: frequency of tweets over time 10 March– 26 April 2020 .....</i>                                                                                                    | <i>158</i> |
| <i>Figure 3: Frequency table of most used hashtags in the Edinburgh Science dataset, 10 March–26 April 2020, generated using R. ....</i>                                                                           | <i>160</i> |
| <i>Figure 4: Word cloud of frequently used terms in the body text of tweets, from the Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset, 10 March–26 April 2020, generated using R. ....</i>                                       | <i>161</i> |
| <i>Figure 5: Frequently used terms in the Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset, 10 March–26 April 2020, generated using R and presented as a list, with the lowest frequency of use set to 100 times. ....</i>        | <i>162</i> |
| <i>Figure 6: Frequencies of tweets over time for the 'Digital Content' and 'Cancellation' close reading datasets, set against the frequency of unique tweets in the full dataset, 10 March–26 April 2020 .....</i> | <i>163</i> |
| <i>Figure 7: Frequency of URLs shared in both close reading datasets from the Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset, 10 March–26 April 2020.....</i>                                                                   | <i>165</i> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <i>Figure 8: Tweet by @EdSciFest on 17 March 2020 announcing the cancellation of the 2020 festival. Available at <a href="https://twitter.com/EdSciFest/status/1239981747426799621">https://twitter.com/EdSciFest/status/1239981747426799621</a> [Accessed 15 March 2023].....</i>                                                                                  | <i>167</i> |
| <i>Figure 9: Tweet by @EdSciFest on 4 April 2020 announcing the start of the digital programme. Available at <a href="https://twitter.com/EdSciFest/status/1246361968442834945">https://twitter.com/EdSciFest/status/1246361968442834945</a> [Accessed 14 March 2023].....</i>                                                                                      | <i>169</i> |
| <i>Figure 10: Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset: frequencies of tweets over time, 13 July–7 September 2020 .....</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <i>189</i> |
| <i>Figure 11: Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset: pie chart of tweet types, 13 July–7 September 2020.....</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <i>191</i> |
| <i>Figure 12: Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset: pie chart of tweet types, 10 March–26 April 2020 .....</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <i>191</i> |
| <i>Figure 13: Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset: tweet types for #edfringe hashtag query, 13 July–7 September 2020.....</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <i>192</i> |
| <i>Figure 14: Frequency table of the most used hashtags in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset, 13 July–7 September, generated using R in Jupyter Notebooks.....</i>                                                                                                                                                                                      | <i>193</i> |
| <i>Figure 15: Word cloud of frequently used terms in the body text of tweets from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset, 13 July–7 September 2020, generated using R in Jupyter Notebooks .....</i>                                                                                                                                                         | <i>194</i> |
| <i>Figure 16: Frequently used terms in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset, 13 July–7 September 2020, presented as a list. Generated using R in Jupyter Notebooks, with the lowest frequency of use set to 400 times. ....</i>                                                                                                                            | <i>195</i> |
| <i>Figure 17: Frequency of tweets by @edfringe over the August festival period, compared year-on-year from 2018-2020 inclusive. ....</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <i>197</i> |
| <i>Figure 18: Tweet by @edfringe to mark what would have been the opening day of the festival on 7 August 2020. Available at: <a href="https://twitter.com/edfringe/status/1291750956250484738?s=21&amp;dt=LFbUWnB1xo7UKlf5m3Eyuw">https://twitter.com/edfringe/status/1291750956250484738?s=21&amp;dt=LFbUWnB1xo7UKlf5m3Eyuw</a> [Accessed 14 March 2023].....</i> | <i>199</i> |
| <i>Figure 19: Tweet by @edfringe to mark what would have been the closing day of the festival on 31 August 2020. Available at: <a href="https://twitter.com/edfringe/status/1300493557938049024">https://twitter.com/edfringe/status/1300493557938049024</a> [Accessed 14 March 2023] .....</i>                                                                     | <i>200</i> |



|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <i>Figure 20: Reply by @edfringe in a Twitter thread (see Figure 18 above) on 31 August 2020. Available at <a href="https://twitter.com/edfringe/status/1300493557938049024">https://twitter.com/edfringe/status/1300493557938049024</a> [Accessed 14 March 2023].....</i>                                                                            | <i>201</i> |
| <i>Figure 21: manual content analysis of Edinburgh Science 'About Us' text from <a href="https://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/about">https://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/about</a> [Accessed 22 June 2021].....</i>                                                                                                                                        | <i>214</i> |
| <i>Figure 22: manual content analysis of Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society 'About Us' text from <a href="https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us">https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us</a> and <a href="https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us/blueprint">https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us/blueprint</a> [Accessed 22 June 2021] .....</i> | <i>214</i> |

# Introduction

## Reflections on this project

This thesis began as an exploration of digital work in the arts and creative industries, based on my professional experience in arts marketing. During a decade of work in digital communications in Edinburgh's cultural sector, I experienced extreme highs and lows of value attached to digital work.

There was a lack of evaluation of the potential for digital work to contribute to organisational models, but also high expectations of digital work as a means of generating revenue, and a strong reliance on and trust in platform metrics as a means of measuring value and success. I often encountered a lack of resource available within organisations to support the development of digital technologies as part of the work of producing, promoting, and evaluating cultural outputs.

The shaping of this research by, with, and through my professional experiences and practice has felt uncomfortable at times. I have been acutely aware of the extent to which research into existing connections from another professional life might inadvertently shape the findings presented in this thesis through unconscious, and perhaps even conscious, bias. There is a lot of 'me' in this research. It reflects my belief in the value of cultural experiences and activities as our constructed social, economic, and political society understands them, alongside the belief that inequalities of access to cultural production and consumption are challenges those governments, cultural policymakers, organisations, and individuals – both in and outside the 'creative industries' – can, and should, address.

Towards the end of the process of conducting and writing up this research, I was happy to come across work by other academics who have explored and developed earlier professional experiences through their research, most notably Steven Hadley (Hadley, 2021) and Susan Oman (Oman, 2021), and this approach has informed the writing of this thesis. In fact, in the introduction to Hadley's book, *Audience Development and*

*Cultural Policy*, I found a sentence which helped me focus in on the personal nature of this project:

“every arts marketer worth their salt has a story of how data they have presented has questioned organisational thinking and challenged the narratives upon which such thinking is based.” (Hadley, 2021, pp. 2-3)

This thesis seeks to question organisational thinking from the perspective of arts marketers, communicators and other professionals who are ‘worth their salt’ to explore the challenges of doing ‘valuable’ work in the cultural sector. As such, there is a reflexive, practice-based thread of enquiry in this thesis that extends to both the findings presented here and the aligned research, also included, that I have worked on during this project. This assemblage of research forms part of the thesis’ contribution to knowledge in its insight into the complexities of how fluid ideas of cultural value and values are negotiated by cultural organisations and the people who represent them, as well as by audiences, and are mediated through communications.

This research centres the practices and outputs of communications activity, particularly through digital channels and platforms, as a means of attempting to understand something of *how* inequalities in and understandings of cultural value are constructed, circulated, and mediated. My focus here is on Edinburgh’s festivals, which occupy a large space in perceptions of the city’s cultural value from inside and out and have a year-round impact on its cultural sector. Edinburgh is a city where I have spent half my life. I was drawn to it by visits to the city’s summer festivals during my final years at school and bought straight into the city as a cultural destination and cultural imaginary, an idea I will explore further in this thesis. While I can see cultural, social, and economic value in framing Edinburgh’s unique position as a cultural destination, which has led to its self-described position as the “the world’s leading festival city”<sup>3</sup>, that is not all its cultural infrastructure is. The idea that the city can be ‘done’ in August – that it is an experience rather than a place, and that it disappears in a puff of smoke for

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/the-city> [Accessed 23 February 2023]

eleven months of the year – sits uneasily with me and exacerbates the challenge of communicating the idea that the city has a year-round cultural life.

Yet examples of this phraseology are many and varied. You could read, for example, a short piece by “comedian, speaker, writer and broadcaster” Cally Beaton in the *Financial Times*, written during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown when the in-person Edinburgh Festival Fringe did not take place, which asks, when sharing a story of having been asked to have a drink “during” Edinburgh, “How can you have a drink during a place?” (Beaton, 2020). Or you could go back further to 2019, the year in which it was reported that Fringe audiences had exceeded three million people for the first time in the festival’s history<sup>4</sup>, and read comedian Dan Antopolski’s take on the experience of ‘doing’ Edinburgh and the loaded narrative which that short phrasing conceals:

“If someone asks you if you are doing Edinburgh and you are only performing for part of the festival, you may answer yes, but you must rush to provide specifics, for to do Edinburgh truly is to be assumed to join in the comradeship of adrenaline, fatigue, ambition, debt and the alternating euphoria and depression of the gigs, which vary wildly in character and success from one night to the next, pummelling your heart. It is a little war, one which changes you slightly – and one which of course doesn’t matter at all.” (Antopolski, 2019)

Finally, perhaps as a nod to those – in which I would probably include myself (and as I will go on to suggest, we are probably a smaller number than we, and our social media bubbles, think) – who take comfort from the idea that they have a deeper understanding of the city’s cultural landscape than most, you only need to read the back cover of arts writer David Pollock’s *The Edinburgh Festival: A Biography* to find a reference to ‘doing’ Edinburgh<sup>5</sup>. Pollock states that this terminology “has made the city’s very name synonymous with world-leading culture and performance”. The back cover tag line says, “You know there’s no such thing as the Edinburgh Festival, don’t you?”, as though a

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/edinburgh-festivals/theatre-and-stage/edinburgh-festival-fringe-audience-breaks-three-million-barrier-first-time-542031> [Accessed 23 February 2023]

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.luath.co.uk/product/the-edinburgh-festival> [Accessed 23 February 2023]

detailed knowledge of the separate but interoperating brands of festival available in Edinburgh in August confers some sort of special, expert status and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Pollock is right, of course. The festivals that happen in Edinburgh in August are each singular cultural organisations and experiences, and the descriptor goes on to reference the communicative power of being able to ‘do’ ‘The Festival.’

As the short illustration above begins, anecdotally, to show, the way in which communications about Edinburgh’s cultural sector are delivered and received has a direct impact on understandings of cultural value in both the city specifically and further afield. What the cultural sector says about what it is, who it is, and its value and purpose, and how those who work in the sector and audiences circulate these messages of value and values is at the core, I hope to show, of developing a reflexive approach to understanding cultural value that moves forward the idea that inequalities of access to cultural production and consumption can be addressed.

This thesis will explore links between the language the cultural sector uses to describe its work, and the imbalances of power in the structure of cultural work and audiences that reinforce inequalities of perceptions of cultural value. Because the research presented here took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns, it captures a unique point in the life of Edinburgh’s cultural sector. It was a time that necessarily foregrounded digital and online cultural production, where the experiences of precarious workers in the sector were more visible, and where new audiences, despite the much-hyped potential of broadening reach through online presentations, did not grow as expected. As such, the lasting impacts of the unsettling, accelerated and reactive adaptations towards adoption digital technologies in the cultural and live events sector are still unfolding (Jones and Elsdon, 2024) and are now entwined with a landscape of economic, social and political uncertainty that has continued to develop post-pandemic.

## About this research

The practitioner-researcher role (Barrett 2007; Scott, 2016; Nelson, 2022) is uniquely centred in this research in the work of communications, which is proposed as an original lens through which to evaluate cultural work and creative justice, and *injustice* (Banks, 2017) more broadly.

In the first phase of this research, findings from interviews and social media-based case studies with two Edinburgh festivals tested and expanded my own experience and contextualised the work of arts marketing and digital communications within marketing teams and organisational structures. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, which quickly recalibrated the role of digital technologies and communications and embedded them further into the production, promotion, and consumption of cultural events. The pandemic has also shone a broader and brighter light on inequalities in the cultural sector and creative industries, including a lack of diversity in the cultural workforce and the sector's audiences. As a result, calls to address these issues rapidly accelerated. In Edinburgh, the UK and internationally, the pause in cultural events and outputs brought about by the pandemic-facilitated space for the sector to consider its value (centred around popular framings of cultural value), as well as its values (the core principles on which it operates) and how these are communicated to and aligned with audiences.

The much hyped 'pivot to digital' (Rentschler and Lee, 2021) that took place in cultural organisations early in the pandemic was superseded by what the Centre for Cultural Value describes as a 'pivot to purpose' (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p.64), as cultural workforces and audiences posed challenges and asked questions about how the sector can become more equitable. This research also pivoted. Through the pandemic, its focus shifted from situating the role of digital communications within arts and cultural marketing and operations, towards a framing which explores value and values in the cultural sector through the lens of communications. This thesis is a contribution to a body of research into the creative and cultural industries that explores the histories and

negotiations of economic, political and social tensions around cultural value and values and cultural work, but uniquely foregrounds the communications worker.

The ‘problem statement’ of this research has also evolved during the planning and data gathering phases of the work. The position from which this thesis begins is that Edinburgh’s cultural sector – and the cultural sector more broadly – has a complex ecology, in which several linked and overlapping cultural, social, economic, and political circumstances have contributed to the existence of inequalities of access for cultural workers and audiences. There are also historically rooted cultural, social, economic, and political arguments which can be used to explore why and the extent to which this is a problem. These are examined here through exploring the histories of notions of cultural value (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007; Belfiore, 2012, 2019, 2020; O’Brien, 2013; Banks, 2017; Brook *et al.*, 2020; Oman, 2021; Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023); industrial framings of culture and creativity (Peck, 2005; Pratt and Hutton, 2013; Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015; Hesmondhalgh, 2019; Belfiore, 2020); concepts of intermediaries and imaginaries in cultural policymaking (Peck, 2005; Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008; O’Connor and Shaw, 2014; O’Connor, 2015; Benghozi and Paris, 2016; Bennett, 2020) and ‘creative cities’ (Florida, 2002, 2003); and cultural work as a field of study (Hesmondhalgh, 2015, 2019; Banks, 2006, 2007). Some of these issues have a particularly local focus or are played out in a particular way in Edinburgh; others are linked more broadly to cultural policy and perceptions of cultural value that are deep-rooted both culturally and geographically through framings of culture and creativity in places (Gilmore, 2013; Gilmore *et al.*, 2019; Lynch and Quinn, 2022; Durrer *et al.*, 2023).

The global COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the extent of these inequalities through the challenges of quickly adapting live culture for digital access and the ways in which audiences for this work could be measured; the ways in which community arts organisations were able to operationalise their activities to support their neighbourhoods with valued local initiatives; and perhaps most importantly, through the pause in operations which led precarious cultural workers to reflect on conditions in the sector and use this time to share experiences and voice challenges, questions and

issues with others. Through the lens of my own reflective research practice, the analysis presented here will be used to develop recommendations for possible futures in both cultural sector work and academic research, and how these two structures can interoperate and explore the value of the cultural sector as both a practicing ecosystem and as a commodity, whose purpose is simultaneously linked to social, political, economic, and cultural value and values.

This thesis will demonstrate the centrality of ideas of value and values in the production, promotion, and consumption of culture and explore theories of value and valuation (Williams, 1983; Bourdieu, 1984, 1986; Normann and Ramírez, 1993; Schwartz, 2006, 2012; Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013; Skeggs, 2014; Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014; Speed and Maxwell, 2015; Banks, 2017; Whitham et al., 2019; Brook et al., 2020; Oman, 2021) to define a framing of cultural value and values in this research. It uses the work of communications, and its position as the storytelling mechanism through which culture reaches audiences, as a lens through which to explore interoperating concepts of value and valuation in cultural policies and practice. It will also show how the COVID-19 pandemic sharpened the focus of cultural workers and audiences on addressing longstanding inequalities in the sector. This has resulted in questions, challenges, and conversations about how the sector can improve equity, access, diversity, and sustainability.

It will consider the role of communications – including digital communications and the data these generate – in developing, establishing, and promoting the cultural value and values that might serve as markers of equitable and sustainable cultural organisations, or as intermediaries for promoting and replicating inequalities in existing cultural policy structures and imaginaries (Banks, 2007; O'Connor, 2015; Lechelt and Cunningham, 2020). And it will continue to examine the origins of the thesis in how communications are valued as cultural work, using these findings a means of understanding challenges and inequalities within organisational structures.

This research is focused on Edinburgh and will discuss the specificities of the city's cultural offer, particularly the economic and political imaginaries of the cultural



destination framing of Edinburgh as the ‘world’s leading festival city’ and the impact of this moniker on the cultural ecologies and networks of the city year-round. This position is used here to develop a proposed framing for future research around cultural value and values through the lens of the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’, which seeks to capture and critically examine the embedded and active tensions and negotiations of cultural value and values in places, through the lens of cultural and creative work. It will also consider the effects of COVID-19 on achieving balance between the local and hyperlocal activities which were shown to generate community impact during the pandemic, and the spirit of international collaboration and welcoming of global audiences which is also part of Edinburgh’s cultural, social, and economic value. While Edinburgh, and its Imaginary, provides the backdrop for the research presented here, the discussion, findings and recommendations will also be applicable as part of broader perspectives for the cultural sector and other ‘creative cities’ in Scotland and the UK, as well as internationally, as the sector considers cultural exchange in respect of the climate emergency.

## Research methodology

This research was always meant to be iterative. My practice-informed approach was flexible to allow me to design the work through comparing my own experiences with those of others and adapting my methods accordingly. The result has been a reflexive, practice-led mixed methods research design, incorporating:

- Focused co-created and participatory case study work with communications practitioners that includes data from multiple sources – social media data collection using computational tools, and interviews – and qualitative and quantitative analysis.
- Wider computational content analysis as a means of contextualising case study findings.
- Documenting my aligned research practice that has informed iterations of the work presented in this thesis.

- The development of an action research methodology for examining futures for the cultural sector through symposium-based and workshop activities that operate according to explicitly stated principles of value and values.

As already noted, this research was envisaged in part because of my experience of a lack of an effective structure for evaluating digital communications and the work of their production in cultural organisations. I questioned the value of platform metrics as a means of measuring success and found the ease with which these metrics could be incorporated into organisational representations of value, through reporting to funders and stakeholders, unsettling. As such, this thesis also seeks to interrogate the practices of conducting research and evaluation about the cultural sector and its value and values.

The questions the research seeks to answer are as follows:

1. What is the value of communications in the cultural sector and how is it evaluated and measured? For organisations, workforces, and audiences.
2. How do the sector and its audiences communicate value and values, in Edinburgh and the sector more widely? What are the limitations and successes of current approaches?
3. What has the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic been on communication of value and values? What lasting changes might it bring about?
4. What approaches to research design and delivery with Edinburgh's cultural sector can drive change towards addressing inequalities in the sector?
5. What does a values-led cultural sector in Edinburgh look and feel like? What does it do?

These research questions will be explored through the literature review, the explanation of the methodological framework of the research, the empirical chapters of the thesis and in the discussion of findings.

## Thesis structure

The thesis is structured as follows:

### Chapter 1: Literature Review

This section will explore and define the position of the thesis regarding understand cultural value and the distinction made in this research between ‘value’, in the singular, and ‘values. It will show how understandings of cultural value – both as intrinsic to cultural objects and instrumental as a tool for social transformation – have been established and negotiated in recent studies of cultural policies, production and consumption. Practices and forms of valuation and measurement will also be examined, including consideration of whose value is prioritised, and why.

The review will include literature about the work and practices of communications and marketing in the cultural sector, including the incorporation of digital technologies and the challenges and ethics of evaluating cultural value and values through interpretation of digital platform content and metrics.

Literature regarding recent economic, social and political framings of culture and creativity will be examined, including perspectives on creative cities, classes and destinations and the inequalities and power asymmetries they embed in cultural production and consumption. This work will underpin the development of the concept of the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’, laid out in the empirical findings from this research, that brings together ideas of the city as a physical and digital cultural and creative economy. This framing captures a sense of how the city tells its own story, and the lens of communications acts as a means of exposing and interrogating that imaginary.

To conclude, the review will examine the concept of ‘creative justice’ (Banks, 2017) and explore its utility in this research as a lens through which to sensitively bring together notions of cultural value and values that might begin to operationalise research and practice towards a more equal and equitable cultural sector.

## Chapter 2: Iterative Methodologies and Practice-Led Research

This section will explore the theoretical underpinnings and development of the practice-led, iterative research methods employed throughout this project. It will consider the challenges and opportunities associated with its design, documenting the evolution of the research methods through a changing landscape of digital research and the COVID-19 pandemic.

It will set out the practice-led action research approaches that were co-created with participants to define the parameters of the case studies included in this research, and how these were contextualised through social media research and content analysis. These approaches were also informed by my own aligned research practice conducted on other projects and programmes, and findings from these will be documented to show how they have supported and underpinned the work presented here.

Finally, it will document the process of the research design for the final output of this research: a participatory event, *Future Culture Edinburgh*, involving participants from across Edinburgh's cultural sector, which was devised and delivered through a creative partnership with ex-producer and creative Morvern Cunningham. The event was supported by the Edinburgh Futures Institute, The Edinburgh Centre for Data, Culture and Society, Creative Informatics and Leith Theatre<sup>6</sup>.

As well as the ethics of social media and digital platform research covered above, this section will document the specific ethical decision making associated with each phase of this research. Particular attention will be paid to the ethical review process for data

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<sup>6</sup> The Edinburgh Futures Institute, <https://efi.ed.ac.uk>, is an interdisciplinary research institute based at the University of Edinburgh; The Edinburgh Centre for Data, Culture and Society, <https://www.cdcs.ed.ac.uk>, is an initiative of the University of Edinburgh's College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences to support arts and humanities skills and research around digital technologies and data-driven innovation; Creative Informatics, <https://www.creativeinformatics.org>, is part of the AHRC's Creative Industries Clusters Programme and supports artists and creatives in Edinburgh and South East Scotland to develop their work with and through digital technologies and data; Leith Theatre, <https://www.leiththeatre.co.uk>, is a 1930s theatre building and venue in the Leith area of Edinburgh in the north of the city.

gathering through a public event as co-produced research design, which required an extensive planning phase and detailed research design. Each stage of the research has undergone ethical review through Edinburgh College of Art at The University of Edinburgh.

### Chapter 3: Research Findings – the value of communications and communications of value

Two case studies are included in the thesis, with semi-structure interviews supported by computational analysis from social media and the case study organisations' websites. These were selected to support a comparison between programming formats and events which take place both during and outwith Edinburgh's summer festivals focal point. Findings from this work – as well as those from aligned practice and projects I have been part of over the course of this research, also explored during this chapter – contributed to the questions posed by the research through a one-off symposium event, *Future Culture Edinburgh*. This took place at Leith Theatre in Edinburgh on 1 September 2021, at which speakers and participants were asked to put forward their propositions for what might come next for the city's cultural sector post-pandemic.

The first case study looked at Edinburgh Science, the organisation which programmes Edinburgh's annual Science Festival in March-April each year, alongside a year-round programme of science communication with schools and an international events business. The work was devised in late 2019 and through my evolving position as a practitioner-researcher (Nelson, 2022) developed a co-created, practice-led hypothesis for studying the organisation's communications based on social media content analysis, focused on studying whether there were ways to understand more about passive online audiences beyond platform metrics.

Data collection was planned for March 2020 and, while the original questions were derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, the social media data collected

from Twitter<sup>7</sup>, alongside interviews with the Edinburgh Science communications and programming teams, trace the cancellation of the in-person 2020 Science Festival and uniquely capture the immediate reactions from the organisation and its audiences.

The second case study built on the findings from Edinburgh Science, working with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society. Two online interviews were conducted with a member of the organisation's communications team, and, like the first case study, this qualitative data was supplemented by an analysis of social media data from Twitter.

Through these two case studies, findings emerged around the pandemic as a disruptor to the status quo of the perceived value and values of these organisations, and of the festivals and cultural sector in Edinburgh more widely. To supplement and compare these findings with a broader picture of the ways in which value and values were communicated, content analysis of ideas of vision and mission put forward by these organisations for public and/or stakeholder consumption on their websites was conducted.

In 2021, with discussions taking place in the press and online about what might come next for Edinburgh's cultural sector and with reports and findings from research about the impacts of the pandemic beginning to emerge, this research turned towards an action research methodology for collecting and understanding how these ideas communicate cultural value and values, and how and what changes might take place. *Future Culture Edinburgh* – the final study in this research – began as an ongoing conversation with my collaborator, Morvern Cunningham, whom I met and interviewed for the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project's *Art in and Out of Lockdown* project<sup>8</sup> in 2020. The project arose out of our shared interest in understanding the inequalities in the cultural workforce and audiences that were further highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic, and in exploring the possibility of solutions-based change to address inequalities – how that change might be co-

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<sup>7</sup> Now rebranded as X, but the platform is referred to as Twitter throughout this thesis to align with the uses and conventions of the platform at the time of data collection.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.edinburghculturalmap.org/research/art-in-out-of-lockdown-report/> [Accessed 23 February 2023]

produced, and the possible contribution research could make to catalysing collective action. Together, we initiated the idea for the event, sought funding, developed the design of workshop activities, and produced and hosted the resulting symposium event at Edinburgh's Leith Theatre on 1 September 2021.

## Chapter 4: Discussion and Summary of Findings

This section will bring together the findings from each stage of the research to set out and trace the evolution of the thesis' answers to the research questions and what they tell us about Edinburgh's sense of its cultural value and values, and how these findings may be more broadly applicable in Scotland, the UK and further afield. It will show how the study of communications practice acts as a lens for exploring ideas of cultural value and values, including the imaginaries associated with Edinburgh as a festival city and broader notions of creative cities, industries and classes. It will also explore creative work in communications and marketing through ideas of creative justice (Banks, 2017), considering platform economies and logics as tools for understanding the communication of ideas of cultural value and values across physical and digital spaces.

## Conclusion

This section sums up key findings from this research, and links them to both my own and others' work on these questions and challenges that has taken place alongside this thesis project. It will evaluate the process and practices of conducting this research, with a focus on the value of co-produced and practice-led collaboration between cultural sector practitioners and researchers, in academic settings and more broadly.

The research's contribution to knowledge will be summarised, making a case for the study of communications practices, outputs and texts as a unique way of seeing and knowing cultural work and ideas of creative justice (Banks, 2017) and cultural industries imaginaries. The study of communications work presented, including platform logics in

physical spaces, are shown to offer unique insight into the fluid complexities of cultural value as negotiated practice, shaped and informed by cultural values.



# Chapter 1: Literature Review

## Introduction

This section will consider multiple perspectives on what culture is, what it does, and who decides what is valuable. It will explore foundations of ideas of value and recent histories and framings of cultural value and values to examine relationships between forms of value and values, and how these factors interact to deliver cultural production and consumption. It will discuss how cultural value is evaluated, assessed, and measured both within and without the cultural sector and the political, social, and economic factors through which notions of ‘value’ and ‘quality’ can be assigned, developing definitions of cultural value and values for this research.

It will introduce the idea of the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’, which is developed throughout this thesis, through policy-led and industrial framings of creative cities and an examination of the roots of Edinburgh’s ‘Festival City’ cultural destination narrative. It will explore lenses of creative work, with a particular focus on communications and marketing. The concept of ‘creative justice’ (Banks, 2017) is explored as a flexible lens through which the findings from this research will be analysed, and one that facilitates critique of what culture is produced, how, and why, bringing together ideas of cultural value and values with the objective qualities (Banks, 2017) of culture and the social principles and practices that decide them:

“by thinking through holistic forms of valuation that consider historical context, subjective apprehension and objective quality, we might better know what culture *is*, and what it can *do* – and so do it justice.” (Banks, 2017, p.146)

## Exploring the history and definitions of cultural value

This research deliberately makes a distinction between value and values but considers them together. This framework aims to reflect the complexity of relationships between

culture, the cultural sector and the creative industries; and the social, historical, political, and economic contexts in which culture is produced and consumed. This approach aligns with Raymond Williams' statement in *Keywords* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1983) that:

“Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is so partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought.” (Williams, 1983, p. 87)

Cultural value is a term with a long history of multiple definitions. Within it is the implication that culture can be measured, with value ascribed through this measurement. Who does the measuring, and the frameworks for deciding what about culture is valuable, or not, has shifted and evolved over time, and continues to do so. This thesis is mainly concerned with ideas of cultural value from the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. However, as Belfiore (2019) points out, the threads of these ideas can be traced back much further, and can be used as lenses to look forwards towards opportunities to develop notions of cultural value. Belfiore and Bennett (2007) recommend a historical perspective on cultural value because it:

“has the advantage of revealing that our commonly accepted notions of the positive impacts of the arts are indeed based on a misleading simplification of a rich and diverse body of intellectual elaborations.” (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007, p.140)

Evidence of the practice of measuring culture through its perceived value can be dated back to Ancient Greece (Belfiore, 2012; Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023). Plato – in the negative tradition (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007) – considered culture and its consumption to be a potentially dangerous force, capable of destabilising and disrupting civil and moral order. To counter this view, and to make the case for culture, Aristotle – in the positive tradition (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007) – framed its value through catharsis, where disruptive ideas and forces could be released safely from

within a structured, civil society (Belfiore, 2012). This, as Belfiore (2012) states, is an early example of a defensive justification for culture that continues today in its focus on tackling a “social deficit” (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023, p.26) through culture. This is a trend which has continued to inform ideas of cultural value, through the Italian Renaissance, when Classical texts were reframed as early examples of religious teachings so as not to appear to challenge the Catholic Church (Belfiore and Gibson, 2019), to nineteenth century concerns with the morality and civilisation of both industrial and colonial (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007) populations that highlighted culture’s transformative powers and saw the start of an increasing state intervention in cultural participation (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023) that has persisted without a clear evidence base (O’Brien, 2013; Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023). The harnessing of this transformational power can signify attempts to support democratic cultural participation but can also be enacted as propaganda in totalitarian regimes, as European inter-war examples in the 20<sup>th</sup> century show (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007). Through this shifting history, ideas of culture and its value are shown to be reflexive and discursive, and the inbuilt tensions of cultural value and its social, political and economic potential continue to be debated in a contemporary context.

Jancovich and Stevenson (2023) date the origins of the United Kingdom’s cultural policy preoccupation with and problematisation of what culture is valuable, and who decides and gets to participate, to the mid twentieth century. In 1942, the Arts Council of Great Britain was established, with economist John Maynard Keynes as its first chairman (Hadley and Gray, 2017), with part of its remit being to develop an artistic “vision” (Belfiore and Gibson, 2019, p.6) for peace time that promoted “access and excellence” (Belfiore and Gibson, 2019) and ‘The Best for Most’ (Belfiore, 2019). Following the end of World War Two, the Edinburgh International Festival was first programmed in 1947. Its declaration that it was presenting the best ‘high culture’ performances on offer (Bartie, 2013) demonstrates this policy in action. This example could, on the one hand, translate as access to cultural excellence, but on the other could be interpreted as access for excellence of a professional class of artists (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023). The controversy this exclusivity provoked led to the festival’s performances being joined by an ‘uninvited’ group of artists who presented their own additional programme that

eventually became the Edinburgh Festival Fringe (Bartie, 2013). The city's history as a culturally valuable place and the central position of the festival in this framing will be considered later in this section, but the origins of Edinburgh's role as a 'festival city' tie it closely to broader negotiations of cultural value in the UK and Western Europe that still prevail today.

By the 1960s, ideas of what culture was and what types of culture were valuable developed as a more diverse British society began to be reflected in its cultural production and consumption (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023). This discourse extended into the 1970s, which saw these debates evolve into discussions around ideas of cultural democracy (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023), a concept which looked beyond existing strategies and policies to democratise access to accepted forms of 'high' culture, and towards legitimising the cultural preferences of those whose cultural consumption does not include what could traditionally be counted as 'high' (Belfiore *et al.*, 2023). This was accompanied by more decentralisation of funding for culture to local authorities, making them more able to support the needs of the communities and places they served (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023) and supported the beginnings of the notion of 'community art', which rejected traditional hierarchies that defined what art was (Matarasso, 2023). By the 1980s, the growing prominence of the community arts movement moved the debate about what constituted valuable culture towards an emphasis on participation (Matarasso, 2023), rather than product, and to "social participation between peers" (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023, p.17) rather than top-down directives through institutions. Through this lens, cultural value was measured and assigned less through consideration of an output, and more through the value of the process of its making. However, this approach was curtailed by cuts to local and community arts funding (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023) and a political shift towards consumer-focused interactions (Matarasso, 2023), and so the 1980s were also the beginnings of a shift in the language of cultural value, which aligned with a Thatcherite strategy of privatisation and free market dominance. While policymakers and funders began to adopt some of the rhetoric and "buzz words" (Belfiore, 2002, p.95) of the community arts movement, this period also marks the beginning of a rephrasing of defining and measuring cultural value that adopted terminologies of business,

economic success and investment (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023), which is still in use today, and which was able, conveniently, to skirt around issues of cultural democracy and cultural equity (Belfiore, 2019; Belfiore *et al.*, 2023). In this framing, cultural value is defined and measured through culture's instrumental role as a tool (Belfiore, 2002) to affect change in other areas of society – social and economic – and is arguably therefore not intrinsic to either the cultural product, or the process of its making. Culture became part of policies for regeneration of cities and regions that were now deindustrialised (Holmes and Beebeejaun, 2007). 'Flagship' projects such as Tate Liverpool and the Burrell Collection in Glasgow were supported to attract new residents, and their leisure time, and to model neoliberal values in areas that had previously been unattractive. This in turn, was part of a shift of cultural value's association with place that, in the UK, extended beyond London and would support the rebranding of these cities and regions towards attracting tourism based on their cultural values (Holmes and Beebeejaun, 2007). The justification for accessible culture outside London also has longer roots. In fact, at the end of the First World War, the Ministry of Reconstruction's 1919 Report, called for the "rebalancing" of British cultural life to allow access to "cultural opportunities where people live" (Belfiore, 2019, p.74) to support the instrumental power of culture in education and improving citizens' social lives.

In the 1990s, cultural policy became a more notable and less peripheral part of the structure of the UK Government, with a minister, department and remit (Belfiore, 2012). By 1997, when New Labour won the UK General Election, culture had been explicitly framed as a tool for tackling social exclusion, and exclusion which is not just economic but includes social, educational and health barriers – a "step change" for UK cultural policy (Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015, p.11). This conceptualisation of culture's transformative power was supported at a global scale by UNESCO's contemporaneous commitment to culture as a means of effecting 'development' (Belfiore, 2019). Belfiore (2012) argues that this is the point at which cultural policy, as a standalone and influential practice and instrument of cultural value, came to exist. The framings of cultural value enacted through this early period of New Labour cemented the language of culture as an investment; one for which it was possible to 'make the case' because of

its economic and social benefits (Belfiore, 2012), and through which culture became a policy ‘attachment’ (Belfiore, 2012, referencing Clive Gray, 2002) to other public remits and initiatives. This instrumental, top-down strategy supported a bottom-up response that required culture to demonstrate its utility as tool for socio-economic improvement as well as its contribution to the production of ‘quality’ arts and cultural products (Belfiore, 2012).

This defensive (Belfiore, 2012) framework for culture as an instrument of social and economic development laid the groundwork for the conceptualisation of the UK’s ‘creative industries’, and the accompanying “celebratory rhetoric” (Belfiore, 2020, p. 384). Belfiore argues that this positivist and general communication of cultural value “obscures, and thus shelters from scrutiny, power imbalances, unequal distribution of cultural authority in society, and unequal access to the means of symbolic representation and meaning-making.” (Belfiore, 2020, p. 384) New Labour claimed to have solved the challenging binary between providing access to culture set against the prioritisation of creative excellence – a tension with a long cultural history as well as a reference point in the formation of current UK funding structures for culture that were enacted by the formation of the Arts Council of Great Britain (Belfiore, 2019) – through a ‘mixed economy’ approach (Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015). The challenging questions of whose cultural value counted could be circumvented and glossed over through policies which encouraged a widening of access and participation through privatisation – making culture an economic instrument that minimised its impact on public funds – while also preserving funding for “high art” (Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015, p. 37) and actively celebrating it as a social instrument through its perceived transformative and life-enhancing power.

Thus, instrumentalism, at a policy level, defends the “dominant neo-liberal political and ideological framework” (Belfiore, 2012, p.105) from criticism because:

“arguments rooted in notions of utility and impact are perceived to be rhetorically powerful; they are powerful because they can be (and indeed, they have proved to be) *persuasive*” (Belfiore, 2012, p.105)

Cultural value in contemporary contexts is thus seen to be relational – contested continually through its explicit link to political identity and the politics of representation. This includes “misrepresentation and stigmatisation” (Belfiore, 2020, p. 390) brought about in part through a lack of diversity and neutrality in those in power, and in the prioritisation of a celebratory economic imperative through allocating value to culture. This need for persuasion, justification, popularity for cultural policy underpins this research’s focus on the practices of communications, which tell the stories of the ideological positions of culture and its value in both what is said and what is left out (Banks, 2007) and signal its values in the process of these communications’ production (Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

## Towards a definition of cultural value and values for this thesis

To define the distinction this thesis makes between cultural value and values, and the relations between them, approaches to this distinction are in part developed through considering broader notions of value and values which, as noted in discussions of cultural value above, can be traced back to antiquity (Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2015). In philosophy, a distinction is often made between intrinsic value, for its own sake or that is held within, and extrinsic value, determined externally in relation to other people or things (Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2015). In developing a framework for studying notions of cultural value that incorporate acts of production and consumption of culture, and their valuation, this distinction is both clear and potentially challenging in its assumption that “we have an intuitive grasp of what properties are internal and external” (Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2015, p.31). A framework of conceptualising cultural value could look like a distinction between the aesthetic value of a cultural object or product, ‘art for art’s sake’ (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007) and culture’s extrinsic value as a relational tool for social and economic transformation, which is shown above to be problematic in its abilities to protect and reinforce political positions and ideas. And if we go on to include ideas from cultural policy and arts management studies that look at how culture is used as a tool, there is a tendency to focus on “distinctions between instrumental and

intrinsic value” (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023, p.19) – whether culture is ‘good’ or ‘good for’ (Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2021). This process of valuation may inadvertently or deliberately exclude broader social extrinsic definitions of value and values, for example Schwartz’s Theory of Basic Values (Schwartz, 2012) and Theory of Cultural Value Orientations (Schwartz, 2006) that observe and compare culture at a national scale to determine “meanings, beliefs, practices, symbols, norms, and values prevalent among people in a society.” (Schwartz, 2006, p.138). Valuation of culture, then, is very much dependent on whose cultural value – either intrinsic, extrinsic, or both – is prioritised.

The Keywords Project, a collaborative research project which, from 2007 to 2017, inspired by Raymond Williams *Keywords* (1976, and second edition 1983), investigated “‘key’ words prominently used but also contested in social debate in English” (Keywords Project, n.d.).<sup>9</sup> The project includes a listing for the word ‘value’ which begins by noting that it is:

“an especially challenging word in modern English. First, during periods of social crisis or upheaval, **values** tend to be vigorously asserted (and attacks made on the presumed values of others). Second, disagreements over **value** are exacerbated by accentuated contrast between “relativity of values” (e.g., in perceptions of postmodernism), claims to authority based on “traditional values” (e.g., in religion), and unresolved arguments over **value freedom** (e.g., in relation to science). Difficulties with **value** inevitably run beyond the word itself into its tangled relations with questions of objectivity and subjectivity, intrinsic and extrinsic worth, and authority of interpretation. What makes **value** both distinctive and confusing, however, is the set of connections, as well as slippage, that the word facilitates among radically different kinds of social thinking.” (Keywords Project, n.d.)<sup>10</sup>

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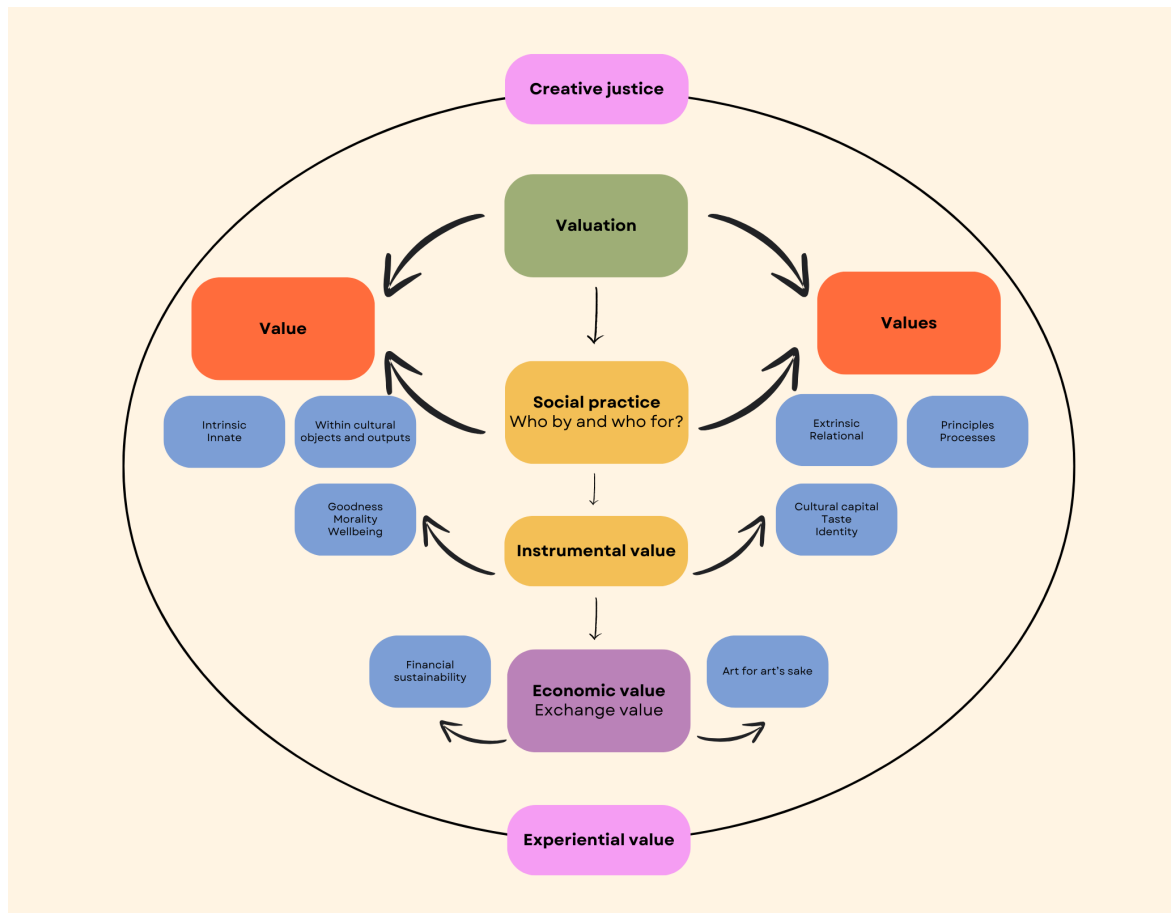
<sup>9</sup> <https://www.keywords.pitt.edu/index.html> [Accessed 10 August 2024]

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.keywords.pitt.edu/keywords\\_defined/value.html](https://www.keywords.pitt.edu/keywords_defined/value.html) [Accessed 10 August 2024]



This description seems to speak directly to the development of notions of culture since the mid-late twentieth century explored above, and to the period that this research captures during and immediately after a global pandemic. From a practice-based perspective, through the lens of the work of communications and marketing, this description also captures the continuous negotiations of value and values that take place within that process.

This research takes the position that the value of culture as an object to be promoted and then consumed can be both intrinsic and extrinsic at once, with the one informing the other through layers of negotiated valuation. This view is supported by notions of creative justice (Banks, 2017) that acknowledge the value of and within cultural objects – “Culture is not a means to an end. It is an end in itself.” (Belfiore, 2002, p.104) – as well as the value and values of the practices that produce and consume them. The distinction between value and values made in this research relates to its focus on the practices of distributing cultural objects, products and experiences through communications, and to the practices of producing these messages. In this process, culture’s intrinsic value is used as a tool through which to attract attention, but the way in which that is done is through building relationships with audiences based on shared values – a value proposition (Speed and Maxwell, 2015) – with a goal that might be both intrinsic but also instrumental, perhaps capturing the “slippage” noted by the Keywords Project above. A suggested illustration of this thesis’ approach to the interrelation and co-creation of value and values is included below, and these definitions draw on class-based socially constructed notions of cultural capital as framed by Bourdieu (1984, 1986); contemporary framings of recent social, political and economic influences on cultural policy (O’Brien, 2013; Skeggs, 2014; Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015; Belfiore, 2020; Oman, 2021); Valuation Studies (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013; Terras *et. al.*, 2021); and literature from marketing and design research on forms of value (Normann and Ramírez, 1993; Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014; Speed and Maxwell, 2015).



## Value theories

For Bourdieu, cultural capital could be acquired in three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalised (Bourdieu, 1986). Embodied cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, relates to our disposition and the labour and process of assimilating cultural knowledge that inform it; objectified cultural capital exists in “material objects and media, such as writing, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc.” (Bourdieu, 1986); and institutionalised cultural capital is acquired through education. In addition, taste, Bourdieu tells us (1984) is both socially constructed through notions of class, and creates a feedback loop as good taste is performed and reflected (Bourdieu, 1984; O’Brien, 2013) only amongst those who already possess it. Recent literature that demonstrates and explores structural inequalities in access to cultural production and consumption (O’Brien, 2013; Taylor and O’Brien, 2017; Brook *et al.*, 2020) shows how

this perpetual reproduction of taste is linked to notions of meritocracy in cultural professions that are expressed most strongly by those in the most influential cultural leadership roles (Brook *et al.*, 2020). This belief system allows values – tolerance, openness, commitment to diversity, access, inclusion – to be communicated only to those with similar tastes and cultural capital, giving the impression of overriding the structural inequalities underpinning the cultural sector, but in fact demonstrating that rather than transcending social barriers, culture is often reinforcing them (O’Brien, 2013). If cultural capital and cultural value are socially acquired and constructed, so too it would follow that the skills and legitimacy to engage in the practice of valuation is similarly produced and/or bestowed by the valuer’s social situation. Valuation can be understood as the communication of a signifier of a value which is accepted and communicated through its use as a signifier of further linked valuations. As such, it is an “engaging social practice” (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013, p. 2) and one that could theoretically reinforce inequalities by enacting them through the valuation process.

Histories and theories of value through the lens of economics are also able to shed light on the complex place of culture, and cultural value and values, in social, political and economic structures, despite Belfiore and Bennett’s assertion that:

“unless we see economic function as the primary purpose of the arts, then economics can have little to tell us about their intrinsic value.” (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007, p.137)

Classical notions of value formed by theorists such as Adam Smith centred around the idea of the labour of production and its cost determining value. The foregrounding of objective measurements of productivity situates ‘the economy’ as a “perpetual growth machine” (Mazzucato, 2018, p. 42) and thus renders anything that sits outside of a growth mindset of productivity – cultural value, for example – as less valuable, and therefore unproductive. With the changing nature of work that happened in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through the Industrial Revolution, the labour theories of value put forward by Karl Marx and David Ricardo sought to capture and measure all labour and the capital that labour produces as a marker of price

(Mazzucato, 2018). Ricardo framed the state and the governments that enact its policies as unproductive, as their function was not to reproduce capital (Mazzucato, 2018). While notions of capitalism have of course evolved and developed over time, there is a sense that this framing lingers through a contemporary notion of the public sector as being slower and less dynamic than commercial operations and detached from capitalism as a system that facilitates and maximises growth (Mazzucato, 2018). This perception seems to impact understandings of what culture, particularly publicly funded culture, is. Where cultural value is attached to public policy it might be assumed to be unproductive however, as shown above, culture has also been instrumentalised as a tool for social change and development, including contemporary measurements which have sought to link cultural consumption to human wellbeing (Oman, 2021).

Twentieth century neoclassical theories of value focus on ideas of marginal productivity to maximise both profit and utility of commodities, where possible, with marginal utility, expressed through individual preferences, determining the ways in which surplus value is returned to the economy. Where this cannot happen, value is instead attributed through scarcity – Mazzucato uses the example of water being essential to human life but is a lower value commodity than diamonds, which are not (Mazzucato, 2018). A parallel could be drawn here with ideas of cultural value, where ‘high’ culture and its scarcity through inaccessibility could perhaps be seen as a marker of its value. The prolonged dominance of neoclassical economic theory in contemporary understandings of value in both an economic and social sense has embedded a sense of inevitability to the idea that there is the potential for everyone to benefit from this model if, crucially, they make the choice to do so.

“Left to itself, capitalism can thus create maximal value for everyone, which is conveniently what everyone ‘deserves’ based on their marginal product.”

(Mazzucato, 2018, p. 68)

What is left out, however, seems to be the idea that valuation – as put forward by recent recalibrations of theories of value such as Mazzucato’s work cited above, Valuation Studies, and Bourdieu’s social, cultural and institutional framings of value as forms of

capital that can be acquired in a “cultural economy approach” (Pitts, 2021, p. 87) – is the notion that the process of attributing value is a social practice and has a direct impact on perceptions of both value and values. This is particularly the case when we start to think about the new economies and distribution models of digital platform labour (Poell *et al.*, 2021) – which we will return to in later sections considering cultural work – that have disrupted the perceived equilibrium of the neoclassical assertion that no one gets something for nothing (Mazzucato, 2018) and that all things can be accurately compared if assessed through the lens “of the single measure of price” (Pitts, 2021, p. 1). As such, new theories of value will be up for grabs, including relational framings which are able to capture value and values that transcend not only inequalities in the structures of capitalism, but the systems which inform it, including what cultural value is and who has access to it. Value and values could perhaps be understood:

“...if not as an economic category, then as a subject of social and political struggle that will rage into a new decade of populism, technological change and, now, at the time of writing this introduction, pandemic.” (Pitts, 2021, p. 7)

Instead, and partly through, the recalibration of value and values brought about by the disruptions of platform economies which have commodified and datafied new areas of our lives – our friendships and professional connections, our politics and activism, our consumption of culture – readings of value that capture social, political, economic and cultural framings, as well as the dynamic nature of how value is created and exchanged, are foregrounded in the findings presented in this research.

Karababa and Kjeldgaard (2014), writing in the field of marketing and consumer research, state that “the notion of value is a notoriously elusive concept” (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014, p. 119). In this framing, economic value, semiotic (sign and meaning making) and social values (deliberately stated in the plural as being multiple expressions of ‘goodness’) are viewed as “abstract” (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014, p. 120), and instead the authors put forward a scheme of conceptualisations of forms of value that is interrelated and overlapping. ‘Exchange value’ is monetary value as

appropriate for the utility to the consumer. 'Perceived value' incorporates an overall sense of utility but also considers ideas of quality, and opportunities for the acquisition of social and cultural capital. 'Social value and value systems' are linked to an understanding of ideal conduct and of achieving a desirable result; consumers apply their own individual value systems to a choice, but these systems are of course constructed by wider social and cultural norms and conventions. 'Experiential value' refers to a judgement on the act of consumption – whether the experience will provide fun or escapism, for example. 'Identity and linking value' describe the opportunity for self-expression through the act of consumption. 'Value as co-created' looks at where in the process of consumption value is embedded, suggesting that rather than being associated with one output or item, value is instead “defined and co-created” (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014, p. 122) by multiple actors in the process. 'Value as the co-creation of meaning' extends the idea of co-created value to think about relationship building beyond an exchange towards a sense of meaning that is “constantly co-created between marketer and consumer” (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014, p. 122), reflecting the negotiation through intrinsic, extrinsic and instrumental cultural value in the practice of marketing and communications noted above.

By conceptualising value in multiple forms, which negotiate with one another, overlap, and interrelate, we can start to think about ideas of value and values as dynamic and move towards a definition of value and values for this thesis that brings together notions of intrinsic, extrinsic and instrumental cultural value. Visually, these multiple forms could be conceived as a value constellation (Normann and Ramírez, 1993; Speed and Maxwell, 2015) through which multiple exchanges of value take place and where multiple forms of value and values can be co-created (see Figure 1). From the point of view of communications of value, the concept of a value constellation lends itself to designing experiences which consider that value is not only embedded in an output (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014) but in the whole process of designing, producing, communicating, and consuming that experience.

The interoperability of values and forms of value, which is shown in Figure 1 above, suggests opportunities for design and visual research methods to influence the

production, communication and consumption of value and values through culture. In a “deliberately contentious” (March, 1976, p. 28) introduction to the 1976 volume *The Architecture of Form*, Lionel March sets out positions of design theory that call into question the extent to which statements of value can be communicated and understood as statements of fact. In March’s framing, the act of designing, be that through principles of value constellations, on a pre-existing map or through the making of an architectural form, is itself a value statement:

“A design is a statement about values. Designing is inextricably bound up with evaluation.” (March, 1976, p. 2)

This assertion, and the accompanying feedback loops suggestive of the principles of a value constellation (Normann and Ramírez, 1993; Speed and Maxwell, 2015), also aligns with Valuation Studies in that these examples show valuation to be a social practice (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013) and by extension, designing as being bound up with processes of valuation. Valuation Studies also provides a lens through which to consider the link between measuring cultural value and the cultural policies connected to economic growth through the “creative economy” (Styhre, 2013, p. 51). Styhre notes that traditional approaches to valuation of culture rely on a socially constructed and largely intangible sense of embedded value but connects the establishment of quantitative cultural ‘metrics’ as a seemingly more objective means of measurement for funding cultural institutions (Styhre, 2013) but, as will be discussed in the following sections, metrics that may seem ‘objective’ may, in fact, prioritise some valuations over others.

## Valuation and measuring value

As we have seen above, the concept of value, and the practice of experiencing value, is difficult to pin down. Figure 1 attempts to visualise the messy and fluid notions of cultural value, as a property of something, and values, as they relate to principles exhibited through behaviours. But definitions of value remain hard to pin down in part

because of the combined intrinsic and extrinsic properties of the word. As Oman (2021) asserts:

“To complicate the issue further, ‘value’ not only refers to what counts (what is valuable, or of value), but *how* to count. It can also be used to describe our *values*—as the moral codes we live by in terms of what is right and wrong. In this sense the word and meanings of value are incredibly important when thinking about well-being data, especially what it might mean for social and cultural policy.” (Oman, 2021, p. 50)

Whitham *et al.* (2019) seek to explore “emerging ethical and political engagements with ‘value’ as a contested terrain” (Whitham *et al.*, 2019, p. 1) through focusing on the processes and practices of valuation in collaborative research and how the meanings found and debated can interoperate and overlap. In this terrain, issues of power are evident. The notion of power is framed as a constellation, in the manner of Speed and Maxwell’s (2015) framing of value constellations, “in which economic agents act on other subjects to provoke certain activity” (Josifidis and Lošonc, 2012, p. 501). Through the lens of economic analysis, they consider value as “a practical *metacategory*; economic agents are constantly fighting for social framing of their economizing” (Josifidis and Lošonc, 2012, p. 508). They go on to state that “value is the non-measurable framework for economics that allows measuring” (Josifidis and Lošonc, 2012, p. 508), which on the one hand seems to align with Oman’s position on value being about how to count, as well as what to count. On the other, however, the addition of ‘for economics’ in that quotation, could be seen as minimising, or ignoring, the social, cultural, and political circumstances through which the metacategory is constructed.

Oman draws on Skeggs (2014) work on value and values that expand definitions beyond capitalist logics to explore the idea that how we value things in the present has a direct impact on our futures practices of valuation:



“...judgements about how we classify ourselves and each other affect how we also come to value things. This is also wrapped up in how we want our ‘taste’ to be understood by others—what we like and dislike, or what we think is good and bad. So, how we want to express our taste, through music, for example, relates to other people’s perceptions, values and how we wish to be seen by them.”  
(Oman, 2021, p. 51)

Skeggs refers to the idea of understanding “how value and values are lived” (Skeggs, 2014, p. 2), through a comparison between domestic labour as outside the capitalist market and therefore linked to ideas of other values – particularly around ideas of morality and taste, which are explored above in the context of cultural value also being somewhat outside capitalist logics because of this. In addition, as Oman (2021) and Hadley (2021) note, the limitations of measuring cultural value through data have not been thoroughly explored. Hadley tells us that “Too little has been written on the impact of data on the cultural sector” (Hadley, 2021, p. 2) and Oman points out that:

“Metrification – as the process of converting aspects of life into metrics for measurement – does represent existing inequalities, so that they can be addressed. However, it can also reproduce inequalities set out by demographics, such as class and race.” (Oman, 2021, p. 51)

The act of measuring values via a scale makes them easier to communicate, but with the danger that the scale itself reproduces inequities (Oman, 2021). By its very nature, it also places the measurement of values within capitalist economic logics. Through the practice of measuring cultural value and values, Oman argues, it is “deemed sufficient to observe behaviour through consumption as a proxy for feeling” (Oman, 2021, p. 53).

A data-driven approach to the production and consumption of cultural experiences raises interesting questions for the sector. Of course, algorithmic prediction and curation pose ethical questions and challenges that apply to technology and society on a broad level, but for the cultural sector particular tensions emerge or are exacerbated around how value is perceived and exchanged through the consumption of cultural

experiences. The first tension here is the widely held belief that culture is ‘good for you’ (O’Brien, 2013) that is, as Brook *et al.* (2020) show, challenged by data which threatens the view that by widening participation in and access to cultural experiences lives will be magically transformed for the better. The second is the question of *whose* cultural value. This is linked to the potential for data-driven systems to disrupt ideas of the artist making art for art’s sake (Ganji, 2021; Industria, 2023); to definitions of high or low culture (O’Brien, 2013; Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015; Belfiore *et al.*, 2023); and to whether culture is a commercially valuable product or experience, or attracts funding because of its perceived quality, potential transformative impacts, or both.

This challenge also applies to defining and measuring cultural value within a neoliberal capitalist system where cultural value becomes instrumental as an act of, or a justification for, policy through its perceived capacity to generate social change and economic impacts. As Oman points out, these promised impacts are then recycled as ways to generate future and/or further funding, closing the loop of evaluating cultural value through economic growth and therefore social impact.

“What is key here is that in deciding what is cultural in cultural value, cultural policy practitioners (policymakers and academics) are also ascribing value to certain activities or practices. Much like the definition of social value and well-being... this is a value system in and of itself: a ranking system which results in certain places, people and practices being invested in, while others are not.”  
(Oman, 2021, pp. 250-51)

Considering forms of value and valuation studies from the perspective of digital technologies in the form of digitised collections in the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector, Terras (2021) and authors from the Creative Informatics programme (2018-2023)<sup>11</sup> examine ‘The value of mass-digitised cultural heritage content in creative contexts’ (Terras *et al.*, 2021). The authors suggest that the use and reuse of digitised datasets and assets from the sector might be a means through which

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.creativeinformatics.org> [Accessed 28 February 2022]

to “unlock new value” (Terras *et al.*, 2021, p. 1), notably economic value, which aligns with two of the stated core challenges of the Creative Informatics programme: how can data-driven innovation unlock hidden value in archives and datasets; and how can data-driven innovation reveal new business models for the creative industries.<sup>12</sup> Like Styhre (2013), there is a sense that expertise in valuation is required here in determining the extent to which value has been ‘unlocked’, a term which feels positivist with regards to the extent to which digital technologies and data-driven innovation have the potential to bring about structural change and economically valuable solutions, although the article is explicit in its assertion (citing a white paper by some of these authors and others associated with Creative Informatics)<sup>13</sup> that digital technologies are “a novel route to economic growth” (Terras *et al.*, 2021).

Recent large-scale research into cultural value in the UK in the form of the AHRC Cultural Value Project, which produced the ‘Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture Report’<sup>14</sup> in 2016, has been critiqued as being “shaped by the dominant imperative of preserving public funding” (Farrell, 2016, p. 273) and being part of a landscape that, while moving towards a human-centred approach to measuring cultural value rather than a purely economic one, still prioritises and gives weight to public funding and research into its impacts that has “constrained the breadth and depth of research on and for the arts and culture field” (Farrell, 2016, p. 274). But does this have to be the case and must the process of valuation of culture always result in research and policy which foregrounds “dichotomies” (Farrell, 2016, p. 274) and underlines binaries in reporting about and research focused on cultural value? Similarly, these binaries impact the moral values of the cultural sector, where cultural work “promises emancipation from the herd but provides only a new kind of individuated tyranny” (Banks, 2006, p. 456). Raymond Williams (Williams, 1958), for example, sought to assert that *Culture is Ordinary* through a narrative illustration of a journey through his Welsh hometown. O’Brien points out that the preservation of high

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<sup>12</sup> <https://creativeinformatics.org/creative-bridge/creative-bridge-guidelines/> [Accessed 28 February 2022]

<sup>13</sup> Parkinson *et al.* 2020, Developing Data-Driven Innovation in the Creative Industries, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.7488/era/507> [Accessed 28 February 2022]

<sup>14</sup> <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/publications/cultural-value-project-final-report/> [Accessed 14 January 2021]

and low forms of culture can result in the reconfiguration of established genres to accommodate dichotomies and social hierarchies – ‘popular’ or ‘light’ classical music, for example, set against more “specialised and minority” (O'Brien, 2013, p. 64) forms. Belfiore and Bennett (2007) note the historical specificity of artistic forms, and that not all will be considered valuable to the same extent at any given time. Babak Ganjei (Ganjei, 2021) playfully explores the myth of making art for art’s sake as an economically viable career in *Art is the Thing Nobody Asked You to Do*. ‘Structurally Fucked: an inquiry into artists’ pay and conditions’ (Industria, 2023), a report by artists collective Industria<sup>15</sup> frames the ideas Ganjei puts forward more seriously as “elective precarity” (Industria, 2023, p. 74), and are clear about the inequalities that the authors see as deeply embedded in notions of cultural value:

“These material conditions are inevitably exclusionary, resulting in an over-representation of those who can rely on generational wealth or a partner’s stability in the face of widespread precarity, either to live off directly or to provide cushioning against the heavy emotional and financial burden of uncertainty and risk. Racialisation, class stratification, ableism, marginalisation based on gender or sexuality, as well as caring and parenting responsibilities, all represent intersectional barriers that limit artists’ capacity to cope with the additional ‘elective’ precarity of being an artist. As long as conditions of pay in the ‘art world’ fail to sustain artists, then exclusion and inequality are systemic – they are baked in – and no amount of ‘diversity and inclusion’ programming or thematic engagements with identity can upend this exclusionary status quo.” (Industria, 2023, p. 26)

As the above examples show, ideas of cultural value and values, who decides, and who culture is for will always incorporate tensions (Belfiore, 2019) across binaries of high and low, intrinsic and extrinsic, aesthetic and instrumental.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.we-industria.org/> [Accessed 14 June 2023]

Perhaps the term ‘cultural value’ is itself now a buzz word (Belfiore, 2002) that serves as shorthand for a dominant, instrumental view of culture’s social utility, or a marker of culture’s legitimacy (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007). The concepts of value and values framed by this thesis perhaps fall into a pattern of cultural policy scholarship that foregrounds who is invested in deciding what culture is, rather than the impact of its outputs (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007; Hadley and Gray, 2017; Belfiore, 2019) which can, in fact, be social. Hadley and Gray (2017) point out that while cultural value may be an idea worthy of debate, the instrumental nature of policy of any sort is “instrumental in so far as it is concerned with using certain mechanisms to achieve certain ends.” (Hadley and Gray, 2017, p.97) However, they also make a case for what is termed ‘hyperinstrumentalism’ in cultural policy, suggesting that its core preoccupation is less about promoting and funding culture, and more about justifying its own existence (Hadley and Gray, 2017). In acting primarily to make the case for its own instrumental role, Hadley and Gray argue that this hyperinstrumental cultural policy is disconnecting policy and cultural practice, and consequently reinforcing funding structures that retain inequalities in notions of cultural value:

“While this is posited on the basis of the assumed intrinsic values of culture – and largely without explaining what these values might be – the core problem for cultural policy is not the loss of cultural value so much as the loss of financial subsidy that it may give rise to. If instrumental outputs are the basis upon which public funds are allocated to culture, and if it cannot be convincingly demonstrated that culture contributes to these outputs, then why continue to fund it?” (Hadley and Gray, 2017, p.97)

The process of valuation implicit in the use of the terms ‘value’ and ‘values’ might be seen as restricting the incorporation of a more neutral approach to measuring what culture does than terms like “impacts” (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007, p.136). In the fourth edition of *The Cultural Industries* (2019), which was first published during the New Labour administration in the UK in 2002, Hesmondhalgh proposes a more neutral means of description of the production of art and cultural outputs. To remove the “connotations of genius and a higher calling”, art is referred to as “symbolic creativity”

(which Hesmondhalgh acknowledges to be “cumbersome”) with artists as “symbol creators” (Hesmondhalgh, 2019, p. 9). While ‘creativity’ is a term that has increasingly been identified with marketisation of culture (McRobbie, 2015), Hesmondhalgh goes on to argue that the cultural industries are “fundamentally ambivalent” (Hesmondhalgh, 2019, p. 10) but that it is the way in which these industries operate and communicate that presents inequalities because cultural workers are “the primary workers in shaping how texts look and sound, what meanings they communicate” (Hesmondhalgh, 2019, p. 10). The complex terminologies of culture reflect the complexity of its value and the values of those who produce and consume it but, as Belfiore and Bennett suggested in 2007:

“unless we can be clear about what we mean by the arts, we are not going to get very far in understanding either their value, or their “impacts”.” (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007, p.136)

#### The problem of participation

The analysis above returns several times to critiques of cultural value that question whose definition is legitimate. So far, this has primarily centred on cultural value according to policymakers and governments, rather than those who ‘take part’ in culture either as producers or audiences. As Oman (2021) points out, the very act of measuring cultural value is problematic when the frameworks through which that process of valuation is carried out have a pre-determined instrumental goal in mind. This is reinforced by Taylor’s 2016 findings from the Taking Part Survey, which monitors cultural participation in England. These findings showed that:

“8.7% of the English population is highly engaged with state-supported forms of culture, and that this fraction is particularly well-off, well-educated, and white.” (Taylor, 2016, p. 169)

In contrast, Taylor finds that:

“Over half of the population has fairly low levels of engagement with state-supported culture but is nonetheless busy with everyday culture and leisure activities such as pubs, darts and gardening.” (Taylor, 2016, p. 169)

So where does this leave the assertion that culture is good for you – for your sense of morality, your role as a citizen, and your health? Hadley (2021) and Jancovich and Stevenson (2023) assert that ‘participation’ is a performative term. Jancovich and Stevenson (2023) suggest that, despite attractive and persuasive stories, at a policy and funding level participation acts as little more than a buzz word:

“The lack of financial commitment [to increasing participation] indicates the extent to which, despite the rhetorical shifts, little has fundamentally altered regarding the dominant logic of what national cultural policy should be or how the government should execute it.” (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023, p.17)

They note also that “non-participation is not the same as exclusion” (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023, p.25), which is reinforced by Taylor’s findings that more than half of the population in England do engage with ‘everyday’ culture and leisure (Taylor, 2016). The types of participation that makes up the numbers are shown by Jancovich and Stevenson to have been placed in a ‘something else’ category that aligns with but sits somewhat outside ‘valuable’ culture and ‘desirable’ participation (Belfiore, 2019). It seems logical then to suggest that any discomfort with non-participation in state-funded culture stems from the challenge it presents to “the logic of culture as a social utility through which societies agree upon their shared values” (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023, p.25).

There is also the question of *where* participation happens. As we will see below, the early 2000s celebrated rhetoric of creative cities, makes other places ordinary, ‘unexceptional’, ‘crap towns’ (Gilmore, 2013). In a landscape of measurement of the value of cultural participation in the form of league tables and mapped “cold spots” (Gilmore, 2013, p.89), these places become a problem to be overcome, and the

absence of ‘valuable’ participation there is translated into evidence of “need” (Gilmore, 2013, p.89). However, as Gilmore (2013) shows in a case study of Macclesfield, a north of England market town within commuting distance of Manchester, despite evidence of an educated, affluent population with a high level of arts participation, in an alternative dataset measuring cultural assets per square hectare Macclesfield was identified as a ‘cultural desert’ (Gilmore, 2013). The fact that both circumstances can be the case at once demonstrates the challenge of measuring cultural value and the need for the contextualisation of the specificities of place and population through new research strategies and evidence (Gilmore, 2013). Part of this challenge might be explained by a sense of disconnection between the practice of policymaking and those who operate within the frameworks policy creates. Lechelt and Cunningham (2020) suggest a political and policy-driven value for citizen participation in the cultural sector of a place in their exploration of attempts in the Canadian city of Calgary to incorporate participatory policymaking into its cultural strategies. This initiative seemed to have been pitched as a democratic tool for “widening and deepening economic engagement” (Lechelt and Cunningham, 2020, p. 3) but Lechelt and Cunningham found instead that:

“there is often a gap between the rhetoric of democratic participation and the actual implementation of these policy-making initiatives.” (Lechelt and Cunningham, 2020, p. 3)

These findings show the ways in which tokenistic use of terminologies of value around terms such as ‘participation’, ‘co-production’, and ‘co-creation’ can, through research into communications of value and values, be exposed as “reductive and predominantly neoliberal” (Lechelt and Cunningham, 2020, p. 9) rather than inclusive. My work with the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project<sup>16</sup> – presented later in this thesis as findings from my aligned research – explores this challenge in the context of Edinburgh’s cultural sector through cultural mapping (Lee and Gilmore, 2012; Duxbury *et al.*, 2015; Currie and Correa, 2021) and takes this paradox into Edinburgh and the context of the ‘Festival City’, where non-participation by communities around

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.edinburghculturalmap.org> [Accessed 17 August 2024]



the city is problematised by and through cultural policy, and the value of the Festival City as an imaginary for Edinburgh is explored as a reputational value that sits within and without the act of taking part.

Hadley (2021) argues that this discomfort with non-participation in ‘the arts’, however that is understood, exists because the main function of policies and practices that promote participation are to make the case for another practice – audience development – which, despite its socially transformative connotations, tends to exist within organisations as part of marketing, communications and sales departments. Rather than simply accepting a functional, marketing-led definition of audience development that follows marketing’s traditional functions of attracting (and selling to) engaged audiences, Hadley suggests it receive consideration as “an ideological project” (Hadley, 2021, p.8). From the perspective of the cultural sector, cultural policymakers and funders, the position of the audience is one that is receptive to a dominant discourse (Hall, 1973) and largely passive:

“For the cultural sector, part of the function of the idea of ‘the audience’ is to assist in the maintenance of narratives. In this case, narratives are stories the sector tells itself about its value, impact, social role and, of course, audience.”  
(Hadley, 2021, p. 2)

In this framing, the notion of the audience is one that plays its part in advocating for the status quo and narrowness of definitions of what culture is and who it is for. Hadley’s ideological project for audience development is encapsulated in the notion of the “emancipated audience” (Hadley, 2021, p.2), freed from the inequitable power structures that are currently embedded in state-funded culture.

“Too often, the cultural sector—in terms of artistic peer-referentiality, its marketing and communications and sector advocacy—talks only to itself, in its own language. The cultural sector talks only to itself because it *is* power. We must seek to disassemble the imbalance in the idea of having an audience with the artist. The power asymmetry, which sits embedded in so many of the behavioural

codes of cultural consumption, must be overcome, con-comitant as it is with the hierarchies of value implicit in systems of public subsidy.” (Hadley, 2021, p. 2)

Cultural policy research over the past twenty-five years has been critical of the dominant, unequal and undemocratic model for the state support of and perceived socially transformative interventions in culture and the determination of its value (including Belfiore, 2002, 2012, 2019, 2020; Belfiore and Bennett, 2007; O’Brien, 2013; Brook *et al.*, 2020). As Hadley (2021) asserts, “Anything in need of democratisation is, by definition, undemocratic” (Hadley, 2021, p.5), but what is it that we want audience development to do? Increase audiences in number, in diversity, in regions or places? Because, as Jancovich and Stevenson (2023) tell us, non-participation is not a problem across the board. For those non-attendees of comparable socio-economic status to attending audiences who simply choose not to go, their choices can be respected, and they will not be ‘developed’. For those the state determines face social, economic, structural ‘barriers’, they will be a target for audience development initiatives even if, when using a broader definition of culture and leisure such as Taylor (2016), they might be considered to be active participants. In assessing the failures of cultural participation, Jancovich and Stevenson (2023) note that despite a body of academic work that considers different types of cultural participation, problematises non-participation, and suggests strategies for the comparison of their value, research has not made a substantial difference to the dominant model for state support and intervention in culture (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023). However, the assertion in cultural policy studies that making this difference is possible, still feels relevant, for example:

“By finding nuanced ways of discussing cultural value in the twenty-first century... the humanities can make a significant contribution to the construction of a strong and coherent theoretical framework for the elaboration of more rigorous arts impacts evaluation methods.” (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007, p.148)

This is particularly the case given the impact of digital and datafied means of producing, consuming and measuring culture that will be discussed in more detail later and form

part of the empirical findings from this research. The work presented in this thesis will make a case for these more discussions of cultural value taking place through a lens that studies cultural work alongside cultural policy and value, as that is the primary source of data and practice that informs nuanced discussions about what is valuable and who decides. However, the story of cultural policy and its own preoccupation with justifying its own existence (Hadley and Gray, 2017; Bennett, 2020) has, in the past 25 years dominated its structures and communications.

### Imaginaries, intermediaries and industries: culture, creativity and cities

This research frames the City of Edinburgh's cultural sector, and the way in which it tells its own story, as the 'Edinburgh Imaginary'. This lens is rooted in scholarship and policy frameworks that explore complex notions of cultural value – and the values that inform and communicate them – through imaginaries relating to culture and creativity's perceived impacts on people, places and economies; the intermediaries that distribute and promote them; and the industrial concepts and language that increasingly underpin and expand the instrumentalism of cultural policies and practice that support social and economic transformation.

Imaginaries of culture and creativity are ways of conceptualising and describing cultural value through the behaviours of people, the make-up of places and the perceived possibility of a link between culture and economic success (O'Connor, 2015). Jessop and Oosterlynck (2008), exploring the idea of the cultural political economy, describe imaginaries as “semiotic systems that provide the basis for the lived experience of an inordinately complex world” (Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008, p.6) but also note that in focusing on conveying a shorthand for complexity, they are “necessarily partial” (Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008, p.7). This supports the position of this research that cultural value can be defined and constructed in its communication and negotiation. O'Connor, Gu and Lim (2020), citing Jessop and Oosterlynck, describe how, from the early 2000s, communication through imaginaries acted as a tool for showing how culture and creativity could reinvent cities. This trend was based primarily on the work of Richard

Florida's 2002 publication, *The Rise of the Creative Class ...and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*, which posited creative people – dubbed the 'creative class' – and the human capital they possess, as being key drivers of regional and economic growth (Florida, 2003).

Florida's framings of and justifications for creative cities as homes for the creative class are in the interesting position of having been much critiqued in academia (for example, Peck, 2005; Krätke, 2010; Pratt and Hutton, 2013; Pratt, 2015; O'Connor and Shaw, 2014; Bennett, 2020; O'Connor *et al.*, 2020), but also widely adopted in policy, in cities including Edinburgh. Florida describes the creative class as the 'super-creative core' (Florida, 2003): a novel grouping of creative professionals which is always united by the 'three Ts' of innovation – technology, talent and tolerance (Florida, 2002) – that constitute a "new geography of creativity" (Florida, 2003, p.8). In the 'Creative Age', Florida suggests, cities must attract the creative class to achieve economic growth in and through innovation, specifically aligning culture and creativity with financial growth and paving the way for continued industrial framings of culture and cultural work. Florida asserts that attracting the creative class to a city or community is based on lifestyle factors and creating:

"abundant high-quality experiences, an openness to diversity of all kinds, and above all else, the opportunity to validate their identities as creative people."  
(Florida, 2003, p.9)

However, this need, Florida states, is not a collective, civic act, but one based on developing weak, rather than strong, ties between people (Florida, 2003) encouraging individualism and competition in creative professions and practice. Supporting the values of inclusivity, diversity and openness (Florida, 2002) acts as a signifier, operationalised as a means of attracting "highly educated and productive people" (Florida, 2003, p.6), who are in fact, as Krätke (2010) points out, not a new class at all but a group of educated middle class people gathered in one place (Krätke, 2010), with the additional positive impact of enabling tolerance for diversity to act as a measurable indicator for the prevalence of the creative class in a city because of previously

discriminative policies (Florida, 2003). As such, the construction of the creative class uses notions of the clustering of bohemian artists around statements about values of inclusion, while also promoting elitism by actively excluding those who are not 'creative', as suggested by O'Connor *et al.*, 2020:

“Florida embraced the vibrancy of urban living—gays, bohemians, multi-ethnicity—but the urban community it explicitly targeted was a professional-managerial class, expanded to include artists, but in which ‘blue-collar’ workers (threats to tolerance and creativity) were not so welcome.” (O'Connor, *et al.*, 2020, p.2)

So, the idea of the struggling artist, and any associations with working class that might accompany it, are incorporated into a marketized and individualised (McRobbie, 2015) creative class identity aligned with innovation and growth (Bennett, 2020). Moreover, in encouraging the establishment of a strategy of competition between people in creative cities (Bennett, 2020), Florida's work has also engendered competition between cities to demonstrate their effectiveness at attracting the creative class and “repackaging” (Peck, 2005, p.764) cultural artefacts (Edinburgh's festivals, for example) as tools for economic impact and growth (Peck, 2005).

With Florida himself in the role of “cool-cities guru” (Peck, 2005, p.740), and the creative city as the “poster child for funky urban regeneration” (Pratt and Hutton, 2013, p.90), the success of Florida's schemes of creative cities and creative class in Western and Global North cultural and creative economies (O'Connor *et al.*, 2020) could be seen as a case study for effective communication of value and values that act as vehicles for instrumental cultural, social, political and economic policymaking and practice, but do not necessarily support claims about their success (Banks, 2017). Krätke (2010) asserts that the creative class is an unjustifiable generalisation “simply based on the co-location of unrelated occupational groups” (Krätke, 2010, p.836), with no structure for evidencing the ways in which the condition of cities influences the concentration of creative people. However, he also acknowledges Florida's concept's communicative role as a “message of hope” (Krätke, 2010, p.835) for cities looking to signify their

economic success and justify policies that favour existing elites. By grouping these possibly unrelated people together, and expanding the creative class to rely on and incorporate other key features of ‘successful’ cities – technology, finance and innovation – creativity can be seen to obfuscate the goals of neoliberal capitalism to which artists and creative practitioners might historically object, while also simultaneously reinforcing and celebrating them:

““By using a rather nebulous idea of creativity, Florida presents a concept of social classes based on arbitrary assignments and supports a self-idealization of the ‘leading’ occupational groups of today’s capitalism.” (Krätke, 2010, p.836)

Not only that, as Krätke finds in the city of Berlin, once the so-called creative class becomes the predominant population in an urban area that was previously seen as requiring regeneration, the cycle begins again in a new area as artists are dislocated by their own upgrade (Krätke, 2010). Even Florida himself (2003) notes a trend of rising inequality linked to creative class migration, although Peck (2005) suggests that Florida has been able to circumnavigate this issue by positing “negative externalities as a pressing analytical, political, and indeed moral challenge for the Creative Class” (Peck, 2005, p.758).

As discussed above, recent cultural policy and arts management literature notes a continuing tension over decades and centuries between intrinsic and instrumental cultural policies and cultural value and the practices they support. O’Connor and Shaw (2014) demonstrate how the idea of the creative city similarly taps into these tensions and negotiations through “much older notions of the ‘good city’” and 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘city beautiful’ movements (O’Connor and Shaw, 2014, p.165) associated with the moralistic and civilising transformative powers of high culture in the industrial city, set against the possibility of economic and industrial success framed through creative and cultural economies (Pratt and Hutton, 2013). This “slippage” (O’Connor and Shaw, 2014, p.167) adds another layer to the challenge of defining cultural value and values that takes culture into the realm of the creative industries, another elusive taxonomy of creativity that was first defined in the UK by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 1998

to include nine subsectors, all of which were united in their potential to use “individual creativity, skill and talent” to support “wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Terras and Jones, 2024, p.3)<sup>17</sup>. O’Connor and Shaw (2014) assert that “this industrial policy is aimed at a sector whose salient characteristic is its production of cultural values”, and so that “the intrinsic economic value of the creative economy is at the same time about its intrinsic cultural value” (O’Connor and Shaw, 2014, p.167). But, at the same time they find:

“disconnect between the creative city-economy imaginary and the ‘intrinsic’ needs and aspirations of those involved in the arts, creative clusters, creative businesses and the production of urban cultural space–time. The disjunction between rhetoric and reality will lead to revised policy settings, but not necessarily to the benefit of the creative sector.” (O’Connor and Shaw, 2014, p.169)

So, while the case is made for the alignment of cultural value with economic value at a policy level, in line with a recent history of instrumentalism in cultural policy, the gap between why, what, and who this cultural-economic policy hybrid is good and good for (Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2021), is reinforced.

In this framework, Florida and his thesis for creative cities act as intermediaries that communicate and translate between policy and practice (O’Connor, 2015), carrying out the work of justifying the existence of their ideas and performing them through the production of toolkits and handbooks that support their supposedly easy implementation (Bennett, 2020). These handbooks, supported by consultants who translate and adapt “the global policy assemblage of creative economy policy” (Bennett, 2020, p.3), create a “fast policy market” (Peck, 2005, p.767) that renders more substantial policies made at state level as “relatively peripheral” (Bennett, 2020, p.3). Consultants, toolkits and handbooks signify expertise for these intermediaries, whose

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<sup>17</sup> The UK definition of creative industries is quoted from DCMS, 2001. ‘Creative Industries Mapping Document’ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. 9 April 2001. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-mapping-documents-2001>. [Accessed 16 August 2024]

skills lie in “effectively recognising, articulating, deploying and hybridising” (Bennett, 2020, p.6) cultural policy, and cultural value and values. They are communicators, and as such, signify a role for the study of communications as a lens for understanding the basis for and performance of cultural value and policy that is “brought into the realm of economic circulation” (Banks, 2007, p.1). To tie it all together then is perhaps an issue of communication of complexity, performed by cultural policy, but also in the creative city by intermediaries in the manner of Richard Florida. On one side of the imaginary, culture and creativity receive an industrialised, economic value-led treatment which includes a focus on the commercial generation of intellectual property (Pratt and Hutton, 2013) language that posits creativity as a driver of growth and change (Peck, 2005); and on the other, neoliberal and capitalist framings of the creative city are “seductively repackaged... in the soft-focus terms of cultural policy” (Peck, 2005, p.740). Taken together, a general approach to accounting for and communicating this complexity incorporates notions of creative and/or cultural ecosystems which can function both as “holistic and nuanced” (Virani, 2023, p.7) approaches to accounting for complexity in cultural value and values, and as signifier of that complexity that at the same time glosses over the balance of inherent valuations cultural and creative ecosystems contain (Benghozi and Paris, 2016). The complexities of communications of value and values is further exacerbated by the nature of communications themselves. Where governments, cultural policies and intermediaries were once able to prescribe and communicate homogenous notions of cultural value, digital communications have arguably brought about a “revolution in intermediation” and sense of “empowerment” (Benghozi and Paris, 2016, p.77) through redistribution and multiplicity of communications about cultural value and values on digital platforms. These spaces provide “decisive” structures in their conventions and algorithmic organisation, but also encouraging “rethinking” (Benghozi and Paris, 2016, p.79) through their ability to “produce and enable inscriptions of individual and collective actions” (Venturini *et al.*, 2018, p.4196) creating a system of “networked individualism” (Kozinets, 2015) which naturally lends itself to the ‘weak ties’ between people described and prioritised in creative cities by Florida in 2002.



## Edinburgh: Creative, Festival, City

In beginning to construct the Edinburgh Imaginary, we can see how the imaginaries, intermediaries and industries discussed above interoperate in the city (O'Connor, 2015). Jessop and Oosterlynck (2008) identify the role of imaginaries in ideas of transforming the city towards new and better futures, with cultural destination tourism arising both because of that transformation and as a mode of international branding (Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008) and competition between creative cities (Peck, 2005; Bennett, 2020). In terms of an imaginary, Edinburgh was, and is, a city well placed to construct itself with the framework of Florida's scheme: Scotland's capital, rich in cultural heritage – Edinburgh's Old and New towns became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995<sup>18</sup> and the world's first UNESCO City of Literature in 2004<sup>19</sup> – with a year-round roster of festivals that allow for the:

“Repackaging [of] urban cultural artifacts as competitive assets, they value them (literally) not for their own sake, but in terms of their (supposed) economic utility.” (Peck, 2005, p.764)

Where Peck (2005) notes the perceived economic value of cultural assets, Florida (2002) prioritises experiences afforded by the co-location of creativity in cities. Edinburgh is in the perhaps enviable position of being able to operationalise both. The city's festivals, which are annual, time-bound and experiential, are supported by the Edinburgh's year-round cultural assets to create a destination imaginary narrative cycle, peaking during the summer festivals in August – probably the best-known version of 'Edinburgh' in the UK and internationally – but reinforcing the message of creativity throughout the year through other events and cultural tourism. As a cultural destination, much of the focus of outward-facing communications is on Edinburgh's reputation as “the world's leading festival city”<sup>20</sup>, with the city's festivals – those that are included within the Scottish Government and City of Edinburgh Council-funded umbrella

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<sup>18</sup> <https://ewh.org.uk/the-unesco-world-heritage-site/> [Accessed 17 August 2024]

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/creative-cities/edinburgh> [Accessed 17 August 2024]

<sup>20</sup> Festivals Edinburgh homepage <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/> [Accessed 14 April 2022]

network of Festivals Edinburgh – generating a reported economic impact of £407 million in Edinburgh and £367 million in Scotland in 2022<sup>21</sup>. This measurement of economic impact is an increase from £280 million in Edinburgh and £313 million in Scotland in 2015<sup>22</sup> although, reportedly to account for a fall in international visitor numbers in 2022, the 2023 report includes money spent by city residents, which the previous calculations did not<sup>23</sup>. As such, the concept of the Edinburgh Imaginary framed through this research considers the Festival City as “place-branding” (Durrer *et al.*, 2023): a cultural, social and economic instrument for communicating cultural value, which contributes to the construction and communication of the idea of a place and its attributes.

In tracing the development of the ‘Festival City’ from the post-war beginnings of the Edinburgh International Festival and Fringe, cultural historian Angela Bartie states the link between the festivals and the development of year-round producing theatres like the Traverse Theatre and the Lyceum in the 1960s (Bartie, 2013, p. 3). In the 1940s, post-war “idealism” (Bartie, 2013, p. 8) was harnessed through the festivals, and state interventions in the arts were gradually introduced. The 1960s, Bartie states, were a decade in which “cultural change was intimately linked to social change” (Bartie, 2013, p. 3) and so the imaginary of the festival city, a geographical and timebound exploration of these ideas each August, allowed these cultural and social tensions to be “played out in microcosm in Edinburgh.” (Bartie, 2013, p. 2) This is in contrast, Bartie says, to the more commonly held view that the centre of this exploration in the UK was London, also noted earlier in this chapter. Bartie also highlights the festivals’ foundational link to instrumental notions of cultural value and values, and to tourism:

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<sup>21</sup> Reported by in 2023 by the third Festivals Impact Study, produced by BOP Consulting and commissioned by Festivals Edinburgh  
[https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/assets/000/005/534/Edinburgh\\_Festivals\\_Impact\\_Study\\_digital\\_original.pdf?1687855168](https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/assets/000/005/534/Edinburgh_Festivals_Impact_Study_digital_original.pdf?1687855168) [Accessed 2 July 2023]

<sup>22</sup> Taken from key findings from the Executive Summary of Edinburgh Festivals 2015 Impact Study, produced by BOP Consulting and commissioned by Festivals Edinburgh,  
[https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/assets/000/001/964/Edinburgh\\_Festivals\\_-\\_2015\\_Impact\\_Study\\_Final\\_Report\\_original.pdf?1469537463](https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/assets/000/001/964/Edinburgh_Festivals_-_2015_Impact_Study_Final_Report_original.pdf?1469537463), p.1 [Accessed 14 April 2022]

<sup>23</sup> See page 3 of the Economic Impact report, link above, and also  
<https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/edinburghs-festivals-demand-funding-rethink-as-economic-impact-of-recovery-is-revealed-4198844> [Accessed 2 July 2023]

“...new values given to culture in the immediate post-war world: a means of spiritual refreshment, a way of reasserting moral values, of rebuilding relationships between nations, of shoring up European civilisation and of providing ‘welfare’ in its broadest sense. Culture was also viewed as a useful new economic tool in the burgeoning tourist industry... (the Scottish Tourist Board was founded in 1946)” (Bartie, 2013, p. 2)

In the August festivals and specifically Edinburgh Festival Fringe context, the comparison between ‘Edinburgh’ and ‘London’ persists today. Edinburgh is a stage rather than a city: you take a show *to* Edinburgh, you see a show *at* Edinburgh, and the Fringe Society operates a Fringe Marketplace<sup>24</sup> platform through which Fringe performers can access touring opportunities, in London and internationally.

The purpose of this observation is not to frame this as a problem per se. What Bartie’s history of the festivals illustrates is the extent to which the festivals are embedded in the structures of the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’, in the way it communicates with its constituent parts and with others, and in the city’s modern cultural history. Bartie points out that the way in which the Fringe arose outside, but also alongside, the International Festival is on the one hand part of a perceived richness of “cross-fertilisation” (Bartie, 2013, p. 5) in Edinburgh’s experimental and diverse cultural landscape, and on the other, sets up the structures of the curated International Festival and the arguably open access nature of the Fringe – the name of which in itself speaks of being outside – as being competitive and in opposition. The Fringe performers in 1947 were, after all, uninvited, and Bartie states that while a combative stance has not necessarily been the goal of either organisation, this narrative has perhaps “still come to represent opposition and challenge” (Bartie, 2013, p. 5). Part of this atmosphere might stem from more universal and complex cultural tensions around intrinsic and instrumental cultural value, high and low culture, and the uncomfortable relationship between commercial and aesthetic concerns. Bartie traces the development of tourism around the festivals to the 1980s – which tracks with the previously mentioned history of the marketisation of

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<sup>24</sup> See <https://marketplace.edfringe.com/> [Accessed 14 April 2022]

culture – and this growth mindset is shown to have continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the last Edinburgh Festival Fringe before the COVID-19 pandemic, which took place in 2019, breaking records for numbers of events and audiences – over 3,800 shows and more than three million tickets sold.<sup>25</sup>

The Edinburgh imaginary speaks to the two-way relationship between the city as a cultural destination and the city as a place, each informing the other. By exploring this relationship, this research suggests that interrogating the concept of the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’ might allow us to “develop a better understanding of different needs and values in different local contexts” (Durrer *et al.*, 2023, p.4) that would support equitable access to cultural objects and work (Banks, 2017). Festivals construct place, but places also construct festivals (Lynch and Quinn, 2022) and as such, the landscape of a festival be seen as a place where cultural value and values are tested and contested, if only temporarily (Waterman, 1998). Waterman (1998) also suggests that despite perhaps communicating a spirit of openness, festivals can also act as opportunities for known elites to assert control over cultural value and values and reinforce inequalities and commercial, rather than purely cultural, interests (Waterman, 1998). Lynch and Quinn also note that festivals can grow to such a scale as to become ‘placeless’, with the volume of content dislocating the festival as an event from its community and giving the city – as festival imaginary – a sense of being homogenised, and ‘done’. This observation, particularly in August, could also be applied and debated in the context of Edinburgh, and the extent to which the self-described openness of the city to a diverse programme of content was in fact constructing a narrower and more generalised view consistent with the idea of the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’.

Lynch and Quinn (2022) suggest that festivals’ construction of place, and the place’s construction of festivals, might bring about a co-created “Mutually inter-dependent process between the festival, place and the creative process” (Lynch and Quinn, p. 15) which begins to explore a connection between festivals and the communities in which they are temporarily situated. Piccio *et al.* (2022), evaluating the Edinburgh Festival

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<sup>25</sup> Reported by the Scotsman <https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/edinburgh-festivals/theatre-and-stage/edinburgh-festival-fringe-audience-breaks-three-million-barrier-first-time-542031> [Accessed 14 April 2022]

Fringe's digital programme during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, describe festivals as "public celebrations where the community play a primary role" (Piccio *et al.*, 2022, p. 4)<sup>26</sup>. 'The community' here, however, is not defined and it is unclear whether the intended meaning is focused on place or a community of performers, and/or of audiences. There is a clue though that they are referring to a community of festival participants in the introduction to the article, where Piccio *et al.* state that for some performers, in a pre-COVID context:

"Financial profit is not the main aim, and for some producers simply breaking even is a success. Instead, simply being there, and honing their craft in front of live audiences is crucial." (Piccio *et al.*, 2022, p. 2)

The purpose of this article is not to question the structural inequalities in access to culture beyond those caused by the pandemic, for audiences or for those wishing to embark on careers in the cultural sector. However, this statement offers evidence of the extent to which these inequalities – and the anecdotes and rituals of social and cultural capital we associate with understanding the value of producing, performing, and attending the Fringe – are embedded in perceptions of this festival's value. Through the lens of the city as a year-round place, the sense of elitism within festivals (Waterman, 1998) is evident here, as is the notion of the festivals as marketplace (Waterman, 1998, Bartie, 2013). The Edinburgh Imaginary, including the role(s) of the festivals within it, is embedded with tensions between intrinsic, extrinsic and instrumental cultural value and values. Some are specific to Edinburgh's cultural assets and the way in which notions of the creative city have been operationalised here. But, more generally, this research suggests that interrogating the idea of the Edinburgh Imaginary, and the practices that produce it through the work of communications, will offer insights into negotiations of cultural value and values and how these might be translated into notions of creative justice (Banks, 2017).

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<sup>26</sup> The authors are citing Getz, D. 2018. *Event Evaluation : Theory and Methods for Event Management and Tourism*. Oxford: VLeBooks

## Communications, creative work, and cultural value and values

If, as questioned above, it is the case that producers and audiences are content with talking only to themselves and each other, then marketing and communications in the cultural sector could be viewed as primarily promoting the value of exclusivity (Brook *et al.*, 2020); as an exercise in “cultural matching” (O'Brien, 2020, p. 246); and as an intermediary for embedding industrial narratives of culture (Banks, 2007), rather than in developing or deepening engagement with audiences. Belief in meritocracy and the influence of neo-liberal framings of the creative industries foreground a competitive and individualistic landscape of cultural work and workforces that is capable of overlooking challenges and inequalities while celebrating the value and values of these professions and their work (Belfiore, 2020). A moral economy approach (Banks, 2006) to research into and with cultural work and workforces can begin to identify areas of commonality and community between cultural workers rather than assuming the existence of an “individualised instrumentalism” (Banks, 2006, p. 458) in ‘creatives’ that surpasses any moral and ethical collective discourse or actions between these individuals. A moral economy framing adds a layer of what could be termed an ‘ethics of care’ approach that centres care, collective and community thinking, and reciprocity as central values in creative work (Alacovska and Bissonnette, 2021). Noting that the academic study of cultural work coincided with the rise of the conceptualisation of the culture and creative industries, Banks (2007) identifies the ‘creative cultural worker’ as a role that “exists at the very axis point of the political struggle between the forces of art and commerce” (Banks, 2007, p.8) and is required to shelter the aesthetic value of culture from the vulgarities of commercial concerns (Banks, 2007).

The nature of the creative work of communications then, in particular the ways in which cultural workers navigate the tension between the aesthetic nature of artworks, audiences, and consumer-focused markets (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2010, Bilton, 2017), is an important part of exploring and explaining communications about creative work and the creative work of communications.

### *Marketing and communications as creative work*

O'Reilly and Kerrigan (2010) state that:

“While marketing the arts should be a creative practice, often arts-marketing practitioners overlook more esoteric and insightful academic arts-marketing research in favour of two-by-two matrices and step-by-step approaches to branding. Moving forward, the academic arts-marketing community must question the acceptance of those narrowly managerial approaches to marketing which dominate the discourse of arts-marketing practice.” (O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2010, p. 3)

They go on suggest that not only are arts marketers a core audience within arts consumers (O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2010), that this blending of perspectives also applies to arts marketing researchers, who often (as I have done) continue their professional practice alongside their research (O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2010) and are also consumers of arts and culture for entertainment as well as for work.

O'Reilly and Kerrigan are cautious in ascribing value to frameworks and matrices in the practice of marketing arts and culture, yet they frame the study and exploration of new perspectives in arts marketing as being classifiable according to marketing of, in, through, from and as art. This aligns with Alan Bradshaw's axiomatic review of arts marketing (2010), which puts forward four classifications of practice. The first is art as consumption, which suggests that art “consumption and production co-exist and are mutually constitutive” (Bradshaw, 2010, p. 10) and that, as such, art can act as a tool to “frame consumer experiences” (Bradshaw, 2010, p. 9). The second is marketing as art, a culturally embedded practice with “creative intent” (Bradshaw, 2010, p. 11) in which marketers act as the link between consumers and cultural experiences through their own creative practice, resulting in the sense that “marketing achieves realisation as art.” (Bradshaw, 2010, p. 12) The third is art as marketing, in which the “complex balancing act” (Bradshaw, 2010, p. 13) between commercial interests and art is creatively geared towards economic and transactional value or exchange value, similar to the forms of value laid out by Karababa and Kjeldgaard (2014). The final angle in Bradshaw's review is that of marketing interpreting art, in which the marketer is a producer of a critical

insight into an artwork, whose work becomes a creative object in and of itself, as well as a gateway between artist and audience:

“The idea that consumer researchers can contribute to the analysis of artistic texts results in the idea that scholars should review marketing texts using a cultural lens and the implicit assumption that marketing text is a cultural object.”  
(Bradshaw, 2010, p. 14)

In my experience – which spans marketing and communications practice, consumption, and research – arts marketing is a creative as well as critical and analytical practice, in which the marketer consumes and interprets artworks and cultural experiences and creates standalone text and image objects which act as links between the product and the consumer via multiple communication channels and platforms. Working in this way, arts marketing practice is flexible and can adapt to align where necessary to all the frames suggested above, across commercial and aesthetic concerns; and coordinating this alignment is in itself an analytical practice. This critical and creative approach has informed the practice-led methods used in this research that will be expanded in Chapter 2.

Citing Morris Holbrook’s 1999 research on the relationship between popular opinion and so-called expert judgements of films, Bradshaw *et al.* (2010) state that studies of arts marketing “typically ignore the extraordinary aspects of the aesthetic experience and remain mute on the critical question of what distinguishes aesthetic appreciation from other types of consumer value” (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2010, p. 7), including the capacity of art to entertain. In this “experiential framework” (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2010, p. 6; Bilton, 2017), the moment of engagement with an artwork is what sets the value systems of artworks apart from other products. An alternative strategy is relationship marketing, which seeks to build, develop, and maintain an ‘authentic’ relationship between audiences and arts organisations and experiences which align with audiences’ expectations (Osborne and Rentschler, 2010). In this strategy, authenticity is accepted as the central requirement for successful arts marketing:



“An authentic experience engages the audience with the work; it does so by developing product which recognizes the identity of the audience and is sincere in its approach.” (Osborne and Rentschler, 2010, p. 66)

Osborne and Rentschler (2010) position authenticity as the key to unlocking both audience and product development strategies for diversifying cultural attendance through cultivating and safeguarding a universal sense of a right to access and participate in arts and culture in audiences. They state that this creates marketing which is welcoming and inclusive:

“demonstrating that an understanding of audience expectation in multicultural artistic delivery presents a powerful value proposition in the arts.” (Osborne and Rentschler, 2010, p. 54)

While relationship marketing and cultivating authenticity are most obviously relevant to existing cultural audiences, here this approach is also framed within a strategy that takes “entrepreneurial risks usually associated with the periphery of artistic production and [makes] these risks mainstream” (Osborne and Rentschler, 2010, p. 54).

‘Mainstream’ culture is equated with a widening of access and engaging new audiences through breaking down risk as a perceived barrier to taking part in an experience. It proposes a decentralisation of marketing strategies through targeted relationships with communities and allowing those communities to formulate strategies to best reach the audiences with whom they have authentic relationships (Osborne and Rentschler, 2010). Writing in 2010, Osborne and Rentschler see the idea of audience co-production through building relationships on social media as a central part of such a strategy. They are both positive and optimistic about these newer modes of communication and stating that these channels give diverse audiences the opportunity for self-expression and conversation around an artwork or performance (Osborne and Rentschler, 2010).

More recent research into platforms and audience development on social media – underlined by my own findings – has shown that platforms are not concerned with diversifying networks of co-production and value co-creation on their channels, but

rather tend to reinforce existing barriers and divisions (Helmond, 2015; Duffy *et al.*, 2019) and hide them from view (Christin, 2020). It could be argued – and some of the findings from this research suggest – that arts and cultural organisations have largely responded by using broad relationship marketing and brand-building strategies to prioritise algorithmic success over creating a diverse value proposition for their work online. Bilton (2017) sees this trend of ‘uncreative’ marketing as being the result of cultural organisations and marketers’ tendency to prioritise “the creative value of their products” (Bilton, 2017, p.225) over creative approaches to connecting with audiences. However, this is not to say that this strategy could not change were a recalibration of relationship marketing strategies to take place, moving away from the centralised approaches currently favoured. In addition to who is communicating and what they are communicating about, Bilton (2017) suggests that platforms and the distribution of culture and media that takes place on and through them have become more important than the product, or content, itself:

“This shift is reflected in the changing structures of the creative industries value chain, with powerful new intermediaries taking centre stage, and in the practice of marketing, with product-led marketing giving way to more experiential approaches.” (Bilton, 2017, p.222)

In a manner reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan’s ‘Medium is the Message’ chapter from *Understanding Media: the extensions of man* (first edition 1964) and Stuart Hall’s audience reception theory (1973), Bilton states that:

“The meaning and value of cultural products are inseparable from their interpretations, mediations and reimaginings at the point of consumption. This has implications for the political economy of creativity, especially for the relationship between small and large enterprises in the creative economy” (Bilton, 2017, p.222)

This means that, in a commercial sense, the power of culture and creative industries could be seen to have shifted away from cultural producers themselves to those who

“brand and distribute” (Bilton, 2017, p.224) their work. In this context, the definition of what constitutes ‘creative’ marketing and communications is difficult to pin down, particularly in the cultural sector where cultural and creative value is the product, and profit is not always at the core of its work.

In recent literature, the positivism towards social media as a tool for audience diversification has begun to evolve. A relevant example is, a case study of digital communications by the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT) (Miles, 2018), that puts forward a more detailed argument for the value of digital and social media. Miles frames LIFT’s approach to social media as one of “digital staging” (Miles, 2018, p. 306); a positive disruption operationalised both in performances taking place at the festival and in marketing and strategies for co-creation and co-production with audiences. The concept of staging incorporates a stated need to project a sense of “liveness” (Miles, 2018, p. 315) into the festival’s digital content, which resonates with this case studies in this research which examine approaches to liveness in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns. In this analysis, online audiences – which are taken to be the same people – are viewed to have shifted their role from consumer to collaborator, with value co-creation seen as a process which is “consumer-led” (Miles, 2018, p. 307), an approach which Bilton (2017) endorses as the starting point for creative marketing.

This approach and its prioritisation over more consumptive, product-focused strategies are framed by Walmsley (2019) as a paradigm shift, framed as ‘The Death of Arts Marketing’ (2019) in an article which uses “critical marketing” (Walmsley, 2019, p. 32) content analysis of arts marketing articles and journals over three decades to draw conclusions about developments in arts marketing scholarship. Walmsley’s analysis echoes the forms of value framework for marketing and consumer research put forward by Karababa and Kjeldgaard (2014) and the service-led concept of designing through value constellations (Normann and Ramírez, 1993; Speed and Maxwell, 2015). Yet, as has already been noted, arts marketing and the communication of cultural value it entails, might appear set apart, or indeed sets itself apart, from other forms of marketing. On this point, Walmsley notes the charitable, not-for-profit organisational

values of most cultural organisations as central to this point of difference. It is suggested that the values associated with this status and their impact on relationships with audiences have helped to move arts marketing practice away from product and economy led “transactional tactics of segmentation and promotion” (Walmsley, 2019, p. 33). Twenty-first century consumers of the arts, we are told, “are demanding an increasingly participatory and co-creative role in both artistic production and meaning making” (Walmsley, 2019, p. 34), or we might say value as the co-creation of meaning (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014). Walmsley goes on to suggest that this audience-centred approach could be a way of understanding a potential recalibration of value and its exchange between organisations, artists, and audiences, acknowledging the socially constructed nature of value, values and the standards for their measurement (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013; Walmsley, 2019). Looking at the work of reaching new audiences, Walmsley states that communications and marketing have always been central to the process of implementing cultural policy and as such are a key part of “the moral imperative to broaden access and maximise participation” (Walmsley, 2019, p. 36). This principle of benevolence is contrasted by the term ‘audience development’ which centres audience experiences and was “the first proactive attempt to democratise the arts which considered the audience rather than the art.” (Hadley, 2021, p. 8). The value of the moral imperative, then, must be handled carefully by marketers. It is one thing to attempt to tackle the “structural inequalities of arts and cultural participation” (Walmsley, 2019, p. 42), but another to assume that arts marketing and communications are supporting audience wellbeing. Walmsley’s review of scholarship also notes an increase in focus “on the cultural value and social impact of the arts” (Walmsley, 2019, p. 41) and a “reclaiming by artists, audiences and scholars of subjective, intrinsic, co-created and aesthetic value over the predominantly economic values of the market” (Walmsley, 2019, p. 42).

#### Organisational perspectives on communications work

Glow *et al.* (2021) consider the complicated question of how a paradigm shift (Walmsley, 2019) or change in approach in the work of communications might occur

and what the barriers to enabling this capacity for change might be. Using examples of case studies conducted in Australia and the UK, both countries where national cultural policy is focused on diversifying audiences, the authors compare strategies and successes in both audience development – which is defined as operational and strategic, “the nexus of programming, education and marketing” (Glow *et al.*, 2021) – and audience engagement, defined as emotional alignment with audiences and their values, or what we have been terming relationship marketing. In the UK, the research found a “top-down” (Glow *et al.*, 2021, p. 132) structure in both cultural policy and funding, where publicly funded arts organisations are expected to measure audience diversification against a set of policy-led directives and be accountable for results, but with less policy direction in terms of how those results are delivered or what outputs that are likely to enhance audience diversification might look like. In Australia, the approach is more flexible and led by the funding of projects and organisations specifically directed towards audience diversification and the making of work based on these principles, which encourages participation at a community level (Glow *et al.*, 2021). Both models are of course concerned with ensuring that funded organisations are seen to be diversifying audiences in line with national policy goals. However, the implication is that by embedding audience diversification in organisational practice and behaviours more centrally than just through policy frameworks, the Australian model is more likely to bring about broad and lasting change to behaviours.

Glow *et al.* use methods similar to my research in a case study examining the guiding principles document and public facing marketing materials of an Australian performing arts festival. Their study looks for audience focused statements which could show whether diversifying audiences could be interpreted as a central goal for these organisations and the extent to which this focus was communicated to audiences and stakeholders (Glow *et al.*, 2021). Their findings suggest what I too have found while examining public and policy-focused communications of case study organisations for value and values messaging:

“The analysis of the two documents suggest a contradictory approach to audience development that aims to diversify audiences and a distinction

between rhetoric (as illustrated in the festival handout [public-facing]) and practice (embodied in the Guiding Principles [stakeholder-facing]).” (Glow *et al.*, 2021, p. 141)

Glow *et al.* suggest that what is required to close this gap is “a new conceptualisation of the organisational work that is required” (Glow *et al.*, 2021, p. 146) to develop, diversify and engage with audiences, which they believe their model provides. In its conclusion, one of Glow *et al.*’s findings that particularly stands out is that the need for organisational change is best recognised following what they term an “exogenous ‘jolt’” (Glow *et al.*, 2021, p. 146), which it seems likely that the COVID-19 pandemic will have provided for the cultural sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns beginning in March 2020 brought about rapid shifts in cultural programmes, performances, festivals, and events. In evaluating recent research and publications relating to the life course of the pandemic and possible futures for the cultural sector, this research attempts to keep in mind a still present sense of fatigue post-pandemic and the very recent memory of restrictions placed on consumption of culture. The ‘Culture in Crisis’ report by the Centre for Cultural Value at the University of Leeds breaks down the period from March 2020 – November 2021 into three phases: the immediate impact of the pandemic, felt from March–Autumn 2020; the winter lockdown, from Autumn 2020–Spring/Summer 2021; and the ongoing and longer-term impact, from Summer–November 2021 and beyond. While the report acknowledges that the long-term impact of the pandemic cannot yet be established, it is explicit in stating that:

“the impact of the pandemic has aggravated and accelerated existing inequalities and longer-term trends across the arts and cultural sector.”  
(Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p. 4)

The research team conducted case studies of organisations across the UK, including one with The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society; an ongoing survey by The Audience Agency in England called the Cultural Participation Monitor; analysis of the Labour

Force Survey conducted by the Office of National Statistics; social media analysis; a cultural ecosystem analysis of Greater Manchester; and engagement with the government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport, The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, and government funding bodies from around the UK. The Centre for Cultural Value also held a two-day online conference, which I attended, in November 2021. A presentation at this event by Mark Robinson of Thinking Practice<sup>27</sup> described the ongoing impact phase of the pandemic and the shift in focus to values-led, community focused work as being a "pivot to purpose and people" (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p. 64).

On inequalities in the cultural workforce, and their exacerbation, the report finds that:

"individuals and communities who were already under-represented in the cultural workforce were more likely to leave cultural jobs in 2020 than those who already dominated many key roles in the cultural sector and wider economy."  
(Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p. 4)

Similarly:

"Places with a history of obtaining public investment – and the arts and cultural organisations based in those places – benefited most from the [UK Government] Cultural Recovery Fund (CRF); those places without this capacity generally did not." (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p. 4)

These findings resonate with my own from my aligned research in the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project's 'Art in and Out of Lockdown' research, conducted in 2020 (Jones *et al.*, 2020), indicating that in other parts of the UK as well as in Edinburgh, those organisations that were already embedded in their communities and able to react to and reflect the needs of their audiences and networks were best placed to provide those communities with support:

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.thinkingpractice.co.uk/> [Accessed 3 July 2023]

“organisations that had already committed to a civic and community mission became examples of best practice.” (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p. 5)

The “pivot to digital” (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p. 5) undertaken by many cultural organisations who were already literate in digital ways of working in the immediate impact phase of the pandemic, including the case study organisations which feature in this research, was embraced by existing audiences and policymakers as being an example of the creativity of the sector and its vital role in offering positive reasons to stay at home (Bakhshi and Fazio, 2020). Yet, with a broader and longer-term lens, the ‘pivot to digital’ is shown by the *Culture in Crisis* report to have had limited impact in terms of extending digital practice to other cultural organisations, or in reaching new audiences:

“Those who had previously invested in digital data practices and technologies were better prepared to realise new digital and hybrid forms of engagement than those who lacked the capacity to embrace digital strategies to engage communities in their programmes and collections, beyond their institutional walls. Audiences who were already highly engaged found new, digital ways of enjoying the arts and cultural content; those who were less interested pre-pandemic remained so in 2020.” (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p. 5)

For the longer-term impact of digital adaptations related to COVID-19, and on the value of digital as part of the sector’s engagement with audiences going forward, the report is very clear in stating that:

“digital distribution is not the great equaliser or diversifier that much of the sector was hoping it was or even claiming it to be.” (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p. 68)

However, this is not to say that there are no recommendations for continuing digital strategies partly, as the report acknowledges, because this is often the requirement of cultural policymakers (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022) but also through targeted experimentation



with digital technologies as part of a long-term strategy of engagement with audiences through which “Digital innovation can make a positive difference” (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p. 68).

The report recommends a longer-term approach to considering how the UK’s cultural sector might recover from the pandemic. The ‘pivot to purpose’ identified by the Centre for Cultural Value as a “general strategic shift” towards a recalibration of cultural value for workforces and audiences, and the cultivation of a values-led culture through which to enact that recovery. The questions of which, and whose, purposes are not answered, but the language of the report clearly prioritises values-centred terms: ‘compassion’, ‘empathy’, ‘intimacy’, ‘resilience’, ‘collective leadership’. For the cultural workforce, the report identifies the need to “better understand the vital role that freelancers play in the cultural industries” (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p. 65) through research, for training and skills development across all areas of the sector, and crucially also calls for a radical reassessment of how the workforce is valued:

“the pandemic has shown the need for major, perhaps revolutionary, changes in how the cultural sector views its work and its workforce.” (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022, p. 65)

Not only that, but the report also suggests an even more universal need for collective action towards making change:

“Greater determination and commitment to change will also be required if the sector is to reverse the widening of the inequality gap triggered by the pandemic.” (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022)

Exploring these values-driven approaches in Edinburgh, and the extent to which the city’s cultural sector has an appetite for and is committed to change, is central to this research and its outputs and findings.

In a study of arts festivals in South Australia, Rentschler and Lee (2021) also identify this shift and state that “There is now incentive for the industries to work together” (Rentschler and Lee, 2021, p. 45). They identify three areas of transformation in South Australia’s arts festivals sector: from an international to a local focus; from competition to collaboration; and a shift towards digital. In considering the values-led perspective put forward by the *Culture in Crisis* report, Rentschler and Lee are somewhat more pragmatic, stressing the importance of being aware of the relationship between the “conceptual” and the “empirical” in studying the impact of COVID-19 on the arts (Rentschler and Lee, 2021, p. 38) and of “flexibility” (Rentschler and Lee, 2021, p. 49) in considering the qualities we now look for in a festival and a cultural destination as we move away from the pandemic.

#### Considerations for cultural sector communications on digital platforms

Linked to Glow *et al.*’s findings on the need for organisational change discussed above, it would be hard to ignore the promise of ‘big data’ for reaching new and existing audiences and the data-driven approaches to innovation it generates. In my own experience in arts organisations and festivals, the idea of being ‘data-driven’ feels like a good thing to be – and the rhetoric to this effect noted by Glow *et al.* (2021) is often evident – but it is a long way away from being a strategy which many organisations are comfortable or confident to employ. Nuccio and Bertacchini (2021) also note a gap to this effect which finds “conceptual and organizational” (Nuccio and Bertacchini, 2021, p. 1) barriers to adoption of data-driven approaches in in arts and cultural organisations:

“...the arts and cultural field shows a gap in comprehensively addressing the adoption and diffusion of data analytics in order to understand their effect on audiences, organizations and stakeholders. In fact, data analytics is not simply about the opportunity to access and exploit a larger quantity of information but implies a disruptive change in the mindset of organizations towards a conscious data-driven strategy.” (Nuccio and Bertacchini, 2021, p. 2)

Data-driven approaches, for Nuccio and Bertacchini, have the potential for encouraging change in arts and cultural organisations as much through their conceptual value as through the more tangible potential developments they might bring about. They identify three key areas through which data-driven innovation can have positive influence in organisational change: communications and value co-creation; developing skills within the organisation; and the programming of new experiences and participatory opportunities for audience development. In addition to the promise of data, the authors note, data analytics specifically are framed as a means of navigating the complex connections of values in the arts and creative industries – cultural, social, and economic (Nuccio and Bertacchini, 2021) – and the foregrounding of these values to achieve organisational goals. While they acknowledge that outputs from analytics and metrics are not widely viewed as suitable for understanding artistic quality or the multiple values associated with cultural participation (Nuccio and Bertacchini, 2021), it is suggested that it might be possible to “develop novel metrics of value creation” (Nuccio and Bertacchini, 2021, p. 9) that might be able to measure and track both the quality of an artistic output and audience engagement with its consumption. Nuccio and Bertacchini accept that data-driven innovation is not a panacea, citing privacy concerns, bias and lack of context in data-driven approaches (referencing Chris Anderson’s ‘End of Theory’ (Anderson, 2008)). Barriers to implementation are listed as overlapping ideas of a lack of or reluctance to commit financially; lack of organisational capabilities and budget for developing technological skills; a lack of “cultural and attitudinal” (Nuccio and Bertacchini, 2021, p. 14) support.

More broadly, the idea of a “computational turn” (Boyd and Crawford, 2012, p. 665) in research, and in our lives more generally, has altered approaches to knowledge. The perceived value and objectivity of big data is defined by Boyd and Crawford as the interplay between technology and computing power; the opportunity to analyse large datasets; and the mythology that these types of datasets offer access to a “higher form” of knowledge coupled with “the aura of truth, objectivity and accuracy.” (Boyd and Crawford, 2012, p. 663) Social media use is often aspirational (Duffy, 2018); a means of boasting about our experiences and achievements (Rogers, 2018b). Its accompanying

value system of likes, shares and engagement metrics offers easy and immediate proof of the size and strength of a user profile's social network and generates a sense of success that fuels further social media use. Rogers compares this with "Baudrillard's (1990) notion of statistics as particular forms of wish fulfilment. Vanity metrics become fulfilling measurements of attractiveness to others." (Rogers, 2018b, p. 453) The problematic lack of correlation between digital communications and conversion to sales for arts marketers has already been noted, although it is still possible to find measurable value in social media metrics, including measurable cultural capital for producers and audiences through the metrics associated with their profile. This might go some way towards legitimising the work of digital communications, even if it does not directly generate revenue. However, it feels important to keep in mind that platforms themselves are very much revenue generating enterprises, and that their content is "commercial as well as socio-epistemological" (Rogers, 2018c, p. 558). The platformization of the web (Helmond, 2015) has widened the circulation of social media content across the Internet through apps and APIs (application programming interfaces), but at the same time has also locked user data within social media platforms when reformatted 'platform-ready' information from other sites is returned there to maximise its circulation. This framework has resulted in a shifting of power towards social media companies and the increasing commodification and value of the data they control. According to Helmond, these "two processes of decentralizing platform data and recentralizing platform ready data characterize what I call the double logic of platformization" (Helmond, 2015, p. 8).

Boyd and Crawford (2012) suggest that "Much of the enthusiasm surrounding Big Data stems from the perception that it offers easy access to massive amounts of data" (Boyd and Crawford, 2012, p. 673). However, as demonstrated above, the economic model of platformization has created and reinforced a digital divide around data that has implications in both commercial and research contexts. Social media APIs make no distinction between the data they are willing to offer users for marketing purposes and that which is available for use by academic researchers (Venturini and Rogers, 2019). Data available through social media APIs is also restricted and commodified, and responses to public scandals surrounding the dissemination of fake news and the

misappropriation and misuse of user data by Cambridge Analytica have led to the introduction of further limitations around API data, with increasing public concern perhaps likely to result in further restrictions to access in the future (Venturini and Rogers, 2019). These restrictions could increase the monetary value of API data but would, conversely, narrow its scope for marketing and academic research.

There is also the need for the measurement of value of digital communications to address the extent to which audiences behave as ‘themselves’ in their platform-based interactions and the way in which interactions between cultural producers or organisations and their audiences intersect with their ‘real life’ behaviours, specifically cultural attendance. As Boyd and Crawford (2012) note, a social media platform does not represent “all people” (Boyd and Crawford, 2012, p. 669). Users may share their identity to greater or lesser degrees; may see themselves as operating in a professional or personal capacity, or a combination of both; may choose to remain completely anonymous; or may be present on the platform without active participation. The different conventions of behaviour that take place across separate channels and platforms also demonstrate that online behaviours do not transpose easily into an understanding of ‘real life’ ways of being (Boyd and Crawford, 2012; Kozinets, 2015). Kozinets (2015) places user profiles and online interactions between them as often being within the realm of “consocial identity and interaction” (Kozinets, 2015, p. 11) in that the sociality of the exchange is based on shared experience rather than a permanent attribute of who we are. This is not to say that online relationships will never form into lasting bonds, but that they offer more opportunities for forging links with others that are weaker, more fleeting, or short-lived, and that they are conducted at a distance which is both geographical and interpersonal, depending on the extent to which each user is behaving as ‘themselves’. As such, Kozinets says that online interactive behaviours have disrupted our understanding of the terms ‘culture’ and ‘community’, meaning that traditionally more static forms of social interaction become “fluid processes” (Kozinets, 2015, p. 10) in the context of our new “technoculture” (Kozinets, 2015, p. 83).

## Creative communications work and creative justice

As illustrated in Figure 1, this chapter has explored notions of cultural value: intrinsic, instrumental, social and economic; and values, relational processes and practices; and situated them within ideas of experiential value and marketing approaches. To conclude, this section turns to the lens of creative justice (Banks, 2017) as a tool to explore inequalities in the cultural sector through the study of communications work. Creative justice is useful as a flexible framework through which to explore the balanced and negotiated practices associated with culture as an object, culture as a practice, with a focus on bringing the work of cultural production, and specifically the work of communications, to the foreground as a creative practice that is valuable. It supports value attributed to the objective and aesthetic qualities of culture, as well as the affective qualities of its production and consumption.

Banks states that the notion of creative justice frames the question of “what kinds of values or actions might underpin a fairer or more just cultural work” (Banks, 2017, p.4), and this emphasis on action is echoed in the practice-led methodologies employed by this research. The outlined approaches to creative justice also support this research and include critical study of notions of creative and cultural industries and cultural value; framings of cultural valuation informed by Bourdieu; and a flexibility and pragmatism that reflects the complexity of cultural value and values negotiations this thesis will document. Banks describes the particular nature of cultural work that is both socially embedded and linked to individual and collective ethics and identity practices:

“cultural work is a locus of objective relations – a place where concern for the qualities and properties of a real activity... – relate to an articulated sense that the practice is itself good in terms of supporting and extending ‘human powers’”  
(Banks, 2017, p.7)

Bourdieu, Banks tells us, exposes notions of taste as being social (Banks, 2017) noting that the communication of our own taste is a social signifier. As such, he suggests that in understanding cultural value, values and practices of valuation, it is impossible to

avoid the influence of social circumstances and the judgements that they naturally bring about. Creative justice also supports the interrogation of ideas of meritocracy and talent in cultural works and creative practice discussed above, noting that talent is often posited as a 'standalone' gift, but in fact talent requires development through work (Banks, 2017).

While Banks is critical of notions of success in the creative economy, creative justice is posited as a way of incorporating rather than avoiding economic arguments about culture and its value and acknowledging the moral values that are held by cultural workers about and alongside these arguments. He notes that previous (including his own, 2006) work on the moral economy, described above, has not been influential in the study of the creative and cultural industries. The approach here is to critique them and explore equity, equality, the interrelation between the civic and social elements of culture, as well as the moral economy (Banks, 2006), alongside the commercial aspects of cultural production and consumption (Banks, 2017). After all, Banks states, the pursuit of revenue – either through funding or commercially – has an impact on the art that is created, and how producers of marketing and communications sell it. This argument is central to the argument presented in this thesis that the work of communications is a unique lens on ideas of cultural value and is supported by Banks' previous work that suggest moral values are central to cultural workers' "workplace identities" (Banks, 2006, p.456).

As discussed above, the distribution of the creative economy is unequal and therefore, Banks states, unjust (Banks, 2017). The notion of justice for cultural objects as being in possession of value allows for the idea that, depending on your judgement – a social practice which Banks deems to be unavoidable, cultural objects cannot be seen as having equal value for everyone (Banks, 2017). Like Bilton (2017), Banks notes the inequalities of access to cultural work and consumption and the extent to which recent disruptions to cultural and creative industries – both in policy and in practice – have disrupted the cultural sector but also changed the landscape of culture and creative production through media and distribution across society. This, Banks states, requires us to "think more urgently about justice in relation to cultural industries, given the

growing importance of such activities to the social and economic organisation of contemporary societies” (Banks, 2017, p.145). Banks sees creative justice as a provocation for critique of the creative economy, in which intrinsic notions of value are balanced with social practices and values, to address inequalities and challenge unjust circumstances that are pervasive in the sector but can be overshadowed by positivist creative industries imaginaries, such as the Edinburgh Imaginary posited by this research:

“In both ‘public’ and ‘commercial’ terms, therefore, the idea of objective cultural value remains a useful one for informing ongoing critique of the creative economy.” (Banks, 2017, p.33)

Banks concludes with three concepts recommended to advance the study of creative justice. He is conscious of: “the need for wider and more systemic changes that might be required to help occasion a genuinely transformative creative justice” (Banks, 2017, p.145) which aligns closely with the final empirical work conducted for this research through the *Future Culture Edinburgh* event. The first is the idea of ‘objective respect’ for both cultural objects, as discussed above, and cultural work. This framing balances the aesthetic and intrinsic value of cultural objects with the context of their production giving weight to the consideration and evaluation of the qualities of things and experiences. The relevance of this idea for this research is in this blending of the notions of cultural value and values laid out above in Figure 1, alongside acknowledging the complexity of cultural work, experiences of culture and their influence on what culture is produced.

There is also a challenge, Banks acknowledges, in how to pay objective respect without “reproducing unwarranted cultural hierarchies and established inequalities” (Banks, 2017, p.147) and this is also of particular importance in evaluating findings from *Future Culture Edinburgh*. While I have illustrated and described cultural value and values as relational, Banks seems more wary of this approach where it is used to account for or explain complexity without explaining it – as we have seen with creative city, class, and



industry imaginaries earlier in this chapter. Instead, Banks suggests complexity as making the case for objective respect and sensitive processes of evaluation.

"political complexity and the diversity of cultural forms (and their interpretations) should not lead us to disqualify or relativize judgements of cultural value, but simply means that we now have the task of making more difficult appraisals – ones that have to be conducted in a dialogue... that must strive to be sensitive to history, social context and the objective (aesthetic) qualities of the objects in question. We need to embrace this complexity simply because, overall, questions of cultural value remain unanswerable without some prior analysis of why culture *matters*. (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2014; O'Connor, 2016) – as both an objective entity and to its corresponding human subjects." (Banks, 2017, p.147)

And so, all ways of valuing culture are valid, and can interoperate, but what creative justice can do is to support the work of describing, balancing and accounting for them through evaluation because the purpose of critical social science is not merely to provide a positive account but a normative one, also." (Banks, 2017, p.148).

As noted above, Banks states that "we must not lose sight of the fact that cultural work is often far from pleasant or beneficial" (Banks, 2017, p.148). Despite the dominant creative class narrative that cultural work is so loved that it "is hardly like work at all" (Banks, 2007, p.4), it is also, from a political perspective, an intermediary in the "application of managerial (and thus capitalistic) authority" (Banks, 2007, p.5) and is tied to inequalities and the absence of creative justice in the creative economy. More generally too it is a social aspiration that more people should have "especially creative, meaningful and rewarding work" (Banks, 2017, p.149) and so part of creative justice is to make work better and more 'creative'. Thus, objective respect should be paid to cultural work as well as cultural objects to advance creative justice. In this research, the practice-focused lens of communications work supports the facilitation of a dialogue between objective respect paid to cultural objects and to cultural work. The case studies included in this thesis, in particular, allow for the study of how the qualities of

cultural work are linked to the qualities of objects, using creative justice as a dialogue between “a combined set of aesthetic and ethical concerns that contain a number of these internal dilemmas and contradictions.” (Banks, 2017, p.149)

Banks’ second recommendation is ‘Parity of Participation’, which relates to access and “distributive justice” (Banks, 2017, p.149) of cultural objects and cultural work and allows us to recognise and connect different dimensions of injustice under a single justice claim” (Banks, 2017, p.150). As discussed earlier, “inherited social advantage” (Banks, 2017, p.149) makes success in cultural professions more likely, and creative justice supports the idea of interactions between people as equals. The aims of parity in participation are that the maximum amount of people can do cultural work and be fairly compensated for it; that there are no barriers to cultural work through discrimination or prejudice, and that opportunities continue to be available once employed; and that there is democratic, communicative space within the cultural industries (Banks, 2017).

Banks’ third and final recommendation is ‘Reduction of Harms’ (Banks, 2017). This idea has two functions towards creative justice. It acknowledges and takes seriously and brings into connectivity the known incidences of inequalities and harm in the cultural workforce (McRobbie, 2015; Banks, 2017) and, like the post-war Edinburgh festivals origin story, supports the notion of human ‘flourishing’ in cultural work:

“Flourishing consists in being able to expand or develop one’s human faculties and capacities – which derive from being able to live well and work in environments that are safe, supportive and sustaining.” (Banks, 2017, p.156)

So, creative justice as a lens through which to facilitate dialogue between creative and cultural objects, work, and education. For this research, and for Banks, this is important because, whatever balance is struck between framings of cultural value and values, it is clear and logical that creative injustice is harmful in the inequalities of access and representation that it maintains and reproduces.

## Chapter 2: Iterative Methodologies and Practice-Led Research

### Research questions

This section documents the practice-led research in this thesis to consider how communications of value and values in the cultural sector might be collected and analysed. It explores the ways in which my own practice, in professional cultural work in this area and in aligned research, situates my position as researcher-practitioner or practitioner-researcher (Barrett and Bolt, 2007; Scott, 2016; Nelson, 2022), and the role of practice as action (Stringer, 1996) in the iterative participatory design of this research.

As detailed in the introduction, the questions this research set out to answer are:

1. What is the value of communications in the cultural sector and how is it evaluated and measured? For organisations, workforces, and audiences.
2. How do the sector and its audiences communicate value and values, in Edinburgh and the sector more widely? What are the limitations and successes of current approaches?
3. What has the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic been on communications of value and values? What lasting changes might it bring about?
4. What approaches to research design and delivery with Edinburgh's cultural sector can drive change towards addressing challenges and inequities in the sector?
5. What does a values-led cultural sector in Edinburgh look and feel like? What will it do?

### Introduction

As already noted, the first iteration of the research design grew from my professional and academic interest in evaluating and understanding the impact of digital tools and platforms for communications in the cultural sector. I was looking at who platform

metrics served; who was included, and who was left out; and the impact of these mostly quantitative markers for measuring value and success on the development of communications strategies and business models. Anecdotally, and in my own experience, I had found trust in these numbers and that they had contributed to a growth mindset for measuring value and success. However, conversely, the skills and resources required within organisations to deliver communications was less valued, with limited time and resources made available for this work and limited awareness across organisations about the day-to-day operations of digital communications delivery.

This research first looked to transpose the evaluation of value and success of digital communications, and the communications of value and values carried out within the cultural sector, into an academic research framework. As such, this section explores this work through two case studies conducted using participant interviews and computational research. The first is Edinburgh Science, which produces the annual Edinburgh Science Festival each spring. The second is the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, the organisation which “underpins”<sup>28</sup> the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and supports artists and audiences in putting on and finding shows at the festival. For both case studies, digital communications research was designed and conducted around each organisations’ use of Twitter, with data gathering and analysis conducted using R Studio<sup>29</sup> through the Twitter API<sup>30</sup>. The challenges and opportunities of platform research, both generally and specifically to the cultural sector, are included as part of this section to illustrate the ways in which both research into communications and communications of value through platforms might exacerbate or reinforce existing inequalities of cultural production and consumption.

Analysis of findings from these two case studies allowed the research to formulate and develop its focus on communications of value and values in Edinburgh’s cultural sector.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/about/fringe-society> [Accessed 8 May 2022]

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.rstudio.com/> [Accessed 8 May 2022]

<sup>30</sup> <https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/twitter-api> [Accessed 8 May 2022] With changes to the Twitter API having taken place in early 2023, a snapshot of the developer terms website as it appeared at the point of access is available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20220427101742/https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/twitter-api> [Accessed 26 February 2023]

The datasets collected through Twitter captured communications around the timebound content of each organisation's festival, as well as documenting the nature of delivering festival content during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, central statements of value and values are more static and less likely to be found on social media, which in both cases acts mainly as a tool for broadcast at a moment in time. Instead, organisational websites are central resources for these types of statements, on pages titled 'About Us' or similar along the lines of 'visions', 'missions' and 'principles'. As a means of generating and exploring a broader picture of the nature of these communications, the research was then expanded to include content analysis of these pages using Voyant Tools<sup>31</sup>, a web-based platform for the reading and analysis of digital texts. This analysis brought the language of value and values used by the cultural sector into sharper focus and inspired the methodology for the final part of the empirical research.

At the same time as these case studies and content analysis projects were taking place, discussions in the press and online about Edinburgh<sup>32</sup>, and the UK's, cultural sectors were exploring value and values through the lens of COVID-19, where inequalities and precarities in the cultural workforce and in access for audiences were shown to have been highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic. *Future Culture Edinburgh*, a symposium-style action research (Stringer, 1996) event produced in collaboration with Edinburgh-based creative Morvern Cunningham, who had themselves written two pamphlets<sup>33</sup> exploring what might come next for Edinburgh's cultural sector, explored the production of a participatory framework based on action research and reflection-in-action principles through which stakeholders – with a focus on traditionally underrepresented voices – could imagine multiple futures for cultural production and consumption and identify the values, actions and collaborations through which

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<sup>31</sup> <https://voyant-tools.org/> [Accessed 8 May 2022]

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/edinburgh-festivals-future-needs-a-mature-discussion-brian-ferguson-3159953>, 31 March 2021 [Accessed 28 May 2022]; <https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/edinburgh-festival-prospect-of-a-meaningful-season-is-still-within-reach-brian-ferguson-3241694>, 19 May 2021 [Accessed 28 May 2022]; <https://www.theskinny.co.uk/intersections/features/how-a-fairer-future-edinburgh-fringe-is-still-possible> 31 July 2021 [Accessed 28 May 2022]

<sup>33</sup> *You'll Have Had Your City?*, July 2020, <https://www.theskinny.co.uk/art/features/building-edinburgh-back-better-in-a-post-pandemic-world> [Accessed 28 May 2022]; *Edinburgh Reimagined: the future will be localised*. March 2021, <https://sceptical.scot/2021/03/edinburgh-reimagined-the-future-will-be-localised/> [Accessed 28 May 2022]

collective action towards a more equitable sector might be enacted. This part of the research required sensitivity to the mood of the sector at the time – the sense that post-pandemic futures were still uncertain, and with the accompanying precarity, and exhaustion, still very much at the forefront of discussion. *Future Culture Edinburgh* was funded by The Edinburgh Futures Institute at The University of Edinburgh, with support from the Edinburgh Centre for Data, Culture and Society and the AHRC and Data-Driven Innovation Initiative (DDI)-funded Creative Informatics programme.

This research is both iterative by design and in reaction to external circumstances – the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of and restrictions imposed by successive lockdowns. As such, the research has taken an approach based on action research (Stringer, 1996) and ‘reflection-in-action’ (Schön, 1983; Kline, 2014) throughout. The iterative nature of the empirical research this thesis contains has attempted to embed reflection-in-action into the work, considering the developing and changing – particularly through the COVID-19 pandemic – ideas of cultural value and values and the communications of these ideas as an “informal, collective, generational process of design” (Schön, 1983, p. 77) that responds to the evolution of the circumstances in which it is conducted.

## Practice-led research

Throughout this thesis, I describe my work as practice-led; meaning my professional experiences in communications and marketing in the cultural sector, and the knowledge I have acquired through that practice, have been considered, critiqued and applied to the design and execution of this research. In addition, my aligned research practice, in projects and programmes relating to culture and the creative industries that has taken place alongside my PhD, has also informed the iteration of this piece of work, making my research during this period an example of a “multi-mode inquiry”, one in which “evidence may emerge prior to, and beyond, the practice itself” (Nelson, 2022, p.42). As such, I consider myself to be a ‘reflective practitioner’ (Stewart, 2007) in this thesis, and view the iterations of this work in the context of Scott’s (2016) assertion that

“practitioner-researchers are constantly reconfiguring, poking at or questioning methodological frameworks” (Scott, 2016, p.xvii). I also acknowledge that the position I have placed myself in during this piece of work, and my aligned research, has shaped both my research practice and my practitioner-researcher identity.

Stewart (2007) describes practice as research as a process of “navigation”, with practitioner-researchers being required to “establish new ways of recognition and behaviour” (Stewart, 2007, p.123). While Stewart acknowledges that a distinct line cannot always be drawn between research and practice – which is also my own experience – a case is made for taking a clear position within the context of the work, and for maintaining an awareness of this subjective position. For this research, I have been an active participant in engaging with practitioners, trying to always meet them on their terms and sensitively reflect their needs (Lechelt *et al.*, 2019), while also establishing and maintaining a research lens (Nelson, 2022). For me, this process has required the development of new skills in communications, aligning my dialogue with practitioners to encourage rich and engaging conversations, while at the same time also remaining aware of the idea that “practitioner-based research is concerned with theorising practice” (Stewart, 2007, p.124) in a way that practitioners might not. I identify with the assertion that methodologies for the study of culture – and its value and values – can be seen as a ‘bricolage’ (Stewart, 2007; Barrett, 2007) that is “pragmatic, strategic, and self-reflexive” (Stewart, 2007, p.127). This feels applicable to all the participatory research presented here, but was made evident to me most clearly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In taking a position in practice-led research, there is inevitably a place for judgement and criticism. Stewart describes the judgements and negotiations of practitioner research as allowing for the critiquing of academic methods from a unique practitioner-researcher position (Stewart, 2007) that incorporates “situated knowledge” (Barrett, 2007, p.135) and “discourse as practice” (Barrett, 2007, p.136). In doing this, practice becomes praxis (Stewart, 2007), an application of the theory. Praxis, Nelson (2022) states, can also become the “primary evidence” (Nelson, 2022, p.37) of research, and in this research, the case studies and *Future Culture Edinburgh* symposium fulfil that

role. For *Future Culture Edinburgh* in particular, judgement is evident in our research design which, while devised to support equitable and diverse participants and hybrid access to the event, also carries an implicit notion of judgement of who might normally be included in similar spaces, and who would be left out. Action research is also a method that seeks to identify a problem and enact change towards addressing it (Stringer, 1996), which implies subjectivity, navigation (Stewart, 2007) and judgement. And, returning to the lens of creative justice (Banks, 2017), which underpins the findings of this thesis through its framework for the study of cultural value and values and its aim of countering creative *injustice*, Banks is clear that judgement is central to advancing justice for cultural objects and cultural work. That is because to conduct critical enquiry about the creative economy and valuation of culture through the provocation of creative justice – in this case through both practice and research – judgements must be made. And, Banks states, change can only be theorised if judgements are made (Banks, 2017)

## Research participants

The numbers of participants that took part in this research are as follows:

### *Case studies*

Edinburgh Science – 5 participants interviewed; three interviews conducted. Interview transcripts are included in Appendix 1 (1a–1c).

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society – 1 participant interviewed; two interviews conducted. Interview transcripts are included in Appendix 1 (1d–1e).

### *Future Culture Edinburgh*

Hosts – 2, Vikki Jones and Morvern Cunningham.

Presenters – 1 keynote, 3 provocations, 3 research presentations.

Audience – 29 in-person at Leith Theatre, 99 online attendees.



## Case studies

### Introduction

This section details the two mixed methods case studies which form part of this research and explains the rationale for their choice in the context of Edinburgh's year-round programme of festivals. The first mixed methods case study with Edinburgh Science began with a focus on research questions one and two but expanded into question three when the period of data collection covered the cancellation of the Edinburgh Science Festival towards the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The second case study with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society followed a very similar structure to Edinburgh Science and worked with findings from this case study to inform semi-structured interview questions and data collection from the Twitter API to act as a comparison to the earlier findings.

### Rationale for case study organisation choices

In selecting and approaching the two festival organisations that took part in this research, the aim was, as far as possible, to capture some key contrasting elements of the Edinburgh Festivals from those that are part of the Festivals Edinburgh strategic umbrella. The organisation was formed in 2007 by Directors of Edinburgh's "leading" festivals, to encourage "Building on a culture of collaborative working" between these festivals. Festivals Edinburgh is supported by the Scottish Government, The City of Edinburgh Council, and Creative Scotland, and states it has "a mission to maintain and develop the value of Festivals' and the Festival City's position locally and globally"<sup>34</sup>. This network is made up of: Edinburgh Science Festival and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, along with the Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival, Edinburgh Art Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Scottish International Storytelling Festival, Edinburgh's Hogmanay, and Edinburgh International Children's Festival.

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<sup>34</sup> All quotes taken from <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/about> [Accessed 22 June 2022]

As noted in the introduction, Edinburgh is perhaps best known for its summer festivals season, with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe having one of the highest profiles of those that take place in the city during August, described as “the single greatest celebration of arts and culture on the planet.”<sup>35</sup> The Edinburgh Science Festival, on the other hand, takes place during the city’s two-week Easter school holiday period around March–April each year<sup>36</sup>, and so contrasts with the Fringe in its timing.

The programming model for each festival also differs. The Edinburgh Science Festival is curated by the programming organisation, Edinburgh Science. This happens in three ways: the design and development of festival themes and events in-house, which are delivered by the organisation<sup>37</sup>; the development of events through relationships and agreements with partners and sponsors<sup>38</sup>; and through an annual ‘Call for Ideas’, which is publicly promoted by Edinburgh Science in the summer to autumn and invites potential event producers to respond to a theme devised by the organisation, for presentation at the following year’s festival. Successful applications to the Call for Ideas are selected internally, and Edinburgh Science supports organisers of these events in both their production and promotion<sup>39</sup>.

In contrast, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe is not a curated festival. Its stated ambition to “give anyone a stage and everyone a seat”<sup>40</sup> is often referred to in the following case studies and research findings as the Fringe’s ‘open access’ policy.<sup>41</sup> In practice, this means that the role of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society is not to programme the festival’s events, although the Society notes that some festival venues do select the shows they programme.<sup>42</sup> Instead, through the registration fee charged to be part of the Fringe, the Society maintains and underpins the festival infrastructure through: support

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/festivals/edinburgh-festival-fringe> [Accessed 19 December 2023]

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/festivals/edinburgh-science-festival> [Accessed 19 December 2023]

<sup>37</sup> In 2023, these events are listed in the festival brochure as ‘Presented by Edinburgh Science’. See <https://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/brochure-downloads> [Accessed 19 December 2023]

<sup>38</sup> See <https://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/funding-partnerships> [Accessed 19 December 2023]

<sup>39</sup> For the most recent example of the call, see <https://mailchi.mp/adac094c59b9/call-for-ideas-edinburgh-science-festival-1959479?e=5cf382c40d> [Accessed 19 December 2023]

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us/fringe-development-goals> [Accessed 19 December 2023]

<sup>41</sup> See also <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/festivals/edinburgh-festival-fringe> [Accessed 19 December 2023] which describes the Fringe as “Totally open-access”

<sup>42</sup> See <https://www.edfringe.com/take-part/putting-on-a-show> [Accessed 19 December 2023]

for Fringe artists, producers and industry professionals with advice about their event and general information about taking part in the Fringe and being in Edinburgh in August; producing and overseeing street events on Edinburgh's Royal Mile<sup>43</sup>; communications and media support, including listings in the printed Fringe programme and on their website; and ticket sales through the Fringe box office, which provides a central point of access to all Fringe tickets for audiences, and a resource for sales data for festival participants.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the audiences for the two case study festivals also differ. While the Edinburgh Science Festival includes events aimed at adults, a large proportion of its offer is events for children and young people<sup>45</sup>, and this is reinforced by the timing of the festival coinciding with school holidays. The Fringe programme is vast and varied, with the intended audience for each event determined by Fringe participants, not by the Fringe Society. In its printed programme, events are presented by genre<sup>46</sup>, with online events searchable through multiple filters. The Fringe Society's open access policy means, in theory, that its marketing and communications strategy is focused almost entirely on the experience that is 'the festival' and on promoting the Fringe brand<sup>47</sup> and not on individual events. This leaves participants, in some cases supported by larger producing venues that do curate their programmes. To promote their events to Fringe audiences. For the Edinburgh Science Festival, as noted above, the organisation brings together its programme around an overarching theme, and promotes its festival brand, but also strands of programming and individual events.

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/take-part/fringe-street-events> [Accessed 19 December 2023]

<sup>44</sup> Information on services available can be found at <https://www.edfringe.com/take-part> [Accessed 19 December 2023]

<sup>45</sup> See <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/festivals/edinburgh-science-festival> [Accessed 19 December 2023]

<sup>46</sup> For an online version of the 2023 Fringe programme, see [https://issuu.com/edinburgh\\_festival\\_fringe/docs/fringe\\_programme\\_2023\\_web\\_edit](https://issuu.com/edinburgh_festival_fringe/docs/fringe_programme_2023_web_edit) [Accessed 19 December 2023]

<sup>47</sup> See <https://www.edfringe.com/take-part/marketing-your-show> [Accessed 19 December 2023] where the guidance states that "As an impartial organisation, the Fringe Society is unable to provide a marketing service for individual shows. Our job is to get local, national and international media, as well as audiences both at home and abroad, interested in the Fringe as a whole."

## Edinburgh Science

The first case study for this research was with Edinburgh Science, the organisation that produces the annual Edinburgh Science Festival, which was founded in 1989, was the world's first public celebration of science and is still one of the world's largest science festivals. Since then, the organisation has grown to include a year-round programme of work alongside the festivals – in and with schools through its education programming strand, and a worldwide strand which produces and supports international science festivals and science communication including the annual Abu Dhabi Science Festival. Edinburgh Science Foundation, which operates all the organisation's programmes, is an educational charity, which states: "Our mission is to inspire, encourage and challenge people of all ages and backgrounds to explore and understand the world around them."<sup>48</sup>

The starting point for this case study was focused on contextualising the work of digital communications and its perceived value for a cultural sector organisation. I was interested in the perceptions and professional identities of those doing that work, and of the way in which they perceived their work to be valued by colleagues in the organisation more broadly. I was also interested to understand how the organisation measured and understood the audiences that were reached and reachable online. My first interview with three members of the Edinburgh Science communications team took place in November 2019, where we discussed these ideas in detail, as well as exploring wider issues of platforms and platformization, privacy, obfuscation, and the ethics of audience research.

At a second interview in January 2020, again with three members of the Edinburgh Science communications team, we discussed the idea of co-creating an exploratory case study (Mills *et al.*, 2010) that would both flexibly explore the themes of this research towards the development of a hypothesis on directions of value and values of digital cultural work and research, and offer Edinburgh Science the opportunity and

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<sup>48</sup> All company information taken from <https://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/about> [Accessed 28 May 2022]

time to explore some of their own ideas about the work of reaching audiences through digital communications. In our first interview, we discussed the extent to which insights and analytics provided by social media platforms were useful in devising strategies through which to reach new and existing audiences online. The team acknowledged that proprietary platforms know far more about their audiences than is available to organisations through social media analytics, and that even if audiences were not deliberately obfuscating their engagement online, that their behaviours on social media platforms might not be captured directly enough to feature in these analytics reports. Those gaps, the team agreed, are filled most often by their own direct experiences, anecdotes, and instincts about their audiences' behaviours. Our idea, then, was to work with content analysis of social media posts that were made by or linked to Edinburgh Science through tags or hashtags, along with our own quantitative analysis of audience engagement, and to compare these findings with instinctive judgements from the communications team to see if any patterns in this data could be identified in those gaps that might both support the team's instincts and contextualise the rigidity and lack of qualitative nuance of quantitative platform analytics.

The period of data collection, using the Twitter API as noted above, was agreed to take place from the Edinburgh Science Festival's programme launch in February 2020, running until the end of the two-week festival in April 2020. But then, of course, the 2020 Edinburgh Science Festival was cancelled in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection from Twitter was already underway and so, with the permission of the Head of Communications at Edinburgh Science, I continued to collect a dataset of tweets which captured the festival's cancellation and responses to the news at very early stage of the pandemic. The Edinburgh Science festival was the first of Edinburgh's major festivals to cancel its face-to-face programmes in 2020 and replace them with an online offer. As such, this collection of tweets reflects the uncertainty of that time and will be used in this thesis as a means of identifying ways in which immediate responses to COVID-19 foregrounded the value and values of cultural organisations, and the value of culture to their audiences.

This data is supported by a third interview, in April 2020, with one member of the Edinburgh Science communications team and one of the organisation's directors, which contextualised Edinburgh Science's experiences of rapidly repurposing their festival, resources and staff to the production of an online programme. This final interview also provided the opportunity to revisit some of my original findings about the perceived value of the work of digital communications both within cultural organisations and in their audiences, and to consider the extent to which these ideas might be, or might have already been, impacted by the pandemic. The observations of and discussion with the Edinburgh Science communications team – and their role in contextualising my own professional experiences – remain a central part of this research's grounding in the value of communications for the cultural sector and the values communicated by cultural organisations.

#### Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society is the organisation which supports and brands the events and performances that form part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, that takes place for three weeks each August each year except, of course, in 2020. The Fringe, as already mentioned through cultural historian Angela Bartie's 2013 account of the Edinburgh Festivals, began in 1947 when eight artists who had not been programmed to perform in the first edition of the Edinburgh International Festival, showed up and staged their performances at the same time. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, its website tells us, was "founded by artists to nurture and uphold the Fringe's values of inclusivity, experimentation and imagination."<sup>49</sup> The Fringe – society and festival it is assumed but not entirely clear from the same page of the website – states that it operates around the founding principle of being "an open access festival that accommodates anyone with a desire to perform and a venue willing to host them."<sup>50</sup> In addition, The Fringe Society puts forward three core objectives for its operations: to "provide support, advice and encouragement to all participants"; to "assist the

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us> [Accessed 29 May 2022]

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

audiences who come to Edinburgh to navigate what's on offer"; and to "celebrate the Fringe and what it stands for [inclusivity, experimentation and imagination, plus open access, it is again assumed] all over the world."<sup>51</sup> In June 2022, marking the festival's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Fringe Society also launched a "new vision"<sup>52</sup> plan comprising six 'Fringe Development Goals': thriving artists; fair work; climate action; equitable Fringe; good citizenship; and digital evolution. These principles and the circumstances, and methods of their creation, will be considered in more detail later in this thesis.

The principle of open access and its sometimes-problematic relationship with ideas of equal access to culture will also be developed through findings from this case study and in discussion of overall findings. For now, though, it is important to note that open access, and the lack of curation of the festival programme that is systemic to the Fringe's structure, creates a very particular set of conditions for its operation, both during and outwith a global pandemic. Looking at the three core objectives listed above, the support provision for participants cannot make specific recommendations beyond the principle of open access; assisting audiences cannot extend to recommending one Fringe show over another based on anything other than preferences or filters provided by its audience; and celebrating, which seems mainly to refer to the Fringe's "high-profile annual marketing and media campaign"<sup>53</sup>, alongside the promotion of membership schemes<sup>54</sup> can only be done in the context of the festival as an idea, rather than promoting the events and performances which take place under the umbrella of the Fringe as a festival. In addition, as a non-curated festival, events that take place in Edinburgh in August that are not registered to be part of the festival or are un-ticketed could, due to the festival's extensive reach across the city, be seen by audiences as part of the festival by association.

Like Edinburgh Science, the Fringe announced the cancellation of its 2020 in-person festival programme. The announcement took place alongside other major August

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/learn/news-and-events/edinburgh-fringe-signals-time-for-change-on-75th-anniversary> [Accessed 23 June 2022]

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us> [Accessed 29 May 2022]

<sup>54</sup> <https://tickets.edfringe.com/friends> [Accessed 20 December 2023]

festivals – Edinburgh Art Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, Edinburgh International Book Festival, and the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo – in April 2020<sup>55</sup>. The Fringe’s digital programme offer in 2020 encompassed three strands: a crowdfunding platform for artists and venues who would lose their income from Fringe performances that year; a listings platform for digital and live streamed performances; and a ‘Pick N Mix’ platform of short 60-second clips uploaded by Fringe performers<sup>56</sup>. In addition, a live streamed cabaret performance, ‘Fringe on Friday’, took place every Friday during the Fringe run, with ticket sales raising money for the Fringe Crowdfunder platform<sup>57</sup>.

I conducted two interviews with the Head of the Fringe’s communications team, at the start and the end of the Fringe in August 2020. We discussed many of the ideas put forward in my early interviews with Edinburgh Science – particularly considering the value of digital communications work and perceived value of communications within and without the organisation – but here very much in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions, as well as with reference to the parameters of communications at the Fringe that arise because of its open access principles.

Again, like the case study with Edinburgh Science, my interviews were accompanied by social media data collection via the Twitter API, which used a comparable structure to Edinburgh Science – posts made by and linked to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter account, along with relevant hashtags. The resulting dataset was used for quantitative analysis of engagement, as well as content analysis as a means of interpreting the nature of communications taking place on that platform during the 2020 Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

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<sup>55</sup> <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/news/article/12814/edinburgh-takes-profoundly-difficult-decision-to-cancel-2020-august-festivals> [Accessed 29 May 2020]

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/experience/2020> [Accessed 29 May 2022]

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/experience/2020/fringe-on-friday> [Accessed 29 May 2022]



## Exploring digital and social media research methodologies

While it is important to note that the idea of datafication predates the digital technologies which are now so central to so many people's lives (Venturini *et al.*, 2018), access and the computational power to work with large online datasets – 'Big Data' – have been afforded a sense of implicit objectivity (Boyd and Crawford, 2012). This can be seen reflected in bold claims such as that made in a 2008 edition of *Wired* magazine entitled 'The Petabyte Age', that "With enough data, the numbers speak for themselves" (Anderson, 2008). But, as Lazer *et al.* (2009) point out, these "claims to objectivity and accuracy are misleading" (Lazer *et al.*, 2009, p. 6) because what are numbers without context? Even very large quantitative datasets have, of course, undergone a process of curation and interpretation just in the selection of which categories of data to collect and count and which to ignore (Boyd and Crawford, 2012).

Rogers (2018b) states that social media use, including Twitter as the platform studied here, is often aspirational; with a focus on sharing perceived achievements (Rogers, 2018b). Platforms' accompanying metrics are also achievements in themselves and signify a user's value, encouraging further social media use in pursuit of growth. As Rogers says, "Vanity measurements become fulfilling measurements of attractiveness to others" (Rogers, 2018b, p. 453). Despite these limitations, for this research the study of the content of communications on social media, as well as of accompanying quantitative metrics, offers the opportunity to assess the role of social media in the process of communicating about culture and cultural events, and accompanying ideas of cultural value and values. As this research will show, for cultural organisations, the labour required to create and maintain a social media presence that is perceived (by the organisation itself, as well as by audiences) to be attractive and up to date does not correlate with success in the commercial business of selling tickets. In short, social media use does not directly drive sales. For those working to deliver these communications, the practice of finding measurable value in social media metrics is driven in part by the need to justify the legitimacy of that labour to their colleagues. In

addition, these cultural workers feel the need to show colleagues that social media audiences use their association with culture online as social and identity value (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014) and as a means of constructing cultural capital, and that that association represents economic and cultural value beyond conversion to ticket sales.

### Digital methods and engagement with platforms

While, as we will see, digital communications do not link directly to revenue generating activity for cultural organisations, social media platforms themselves are very much revenue-generating enterprises, and ones which were not directly intended to facilitate academic research, even though their content and structures are “commercial as well as socio-epistemological” (Rogers, 2018c, p. 558). There has been growing increased public awareness of the commercial value of personal data resulting from coverage of fake news and election scandals, as well as the 2018 Cambridge Analytica data breach scandal and the “ensnaring and extractive practice” (Rogers, 2018c, p. 558) it represents. However, unease around the ethics of digital research predates these well-known scandals. In 2012, for example, Boyd and Crawford questioned whether regulation of social media data available to researchers may be required, and highlighted the ethical questions and concerns linked to the tracing of individual identities in online research (Boyd and Crawford, 2012). Venturini and Rogers (2019) note Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg’s responses to the Cambridge Analytica scandal and his understanding of social media data as “*powerful but also neutral*” (Venturini and Rogers, 2019, p. 2). In addition, they state that the company’s response to the scandal has been to further lock down its data within its own platform, because Cambridge Analytica’s data aggregation work took place outside Facebook’s systems. Boyd and Crawford consider the perceived value and objectivity of big data, which they define as the interplay between technology and computing power; the opportunity to analyse large datasets; and the mythology that these datasets offer access to a “higher form” of knowledge coupled with “the aura of truth, objectivity and accuracy.” (Boyd and Crawford, 2012, p. 663). They assert that “Technology is neither

good nor bad, nor is it neutral” (Boyd and Crawford, 2012, p. 662). Rogers (2018b) interrogates what ‘good’ data might be, considering data from human subjects; the proprietary effects of data; repurposing of social media data; and whether research should be considering alternatives to accessing data beyond what commercial platforms are willing to provide.

Digital Methods, an initiative directed by Rogers at the University of Amsterdam, focuses on the repurposing of digital traces – noted in the literature review along with McLuhan’s framing of the medium and the message – seems to capture both aspects. As Venturini *et al.* (2018) put it:

“The strength of these methods comes from their capacity to take advantage of the data and computational capacities of online platforms; their weakness comes from the difficulty to separate the phenomena that they investigate from the features of the media in which they manifest.” (Venturini *et al.*, 2018, p. 4195)

This sense of “entanglement” (Marres and Weltevrede, 2013, p. 323) and the blurring of distinctions between the objects of research and its methods can be found within the terminology used to describe digital media practices – the ‘like’, for example – as well as that associated with digital research practices. Marres and Weltevrede explore the ‘scraping’ of the Internet as a research method, a term which now carries negative connotations in that it captures data in a way that does not require an explicit opt-in or granting of consent, despite that data being publicly accessible. They suggest that the ‘entanglement’ of digital objects and methods might itself be employed as a research method (Marres and Weltevrede, 2013), and that scraping is a method that does this in that the categories programmed into a web scraper are derived from the media itself. However, the increasing prominence of social media in communication practices, coupled with the idea of ‘locking’ data into a particular channel or platform mentioned above, increase the likelihood of infrastructure bias (Venturini and Rogers, 2019) both in terms of user practices and in research. Rogers cites Anne Helmond’s ‘platformization’ when he asserts that “the web is becoming enclosed and overwritten by social media” (Rogers, 2018c, p. 557). Helmond explores the term ‘platform’ at both a conceptual

level – the sense that a platform offers the user the chance to have a voice that can be widely heard and their ideas discussed with others – and as a computational tool associated with Web 2.0 infrastructure (Helmond, 2015).

Platformization, according to Helmond, is the extension of social media infrastructure and content into the wider Internet, which is then redirected back into the platform itself. Helmond states that the term is used to “refer to the rise of the platform as the dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web” and notes that the sense of the “participatory web” (Helmond, 2015, p. 3) that accompanies widespread use of social media has blurred and disrupted the online transposition of traditional, offline, roles of production and consumption. The rest of the Internet is required to be “platform ready” (Helmond, 2015, p. 1), but this is not a democratic, reciprocal, two-way relationship. Instead, it allows social media platforms to acquire power over not only the outputs and objects that are distributed across the Internet but also the labour associated with their production and the formats in which they are realised. The study of platformization takes a “material-technical perspective” on social media platforms and is the study of “the way platforms reformat the web according to the logic of social media” (Helmond, 2015, p. 2).

#### API research

Social media platforms are also able to assert their control over wider online communications through self-regulated APIs which Helmond describes as an integral part of these platforms “enacting their programmability” (Helmond, 2015, p. 4). These interfaces offer access not only to data relating to the use of social media, but to user-generated content itself and as such have, in theory at least, huge potential for enabling digital research. However, the level of infrastructure bias inherent in social media platforms, as outlined by Helmond, coupled with the potential for commercial social media companies to clean or edit the data they release through APIs as they see fit, present researchers with several challenges. It could be that accepting the platform’s own terms for data collection and analysis without a clear sense of the details of any

inherent biases in the dataset might limit the rigour of a research project, restricting it to an approach that is forced to adopt a position of “lurking” (Kozinets, 2015, p. 90) around its subjects, a term which lends itself to unease among researchers and the public. It may also be the case that conducting research via social media APIs reinforces the perceived value, importance and quality of research using big data (Boyd and Crawford, 2012). Venturini and Rogers (2019) make the following observation:

“API-based research is guilty (in part at least) of spreading the hype of social media data, of reducing the diversity of digital methods to the study of online platforms, and of spreading the received ideas that Facebook, Google, Twitter and their likes are the masters of online debate and that there are no alternatives to living on the breadcrumbs of the APIs” (Venturini and Rogers, 2019, p. 536)

The repurposing here of the Hansel and Gretel navigational metaphor, also commonly used to describe the hierarchy of user navigation through a website, is perhaps a subtle reference to the data released via APIs being traces of traces, curated via means which are not transparent to the researcher. It urges caution in API-based research and suggests the need for digital research to diversify on to the study of other platforms and consider other means to gather data (Rogers, 2018c; Venturini and Rogers, 2019).

The attraction of computational, algorithm-based, big data analysis for the humanities and social sciences is perhaps the sense that it offers these disciplines new ways to bridge the perceived divide between qualitative and quantitative research methods and outputs (Boyd and Crawford, 2012). In addition, extremely large datasets may be prone to displaying patterns where none exist, simply because of correlating such large amounts of data (Boyd and Crawford, 2012), meaning that “bigger data are not always better data” (Lazer *et al.*, 2009, p. 8; Boyd and Crawford, 2012). So, if big digital data is not inherently good, how do we understand the challenges it presents to determine what is good, bad, better, or worse? In 2018, Rogers correctly predicted a “coming crisis” in social media research (Rogers, 2018c, p. 557), noting that social media is not designed and does not operate with research in mind. However, the prevalence of social media use is such that its investigation could carry relevance and importance across

multiple research avenues. In fact, the practice of conducting social media research could in itself be worthy of scholarship (Venturini *et al.*, 2018).

At the time of conducting my Twitter research, the datasets released by social media APIs were not exclusively available to researchers but open to anyone agreeing to the platform's terms who wants to access them.<sup>58</sup> This could be viewed as a democratising force for research, in that 'citizen researchers' could effectively conduct the same piece of research as an academic, just as was perceived to be the case with 'citizen journalists' in the earlier days of Web 2.0. In *Digital Methods* (2013) Rogers states that the sense of amateurism around the quality of citizen journalism and online authorship has waned and been replaced by a wider debate around "quality of data" (Rogers, 2013, p. 204). In addition, the recent professionalism of content creation has enacted something of a quest for legitimacy and expertise in the successful production and promotion of digital content as a career (Bishop, 2020). Measuring the quality of data available through API research is shown to be challenging here in two ways: that the algorithms controlling successful content on social media and the quantitative metrics that accompany them are specifically developed to drive further social media use (Venturini and Rogers, 2019); and that the social media platforms themselves are in complete control of changes to algorithms and analytics, as well as the content of the API datasets and digital traces they contain (Venturini and Rogers, 2019). Platforms are "now the gatekeepers of their traceability" (Venturini *et al.*, 2018, p. 4197) and this level of control renders the quality of social media data and analytics unstable and unclear (Boyd and Crawford, 2012; Rogers, 2018c). This is undoubtedly proved by changes to the Twitter API announced in early February 2023 that introduced a fee for limited access to the platform's API and placed new and reduced limits on free access despite the assertion that this is "extremely important to our ecosystem"<sup>59</sup>. This shows, as Venturini and Rogers assert, that social media companies are, or at least have been,

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<sup>58</sup> Changes to API access on Twitter since the platform's purchase by Elon Musk in late 2022 are, at the time of writing, still being rolled out. The extent and availability of free access to Twitter API for academic research is currently unclear. See, for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/feb/07/techscape-elon-musk-twitter-api> [Accessed 5 March 2023] but a new 'Enterprise' plan was announced in March 2023 that placed new restrictions on access to and queries on various APIs, with the cheapest package costing \$42,000 per month. See <https://www.wired.com/story/twitter-data-api-prices-out-nearly-everyone/> [Accessed 14 March 2023]

<sup>59</sup> <https://twitter.com/TwitterDev/status/1623467615539859456> [Accessed 26 February 2023]

keen to appear open to providing valuable insights as the act of provision suggests the quality of their data. According to Venturini *et al.* (2018), “part of the strategies for platforms [is] to present themselves as providers of valuable analytics” (Venturini *et al.*, 2018, p. 4197), while also requiring researchers who access APIs to follow the platform’s rules for working with and publishing the data they gather (Rogers, 2018c).

Acknowledging the limitations of social media APIs is not the only issue when determining quality of data. Part of the attraction of working with the digital traces generated by social media is the opportunity to understand the “interactive complexity” (Rogers, 2018c, p. 558) of the communications that happen there. These channels offer the opportunity to analyse not only the content of social media posts and their engagement metrics, but to explore how the digital traces they generate might facilitate the study of the ways in which these communications travel around the platform (Venturini and Rogers, 2019), which is also part of this research. The relationship between content, metrics and algorithmic distribution lends a temporal dimension to how social media platforms present data that might show how a user builds their audiences. There is a sense that in publishing content to social media, we are all engaging in ‘live’ social research in that the data is formatted at the point of posting, received on other users feeds and analysed by algorithmic metrics instantly and in real time (Marres and Weltevrede, 2013).

### Social media research and measuring audience engagement

The ethical concerns associated with the collection and aggregation of social media data from human subjects will be addressed in the ethics section of this chapter. Alongside these concerns, it is also important to consider – as noted in the literature review – which segments of cultural organisations’ audiences are using social media, and the extent to which audiences behave as ‘themselves’ on these platforms. Boyd and Crawford (2012) assert that a social media platform does not represent “all people” (Boyd and Crawford, 2012, p. 669) and are not reliable indicators of users’ off-platform personas. They can choose to leave the platform and remove their contributions,

although perhaps not all their digital traces in communications with other users, at any time. While there are, of course, limitations in the study of digital traces as indicators of all audiences' behaviours, this does not mean they should be completely disregarded. The case studies in this research seek to contextualise these traces through transparently incorporating the methods of curating datasets from social media – Twitter, in this case – and through mixing and remixing quantitative and qualitative methods of analysing these datasets. The quantitative analysis of frequency of tweets and their reach, measured through likes and retweets from others, is combined with further qualitative analysis of smaller datasets through close reading, and of interview transcripts, to provide an understanding of the extent to which communications on social media are a part of understanding how cultural organisations communicate with their audiences.

The digital traces generated on social media are treated as indicators of human beliefs and behaviours in a manner which Rogers (2013) compares to research around popular culture and television several decades ago: “that one can read and diagnose cultural concerns from the medium” (Rogers, 2013, pp. 203-4). Another problematic aspect of using social media's quantitative measurements as indicators of audience engagement is the extent to which behavioural conventions on platforms encourage distortion of beliefs through a perceived pressure to present oneself in a relentlessly positive light. This self-appointed celebrity status is easily measured through platform metrics. Before social media, it could be argued that to engage online was harder to do – more active, perhaps – but more ‘valuable’ for that. Now, the act of clicking the like button on social media is “light and short-lived” (Venturini and Rogers, 2019, p. 538) and a representation of cultural engagement as the “slacktivist thesis: the critique of online engagement that stipulates that liking and sharing are low cost, feel good forms of solidarity only” (Rogers, 2018b, p. 453). To operationalise this open acknowledgement of the limitations and biases inherent in social media datasets, Bruno Latour (2012) suggests embracing the continuing evolution of digital research methodologies and of the human behaviours we find on platforms: “it would be a pity to miss this occasion to explore such a powerful alternative that may provide another way to render the social



sciences empirical and quantitative without losing their necessary stress on particulars” (Latour *et al.*, 2012, p. 613)

#### Research on commercial platforms

The uneasy relationship between social media platforms as commercial enterprises hosting commodified data and as research tools has already been considered and is further explored in Rogers’ (2018) discussion of what he terms ‘proprietary effects’ in social media research (Rogers, 2018c). The data held by social media companies is extremely expensive, representing value in both commercial (advertising) and social terms (Rogers, 2018c), but it is also important to note that these companies have themselves incurred huge costs to build and maintain their infrastructures (Venturini *et al.*, 2018). This is the economy through which digital communications networks transact. As previously discussed, the platformization of the web (Helmond, 2015) has widened the circulation of social media content, but at the same time has also locked user data within social media platforms when reformatted information from other sites is returned there. Social media companies simultaneously decentralise and recentralise the data they hold and this “double logic of platformization” (Helmond, 2015, p. 8) that tips the balance of power balance around commodified user data in the platforms’ favour.

Boyd and Crawford (2012) suggest that – both for marketers and for researchers – “Much of the enthusiasm surrounding Big Data stems from the perception that it offers easy access to massive amounts of data” (Boyd and Crawford, 2012, p. 673). But as we have seen, while marketing data and academic research data might be viewed differently by their respective research communities, platforms themselves do not make this distinction (Venturini and Rogers, 2019). These developments led Venturini and Rogers (2019) to suggest that API-based research might be best recognised as a distinct method within the academic community, to encourage the transparency and explicit acknowledgement of the limitations already mentioned and go some way to prevent the “blackboxing” (Marres and Weltevrede, 2013, p. 322) of digital methods in a

similar way to that associated with social media APIs. However, as noted above regarding Elon Musk's purchase of Twitter, Venturini and Rogers' 2019 prediction of further restrictions on API access for academic research has recently come true.

## Exploring value and values messaging through content analysis

### Introduction

The analysis above shows the value of contextualising API-based research through a mixed methods approach. For this research, the data collected from Twitter informs the design of the accompanying interviews and content analysis, and vice versa. In these interviews, both case study organisations state their value and values clearly. Through close reading of the marketing and communications texts generated through social media data collection, there is some evidence of a commitment to an institutional value proposition. But – particularly in the context of the inequities in the cultural sector brought into sharper focus by the COVID-19 pandemic – these findings also suggest the existence of what I have termed a 'values gap' between the content and language of my case study interviews and the content and language of communications materials. Comparison of findings between the two case studies also suggest a separation between rhetoric and practice (Glow *et al.*, 2021). The iterative nature of my practice-led methodological strategy thus led to the second phase of empirical research which forms part of this thesis. This looked to further contextualise communications of cultural value and values and test the idea of a 'values gap' (Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2021) through and alongside my two exploratory case studies.

The methodologies employed here take inspiration from Raymond Williams *Keywords* (1983, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition) and the complexity of understanding of culture and cultural value noted in the literature review. As such, the intention is to explore terminologies of value through both computational and human lenses. In the article *Keywords as method* (2021), Moran notes Williams' reaction against close reading as a means of determining cultural value, towards what he termed 'cultural materialism' (Moran, 2021, p. 1023) –

rejecting cultural elitism and idealism, and focusing on the active practice of communication and “production (rather than reproduction) of meanings and values by specific social formations” (Moran, 2021, p. 1023). As such, Moran says, the notion of cultural materialism “quietly informs and animates the keywords approach that Williams was at the same time developing” (Moran, 2021, p. 1024). Furthermore, Moran suggests that viewing a keywords approach as simplistic is to ignore the “fruitful method of socio-cultural analysis” (Moran, 2021, p. 1025) that comes about through a ‘keywords as method’ framing that takes into account Williams’ philosophies of cultural materialism. While my research does employ the close reading Williams rejected, it also incorporates ‘keywords as method’ in its awareness of the fluidity of meaning of these keywords and the context of their appearance at certain moments of change. In the two case studies conducted here, this is particularly evident regarding some of the quickly evolving terminology around digital and online events brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this broader analysis of communications of value and values, keywords and contexts are overlaid to offer insights into both method and meaning, and into the evolution of the contexts in which keywords are used.

### Scraping and analysing communications using Voyant Tools

To balance to some degree the unique nature of the programming that took place in 2020, and to expand the texts for analysis beyond those collected from Twitter, this piece of work looked beyond communications on social media, and, initially at least, beyond just the two organisations which took part in this research as case studies. To expand the analysis, the research was broadened to include other organisations which are part of the Festivals Edinburgh network, the structure of which is explained above.

This part of the research collected text from each of these festivals’ websites, from the ‘About Us’ or similarly titled pages which were – after some desk research – found to be the most likely to contain evidence of these organisations’ values and value proposition for their audiences. The relevant text was scraped manually from each festival’s

website, screenshotted, and archived using the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine<sup>60</sup>. At this point, the decision was taken to remove Edinburgh's Hogmanay from the analysis as this event is operated by an external producer (Underbelly, at the time of writing) alongside other programmes and events which take place around the UK. As such the communications of value and values found on Underbelly's website were more general and less associated with an Edinburgh-based operation and, as such, were felt to be incongruous with the other texts collected.

From here, any references to human subjects were manually removed from the texts and screenshots, before they were uploaded to the online analysis environment Voyant Tools<sup>61</sup>, which offers several options for visualising text content and sentiment analysis. These visualisations were used to build comparisons across each festival based on keywords associated with value and values. In line with the approach taken to the earlier analysis of social media data, which seeks to openly compare computational data analysis with other methods, a close reading of the texts was also conducted manually, highlighting words and phrases associated with the communication of value and values that felt explicit in their meaning; that "their meaning seems self-evident, obvious, accompanied by a general sense that 'everyone knows' what they mean." (Moran, 2021, p. 1025) While conducting this analysis, very quickly the difficulty of incorporating comparisons across a broad range of Edinburgh festival organisations, each with their own unique programmes, value propositions, and organisational structures became apparent. To prevent the addition of unnecessary complexity to the comparison of my two case study organisations, only the analyses of Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society have been retained for the purpose of this research. The resulting comparison allows for a deeper understanding of the complexity of the language of value and values employed by these two cultural organisations, and for a critique of the standalone value of computational keynote and sentiment analysis that will be set out in the research findings.

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<sup>60</sup> <https://archive.org/web/web.php> [Accessed 22 June 2022]

<sup>61</sup> <https://voyant-tools.org> [Accessed 22 June 2022]

## Moving towards further iteration of research methodologies

It is important to note that the cancellation of live festival programmes for both Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society due to COVID-19 renders the communications I have collected around these 2020 programmes as unique and non-standard in comparison to previous years. The analysis of value and values messaging through Voyant Tools took place as an attempt to mitigate somewhat for those exceptional circumstances. However, it should also be noted that, as we will see, for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in particular, quantitative analysis of Twitter data shows that the pattern of outgoing communications from the Fringe was broadly similar to that of previous years.

The pandemic has been widely publicly framed as an opportunity for cultural organisations to reassess the work they do, how they do it, and who they do it for. As Brook *et al.* (2020), radical change to the cultural and creative industries will require “a new theory of value, both of the value of culture, and of the value of persons.” (Brook *et al.*, 2020, p. 282) Communications between those who produce, consume and support culture are central to this opportunity. In 2021, ongoing responses in the press and through public events to the COVID-19 pandemic, making the case for equitable access to culture and cultural professions, began to suggest that arts and cultural organisations were beginning to rethink their value and values and how these are demonstrated in their outputs and working practices. The final iteration of research methodologies and empirical outputs from this research seeks to explore the idea of a “new theory of value” (Brook *et al.*, 2020, p. 282) through the lens of Edinburgh’s cultural sector and infrastructure.

Further iteration of research methodologies has also been supported by my aligned work as a practitioner-researcher (Barrett 2007; Scott, 2016; Nelson, 2022). The Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project<sup>62</sup>, on which I worked as a research assistant from 2019 to 2021, began in 2019 with the goal of creating a

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<sup>62</sup> <https://www.edinburghculturalmap.org/> (<https://www.edinburghculturalmap.org> [Accessed 27 February 2022])

participatory cultural map of the city, created through a series of cultural mapping (Lee and Gilmore, 2012) workshops at locations around Edinburgh, at which I acted as a facilitator. Participants were asked to mark cultural spaces they valued, to identify key cultural hubs for them and for their communities, and to identify cultural spaces they felt were at risk in some way.

Workshops took place within community hubs and spaces, and a session with cultural professionals was held in the city centre in May 2019. The format of the mapping process took the form of either structured sessions led by facilitators on the project (including myself), or of ‘drop-in’ style sessions where the ‘itinerant’, base layer map would be presented at community events with participants invited to walk up and participate in a less structured way.<sup>63</sup> In marking cultural spaces, participants were also invited to contribute their thoughts on a key for cultural spaces on the map, sparking conversations about who has the power to define and decide what is a valuable cultural space and what criteria would be used in that assessment. I recall, for example, a participant putting forward the idea that for some a beauty salon or nail bar might be considered a cultural space in that it is immediately accessible geographically; does not present social and cultural barriers to access in that they felt immediately comfortable in that environment; is relatively affordable; and provides an enjoyable experience that is shared with a therapist and others in the space at the same time.

The 2019 workshops led to the identification of a list of 16 most valued cultural spaces in the city, with 23 spaces identified as being at risk, most often because of perceived precarity in funding and grassroots support.<sup>64</sup> The valued spaces comprised a mixture of mainly established venues and programmers, as well as some community hubs and organisations and green spaces. Most of the valued spaces were in or around Edinburgh’s city centre. When the COVID-19 pandemic brought opportunities for face-to-face interactions with cultural mapping to a halt, the Culture and Communities

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<sup>63</sup> See <https://www.edinburghculturalmap.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2.-The-participatory-process.pdf> [Accessed 27 February 2022]

<sup>64</sup> See <https://www.edinburghculturalmap.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/3.-Results.pdf> [Accessed 27 February 2022]

Mapping Project recalibrated its research to an online context in 2020 to explore how community cultural hubs and organisations were responding to the pandemic: through cultural activities delivered online; to emergency responses in terms of provision of food or digital access; and to some organisations which had been forced to temporarily close their doors completely (Jones *et al.*, 2020). This report, titled ‘Art in and Out of Lockdown’, showed the extent to which community cultural spaces were able – supported by a more flexible approach from funders – to quickly repurpose their work to best support their neighbourhoods. The exceptional situation brought about by the pandemic and related lockdowns exposed the interconnected nature of culture, cultural policy and cultural value with socio-economic concerns and support in a local context.

In 2021, as COVID-19 restrictions began to ease, the Culture and Communities Mapping Project worked with Festivals Edinburgh and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society on a piece of work related to the geographies of Edinburgh festivals’ venues and ticket buyers, titled Mapping Cultural Dispersal<sup>65</sup>. Through in-person and online workshops with participants from six community hubs in satellite communities around Edinburgh – Goodtrees Neighbourhood Centre (South East Edinburgh), granton:hub, North Edinburgh Arts, Oxfangs Neighbourhood Centre, The Ripple (Lochend, Restalrig and Craightinny) and WHALE Arts (Wester Hailes) – the research explored relationships between festivals and communities and the role that festivals play in the cultural lives of communities outside the city centre. Broadly, this project found a sense of celebration of the festivals amongst its workshop participants and noted a wish for more connected relationships between the festivals and Edinburgh’s communities. The idea of ‘cultural dispersal’ of festival events across the city, including in community hubs and green spaces was met with an enthusiastic response from participants (Jones and Currie, 2022). This project also resulted in the production of a Festivals and Communities Map<sup>66</sup>, which the City of Edinburgh Council continues to support through annual updates.

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<sup>65</sup> <https://www.edinburghculturalmap.org/research/mapping-cultural-dispersal-2021/> [Accessed 27 February 2022]

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.edinburghculturalmap.org/research/festivals-communities-map/> [Accessed 14 June 2023]

Also noted, however, were a complex network of perceived barriers to access for communities, made up of “interlinked economic, geographical, structural and socio-cultural factors” and a feeling that the city’s communities are absent from festivals communications strategies (Jones and Currie, 2022, p. 1). Communities perceived as peripheral<sup>67</sup>, the report finds, are the victims of a sense of being ‘other’ to festival audiences largely through omission and are marginalised through their tokenisation as being the recipients of targeted community engagement work, rather than as audiences to the festivals’ central programmes. ‘The Mapping Cultural Dispersal Report’ makes three recommendations on this basis: the active promotion of festival programmes in Edinburgh’s communities, aided by links made through community hubs, to encourage attendance and literacy around the festivals; continued development of structures which enable cultural dispersal to continue through and post-pandemic; and to make more use of the green spaces that already exist across the city for cultural events (Jones and Currie, 2022). This project was conducted alongside the methodological development of *Future Culture Edinburgh*, detailed below, where the Project Principal Investigator, Dr Morgan Currie, also presented. As such, the conversations from these 2021 workshops fed into the framing of the discussions and activities Morvern Cunningham and I devised for our event.

More recently, I have worked as a Research Associate on the Creative Informatics programme<sup>68</sup>, which is part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded Creative Industries Clusters Programme and focuses on bringing together Edinburgh and South East Scotland’s creative and technology sectors to explore and provide funding for research around digital technologies and data-driven innovation. In 2022, Creative Informatics undertook a Creative Horizon project<sup>69</sup>, which asked how digital technologies, data-driven innovation and online platforms for performance can

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<sup>67</sup> For more on definitions of peripheries and their place in the city that are not based on what the area does not have, or on the perceived negativity of being set at a distance from the city centre, see the *Peripheries* Journal, published in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil <https://revistaperiferias.org/en/about/> and specifically ‘Letter from Maré, Rio de Janeiro – A Manifesto From the Peripheries: The Peripheries and Their Place in the City’, available at <https://imja.org.br/pt-br/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/LETTER-FROM-MAR%C3%89-A-MANIFESTO-FROM-THE-PERIPHERIES-English.pdf> [Accessed 17 March 2023]

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.creativeinformatics.org> [Accessed 19 June 2023]

<sup>69</sup> <https://creativeinformatics.org/news/creative-horizon-3-envisioning-digital-futures-for-equitable-and-sustainable-festivals-in-2030/> [Accessed 19 June 2023]



support equitable and sustainable futures for festivals in Edinburgh and South East Scotland in 2030, based on the premise that the relationship between digital, equity and sustainability had not been extensively explored in our own or other recent research. Working in partnership with Glasgow-based futures design researchers Andthen<sup>70</sup>, the project interviewed people working in and supporting the region's festivals, which informed the design and delivery of a series of participatory futures workshops.

Participants were invited to become speculative 'journalists' for *FestForward* Magazine, Scotland's leading cultural publication in a fictional 2030, and to respond to imagined 'provotypes' – scenarios created by collections of designed objects – of possible digital futures through writing their own magazine article headlines. These headlines were developed by the research team to produce a print and digital summer 2030 edition of *FestForward*<sup>71</sup>. Imaginaries developed in the publication explore possible futures for perceptions of cultural value that include social, cultural, environmental, and economic definitions of equity and sustainability for festivals. These include a local festivals currency, Fe\$toons; hybrid and digital performance; an open festivals data cooperative and equitable digital models and approaches for fairer cultural work. The magazine has been used by researchers, policymakers, and cultural and festival organisations as a creative way to stimulate conversations about possible and preferable digital futures and ways to develop equitable and sustainable approaches to digital and data-driven technologies at, with, and through festivals.

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<sup>70</sup> <https://www.studioandthen.com/> [Accessed 16 June 2023]

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.festforward.org> [Accessed 16 June 2023]

## *Future Culture Edinburgh: a practice-led, action research approach*

### Introduction

Inequalities of access to cultural activities and work (Banks, 2017; Brook *et al.*, 2020), became a key talking point during the pause in operations brought about in the sector during successive COVID-19 lockdowns (Jones *et al.*, 2020). To explore the potential impact of a “new theory of value” (Brook *et al.*, 2020, p. 282), the final iteration of this research took the form of a symposium style event, *Future Culture Edinburgh*, devised by me and freelance creative, former producer and researcher Morvern Cunningham, who I met through my work with the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project and interviewed in 2020 for the *Art in and Out of Lockdown* report (Jones *et al.*, 2020). This hybrid event was held in Edinburgh’s Leith Theatre<sup>72</sup>, and online using the video conferencing platform Zoom, on 1 September 2021. It took place during a time of social distancing and restrictions on public events, and measures in place included the wearing of face masks, space between the 29 participants in the venue, testing requirements and track and trace measures. Our aim was to inspire creative thinking and collective action towards more equitable and inclusive futures for Edinburgh’s cultural sector as the city begins to recover post-pandemic. The work used an action research approach, which seeks to not only explain a problem at a distance, but also to incorporate potential resolutions (Stringer, 1996) and to make the research taking place as relevant as possible to those working in the sector and more likely to lead to positive responses to the work.

Stringer’s action research approach begins with the problems of a community or group – here, the inequalities associated with working in and accessing Edinburgh’s cultural sector and the extent to which that work is valued and communicates its values to others – and seeks to put forward “a collaborative approach to investigation that seeks to engage ‘subjects’ as equal and full participants in the research process” (Stringer,

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<sup>72</sup> <https://www.leiththeatre.co.uk/> [Accessed 23 June 2022]

1996, p. 9). There is a link here, it seems, with the assertion explored in Chapter 1 that valuation is an inherently social practice (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013; Banks, 2017) in that in determining a ‘problem’ which is suitable for an action research approach, researchers are attributing value to that problem in that context. In fact, as we shall see in the findings from *Future Culture Edinburgh*, that problem could extend beyond the group taking part in the research and be part of broader issues that are at once social, cultural, economic, political, as also noted by Banks (2017) in the context of creative justice. The research itself may also be a means of acquiring cultural capital and identity value for researchers and participants by association with the project and in the problematising of the situation. Stringer also places value on changemaking outcomes for action research:

“if an action research project does not make a difference, in a very specific way, for practitioners and/or their clients, then it has failed to achieve its objectives.”  
(Stringer, 1996, p. 11)

However, this ‘making a difference’ is not necessarily defined as wholly solving the problem or problem on which the project is based. Action research can help to “develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of the problems and issues that confront them” (Stringer, 1996, p. 10).

*Future Culture Edinburgh*’s structure and design was collaborative. Its content and structure were co-produced by me and by Morvern; through which we collaborated with speakers and groups who brought ideas, provocations and existing projects and practice to the event; and participants in the theatre and on Zoom contributed thoughts and ideas to the activities included during the symposium. As such, this part of the research could be understood as ‘collaborative design research’ (Whitham *et al.*, 2019) which is very much entangled with ideas of value and values but can also foreground “how we [as researchers and participants] guide, and are guided by, practices of valuation in the complexities of collaborative design situations” (Whitham *et al.*, 2019, p. 1).

## Aims of Future Culture Edinburgh

The extent to which the *Future Culture Edinburgh* event could be termed a successful action research project will be discussed as the findings of all the elements of this research are brought together. The collaborative aspect of the research was present from the outset of its planning through my connection and collaboration with Cunningham, and our aim was to bring together stakeholders in Edinburgh's cultural sector to explore how conducting conversations about inequalities in the sector, through the lens of shared and collaborative cultural value and values made explicit, might generate change and improvements to the structures which bring about and facilitate them. In using this collaborative, action research approach to encourage those taking part to look forwards, the methodologies employed here saw "collaborative design research practice as seeking new ways of connecting people to shared and individual futures" (Whitham *et al.*, 2019, p. 3) . Through this approach, we hoped to encourage and make space for multiple understandings of value and values to emerge from the research during, and hopefully after, the event; taking into account the idea that capturing ideas of value and values is a reflexive process (Whitham *et al.*, 2019) and one that is not just informed by how these ideas are identified, but "how values are lived by those who do the work of reproduction" (Skeggs, 2014, p. 2).

Activities undertaken during the event were designed to explore ideas and solutions-based approaches to addressing challenges and seizing opportunities for the nourishment and benefit of Edinburgh's cultural ecosystem. The programme of speakers and activities that took place at the event were inspired by participatory research methods, including cultural mapping as a tool for generating conversations between participants and providing a reference point for sharing stories and listening to one another (Currie and Correa, 2021) and speculative design (Kozubaev *et al.*, 2020) as a means of exploring and generating "insights with have the richness and quality of long-term fieldwork such as ethnography, but do this pertaining to a near-future possibility" (Lindley and Green, 2022, p. 37), or possibilities. In bringing together the methodologies which form part of this thesis – for *Future Culture Edinburgh*, particularly – after the fact, it is interesting to recall the point at which more formal definitions for

the methods employed entered my consciousness as a researcher. In the spirit of transparency of value and values which were central to the research design, at the point of devising the research my main areas of concern were less around the application of a methodology or framework, and more on devising approaches and formats which would encourage collaboration, discussion, and active, solutions-based thinking that would play a part in driving change towards preferable futures for Edinburgh's cultural sector without adopting or following a formal framework for the research. As such, I identify with the definition of speculative design put forward by the *SpeculativeEdu* project, which has analysed ways in which these methods are used in practice. This research found that speculative design is often intended and defined as:

“...an approach, more than as a formal methodology, with the intent of bringing together multiple disciplines, skills, competences, cultures and interests, and to have the flexibility which is necessary, first of all, to convey the results of the technical and technological investigations into narrative form and diegetic outputs which are able to engage all senses. And, then, to be able to have the irony, curiosity and spectacularity which is necessary in order to engage different kinds of people, from niche to mainstream... [and] become an opportunity to bring communities together into a critical reflection around possible future scenarios of their cities, environment, schools, offices, homes, etc.”<sup>73</sup>

Central to the research design was a desire to create an accessible space in which all interested stakeholders, regardless of their profession or connections to existing cultural infrastructure and organisations, could imagine and engage in open discussion about their ideas for equitable futures of culture in the city. To achieve this, we sought to explore hybrid events and ways in which synchronous online and in-person programmes and experiences might be comparable and equally accessible, while acknowledging the circumstances of experience through which the two formats differ. In addition, invited speakers at the event were diverse and wide-ranging in their experiences of Edinburgh's cultural sector, and the programme deliberately skewed

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<sup>73</sup> <https://speculativeedu.eu/approaches-methods-and-tools-for-speculative-design/> [Accessed 23 June 2022]

towards community-based and other underrepresented voices, including people of colour and creative freelancers. Specifically, we set out to intentionally platform those voices that tend to be marginalised or absent from traditional forums of discussion within Edinburgh's cultural sector. There were no invited guests at the event, although relevant contacts and colleagues were, of course, made aware of the event during its programming and through direct promotion. Participants were asked to register online and then select if they were interested in taking part in person at Leith Theatre. Forty names were drawn at random from this list and invited to attend the venue. This approach was employed as a means of rejecting assumptions around hierarchical access to having influence on the city's cultural sector. The aim was to ensure openness and avoid putting forward the notion that those in a more privileged position in the sector with regards to their public voice and association with 'valuable' culture would be automatically given a platform to attend in person. That said, however, of course those with a professional or existing connection to Edinburgh's cultural sector were likely to, and anecdotally seemed to, make up most of the participants both in-person and online.

In the few weeks' run up to the event, which coincided with the 2021 iterations of Edinburgh's August festivals, there were several press articles<sup>74</sup> which explored questions and views about the future of the festivals and highlighted the need and opportunity to discuss and address known challenges. Examples include infrastructural challenges around 'festivalisation' of the city centre and their impact on sustainability agendas, short-term lets, and experiences of living in the city during the festivals – particularly in summer – for Edinburgh's residents and communities. As far as possible, we hoped to steer away from rehashing these known issues, debates, and agendas, and to encourage imaginative and solutions-based thinking about preferable futures.

Through completing asynchronous and synchronous workshop activities, participants generated and discussed a dataset of thoughts, ideas, and scenarios, which contributed to findings first laid out in a public report, published in partnership with the

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<sup>74</sup> For example, <https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/edinburghs-festivals-pledge-they-do-not-need-to-come-back-bigger-than-ever-3334819> [Accessed 23 June 2022]

Edinburgh Futures Institute in 2022 (Jones and Cunningham, 2022), and now transposed into the broader context of this thesis. As an asynchronous activity which participants were asked to complete before the workshop, we used the whiteboarding tool Miro to ask attendees to record what they would like to keep, lose, and change about Edinburgh's cultural sector. During the event, writer and podcaster on collective imagination and environmental sustainability Rob Hopkins<sup>75</sup> led an exercise which invited participants to imagine their visions for Edinburgh 2030 and think about how culture would be part of the city.

The next section of the event included a series of short presentations about ideas for making change by Leah Black<sup>76</sup>, Chief Executive of WHALE Arts in Wester Hailes, Edinburgh who spoke about ideas for long-term funding structures; interdisciplinary artist and researcher Rosie Priest<sup>77</sup> who discussed ideas for a 'steering group' or 'critical friend' for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe as a way of tackling inequities; and award-winning writer and editor Arusa Qureshi<sup>78</sup>, who spoke about the experience of being a person of colour in the creative industries in Scotland. These presentations were included to act as a starting point for futures focused discussions. Each put forward a clearly articulated idea through which they felt change in the city's cultural sector might take place.

Following this, participants worked in groups in the venue and Zoom breakout rooms online to think through, discuss, and use post-it notes or a Miro board to identify changes they would like to make; people who could help them and how the change might be made; and finally, what the impact of that change might be. The final part of the event included presentations from two research projects looking at research into changemaking in the city's cultural sector that was already taking place. Oli Savage and Josie Dale-Jones joined us on behalf of the Future Fringe project and report<sup>79</sup>, which

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<sup>75</sup> See <https://www.robhopkins.net> [Accessed 18 November 2022]

<sup>76</sup> <https://leah-black.medium.com/> [Accessed 18 November 2022]

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.theskinny.co.uk/intersections/features/how-a-fairer-future-edinburgh-fringe-is-still-possible> [Accessed 18 November 2022]

<sup>78</sup> <https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2021/02/28/people-of-colour-and-the-creative-industries-in-scotland-a-post-2020-reflection/> [Accessed 18 November 2022]

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.thegreenhousetheatre.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Future-Fringe-Steering-Group-Final-Report.pdf> [Accessed 18 November 2022]

brought together creatives who perform at, or work with or alongside, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to consider challenges at the festival around equity and sustainability. Morgan Currie, Principal Investigator on the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project<sup>80</sup>, talked about the ways in which the Edinburgh Cultural Map can be used to visualise challenges regarding access to culture in the city, and as a prompt to explore people's experiences of cultural events and activities.

In initially working with Cunningham to bring together findings from the event for the *Future Culture Edinburgh Report*, and then revisiting and recompiling these findings in the context of more prescriptive research methodologies, including Stringer's (1996) definition of action research, I have considered the extent to which some of the ideas put forward at the event and the methods through which they arose might be thought of as 'radical', and whether radical is a valuable thing to be. In the introduction to his handbook for practitioners of action research, Stringer states that, for a time, action research was perceived negatively due to its association with radicalism in the 1960s but has since re-emerged, and perhaps been reinvented through a shift in its alignment with values, as a community-based methodology which takes a "democratic, empowering, and humanizing approach to inquiry" (Stringer, 1996, p. 9), but retains an ideological basis. Stringer suggests that a radical, or at least disruptive, aspect to action research is still implicit in its methods:

"As an integral part of a complex social system, researchers always affect other people's lives in some way when they modify their work practices or initiate new activities. Researchers are likely to disrupt practices that have long been institutionalised and that can have impacts on people's egos, dignity, power, status and career opportunities. In almost all situations, some people will resist changes of any sort unless the processes are carefully defined and their interests taken into account." (Stringer, 1996, p. 117)

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<sup>80</sup> <https://www.edinburghculturalmap>, as before [Accessed 18 November 2022]



In the *Future Culture Edinburgh Report* (Jones and Cunningham, 2022), we note the association between radical action and the perception of it being reactive and short-term. Instead, we suggest that “long-term, collaborative, people-centred, and values-led approaches to change can be both radical and sustainable.” (Jones and Cunningham, 2022, pp. 8-9) The shifting definitions of action research as both radical and democratic suggest that the inbuilt disruption of changemaking as a practice, and the perception of value associated with that change and its achievement, are linked to the communication of cultural value and values that this thesis explores.

## Conclusion: on practice-led mixed methods research

Through the exploration of multiple methodologies in the process of conducting this research, I have had the opportunity to explore multiple platforms, frameworks, and lenses for developing and presenting the work this thesis contains. As I have already stated, this research was deliberately developed to be iterative, incorporating practice as action, as a means of exploring the landscape of cultural value in Edinburgh and the work of the people and platforms that are used to communicate associated value and values.

However, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns, and cancellation of 2020 live events has had an enormous impact on the design and delivery of this project. As noted above, the parameters of my first case study with Edinburgh Science were very swiftly changed in March 2020 when the live elements of the Edinburgh Science Festival were no longer able to take place. I was, however, in the lucky position of being in the process of conducting my case study research, which was remote in its nature, when the cancellation took place. This enabled me to quickly adapt this research to these new circumstances and to ‘pivot’, as we were all doing at the time, to a new formulation of research questions, which this thesis now seeks to answer. Questions of cultural value, the role of culture and cultural organisations in supporting communities and wellbeing, and the precarities experienced by cultural workforces impacted by successive lockdowns, became embedded in my original questions about the relationship between

the work of communications in the cultural sector and its relationship to ideas of cultural value.

In the context of the pandemic, but also more generally, the flexibility and reflexivity of my methodologies, and their operation in a space that is informed by and works alongside my role as a practitioner-researcher (Nelson, 2022) have allowed me to quickly adapt to changing circumstances and to conduct this research in sometimes difficult and unpredictable circumstances. I have at times encountered challenges in reaching and working with research participants; usually cultural organisations where staff numbers had been reduced and where organisations were very understandably directing their time and energies towards finding ways to work during lockdowns, as noted in the *Art In and Out of Lockdown* report produced by the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project, which I co-authored (Jones *et al.*, 2020). As a result, the scope of this research has been, particularly in 2020, focused on the work of just two organisations, but does, I hope, capture a unique snapshot of the challenges and uncertainty of communicating cultural value during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As already discussed, this research came about through my own professional experiences in working in communications in the cultural sector. These have undoubtedly had an impact on my access to, and understandings of, the findings from this research. There is, as I have acknowledged, a lot of myself in this thesis, and the flexibility of this research and the practice-led mixed methods it employs have allowed me to remain conscious of my lens on this work as a researcher, a cultural worker, and an audience member. I have tried throughout to maintain an awareness of my position, and my relationships with and to the people and practices I study, while also appreciating and pursuing an active role in co-creation of value and values with the cultural sector. As Whitman *et al.* (2019) suggest, these co-produced projects can show how research such as this is not conducted from a distance but is entangled with ideas of value and values. As such it can suggest:

“how collaborative design practices engage in the process of constituting, articulating and exchanging value, and how they negotiate the questions of

power and subjectivity that come not only with having to measure and report on those values, but also with being complicit in the shaping and articulation of value in the first place.” (Whitham *et al.*, 2019, p. 3)

The findings from this research, as well as the projects I have worked on alongside and since, which are outlined above, have supported my continued development of ideas about the role of practice-led participatory research in actively exploring ideas of cultural value with the cultural sector.

## Ethics

### Introduction

All the work conducted as part of this research has taken place with ethical approaches to research in mind. Each element and iteration of the research has undergone ethical review through Edinburgh College of Art (ECA)’s Ethics Approval three-tiered system. This approach begins with a self-audit process, which highlights any areas of complexity and begins a process of external review where appropriate.

The research has involved human participants both directly, in the form of interviews and event participation, and indirectly, through the collection of posts on Twitter. The broad challenges of ethics and consent regarding research conducted through social media APIs are addressed above, but the ethical approaches specific to this thesis are discussed in the context of these issues in this section.

The COVID-19 pandemic also brought challenges in conducting this research. In addition to considerations about working with human subjects, the research had to also consider the incredibly difficult circumstances in which these research participants were working in 2020 and 2021, and to sensitively managing relationships with the people who made time to take part in this research. Not only that, when it came to programming a live, in-person event during the pandemic, the research had to take extra

care in its design to meticulously mitigate as far as was possible against any risks posed by unnecessary exposure to COVID-19.

## Data management

Data management plans were produced for each element of this research, using the University's template for Postgraduate Research Students. These plans include details of data collection; documentation of the data; ethical and legal compliance for the work; data storage, sharing and preservation; and who is responsible for carrying out and maintaining the content of the plan.

## Case studies

Each of the participants who took part in interviews for my case studies were provided with a participant information sheet, which they read before signing consent forms, which noted their right to withdraw from the research at any time. These participants were also made aware of, and gave their consent for, the collection of data through Twitter, including access to the timeline of posts from their organisational Twitter accounts.

As noted in the account of the methodologies used above, the ethics of working with data posted publicly on Twitter are complex. Ethical decision-making in social media research is inextricably linked to an understanding of the conventions of platform behaviours. As the sections above have shown, it is not necessarily ethical to assume that users have actively engaged with the contents of the terms and conditions they agree to on signing up to a platform, including the possibility that their posts might be collected and analysed by researchers, and used to contribute to findings in contexts other than the platform of their origin. The design of the case studies included in this thesis was informed by version 3.0 (2020) of the Internet research ethical guidelines of the International Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) (Franzke *et al.*, 2020).

As Rogers (Rogers, 2018c) notes, we cannot assume that platform behaviours and the content they host are in any way accurate reflections of human beliefs and behaviours off-platform. They are indicators of course, but they are not necessarily useful in isolation in measuring communications of value and values, or the value of the work of digital communications. In fact, as we will see in the findings section, participants in this research explicitly noted that while their audiences were to be found on social media, the work of posting on Twitter does not lead to a direct conversion to ticket sales.

For the purposes of this research, knowing the identities of the individuals or organisations who interact with my case study festivals on Twitter is of secondary importance to understanding the frequency and nature of these interactions. That is to say that the language contained within the texts of the tweets I have gathered, and their use of platform-specific conventions, can be studied without the need to connect them back to an individual account. As this part of the research is mainly concerned with the work of communicating cultural value from a cultural professional point of view, the analysis contained in these case studies focuses mainly on the tweets created by the organisations studied and is supported by studies of their circulation through online audiences.

Tweets that appear in full in this thesis are from the case study organisations' accounts only. These were verified before submission as being still live on the platform and appear in accordance with the platform's display requirements.<sup>81</sup> In collecting datasets from Twitter, I used code adapted from that used in a training workshop I attended in May 2019<sup>82</sup>. Through this code, I was able to protect user account information by assigning each tweet a unique anonymous ID number, linked to its Twitter status ID. This information is password protected and stored securely on university systems, separate to the main datasets. All non-relevant user information was deleted before this

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<sup>81</sup> <https://developer.twitter.com/en/developer-terms/display-requirements> [Accessed 14 March 2023]

<sup>82</sup> Training via the Ancient Identities in Modern Britain AHRC-funded project. Code available at [https://github.com/IARHeritages/R\\_FOR\\_HERITAGE\\_TRAINING\\_WORKSHOP](https://github.com/IARHeritages/R_FOR_HERITAGE_TRAINING_WORKSHOP) [Accessed 28 February 2023]

process took place. These steps were taken to reduce the risk, as far as is possible, of identifying human subjects through this research.

### Computational data analysis

The analysis of organisational website data on the third-party platform Voyant Tools, a web-based reading and analysis platform for digital texts<sup>83</sup> also took similar steps to pseudonymise any content uploaded for analysis. Although the texts were publicly available online, for the purposes of text analysis this part of the work was most concerned with descriptive language of value and values and so, any references to human subjects were removed before the texts were uploaded to the platform. Voyant Tools provides each dataset with a unique link to the online analysis environment, and these are securely stored on university systems, separately to the texts themselves, which remain accessible through Voyant Tools during the live research period but can be permanently removed from the platform thereafter.

### Live events in a pandemic

Due to the nature of conducting a public research event, and to the COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time, the planning of *Future Culture Edinburgh* underwent a Level 2 (beyond self-audit) review by the ECA Ethics Committee. The event included the use of the online platforms Zoom and Miro, both of which were supported by the University at the time. The event was also filmed, subtitled, and made publicly available a few months after it took place<sup>84</sup>. Data sharing was also an additional concern for this part of the research because the event was produced in collaboration with Morvern Cunningham, who works outside the University. Data sharing risks were minimised through granting external access to data only once it had been anonymised, and by storing anonymised data separately to the original datasets,

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<sup>83</sup> <https://voyant-tools.org/> [Accessed 14 March 2023]

<sup>84</sup> Links to the recordings are available at <https://efi.ed.ac.uk/future-culture-edinburgh/> [Accessed 14 March 2023]

Participants taking part in-person in Leith Theatre and those joining the event on Zoom were captured through different platforms and in different ways. For this reason, separate participant information sheet and consent forms were written and supplied to each group. These documents are available in Appendix 2 (See 2a–2d) to support and outline the ethical approaches that have underpinned this event, but also the research that the whole of this thesis contains. Online participants were contacted by email with this information, managed by the Edinburgh Futures Institute, which supported the event, through the Eventbrite platform; in Leith Theatre, the information was supplied on paper. Both versions included instructions for participants on how to best anonymise their contributions, including indicating to videographers if they would prefer not to be filmed in the venue, and using Miro boards anonymously online. The aim of this research design was to facilitate, as far as possible, open, and collaborative contributions, while protecting participants' anonymity.

To conduct a live event, additional documentation and permission was required for off campus research to take place to ensure the research was viable under COVID-19 restrictions and could take place safely with appropriate measures in place to protect participants. Requirements relating to contact tracing, as required at the time, were managed by the venue, and participants were asked to take lateral flow tests in advance of the event, and not to attend if they were experiencing any known symptoms of COVID-19.

The ECA Ethics Review Committee responded to my submission with a favourable opinion and described the research as “particularly robust and considered in its design”. The committee reviewed the Level 1 self-audit form, participant information sheet, and COVID-19 off-campus research checklist. In addition to the documents noted above, Appendix 2 also contains a copy of the data management plan (2e), COVID-19 checklist (2f), and Ethics Review Committee Opinion (2g).

## Conclusion

This research has undergone ethical review at all stages, through self-audit, with support from supervisors, and through the ECA Ethics Review Committee where required. While there have been challenges to address – particularly with reference to human subjects in social media research and in conducting live research online and in-person during a pandemic – ethical approaches have been central to the research design throughout.



## **Chapter 3: Research Findings – the value of communications and communications of value**

### **Introduction**

Broadly, this thesis tackles the question of how the cultural sector communicates its value and values, and what the value of these communications is. As outlined in Chapter 2, the design of this research has been iterative, with the order of these questions broadly reflecting the way in which the structure of the research has developed over time. As such, each of the empirical research activities presented focuses on some of these questions, with the design of later research building on findings from earlier work.

As a reminder, the research questions are:

1. What is the value of communications in the cultural sector and how is it evaluated and measured? For organisations, workforces, and audiences.
2. How do the sector and its audiences communicate value and values, in Edinburgh and the sector more widely? What are the limitations and successes of current approaches?
3. What has the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic been on communications of value and values? What lasting changes might it bring about?
4. What approaches to research design and delivery with Edinburgh's cultural sector can drive change towards addressing challenges and inequities in the sector?
5. What does a values-led cultural sector in Edinburgh look and feel like? What will it do?

The mixed methods case study with Edinburgh Science began with a focus on question one and two but expanded into question three when the period of data collection covered the cancellation of the Edinburgh Science Festival towards the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The case study with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society followed

a very similar structure to Edinburgh Science and worked with findings from this case study to inform semi-structured interview questions and data collection from the Twitter API to act as a comparison to the earlier findings. The third part of the research, which sought to broaden the data gathered about communications of value and values across the Edinburgh festivals, focused on the second research question. The purpose of this work was to move away from organisational specificities towards a wider understanding of the role of perceptions of value and values in cultural communications. Findings from this and the two earlier festival case studies were used to inform responses to questions four and five.

*Future Culture Edinburgh*, the final part of this research, focuses on questions four and five above and was designed to engage directly with Edinburgh's cultural sector – including the city's festivals – to collectively explore ideas of value and values and imagine a future or futures for cultural value in Edinburgh post-pandemic.

This chapter focuses on findings from each section of this empirical research in turn but will make relevant links to the iterative methodology of the research overall. These findings will be brought together and compared in detail in the next section of the thesis.

## Case study: Edinburgh Science

### Introduction

This case study with Edinburgh Science, the organisation which programmes the annual two-week Edinburgh Science Festival, began in October 2019. The work was planned to consist of two parts: an ethnography with the Marketing and Communications team considering the practice and value of digital work and communications for the organisation, and the collection and analysis of a social media dataset through which to examine the ideas and practices the interview sessions raised.

The global COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting closure of arts venues and cancellations of events – including the 2020 Edinburgh Science Festival – necessitated a re-evaluation of the research project and of the case study focus and parameters, which shifted to explore the cancellation of the festival and of the digital programme Edinburgh Science was able to present on its website.

While this change does mean that some of the issues addressed in the initial interview sessions and explored below are less directly relevant to the case study's social media dataset, it is now able to examine the immediate impact of the shift in digital work brought about by responses to the pandemic. This first case study as part of this research was always intended to work as an exploratory case study (Mills *et al.*, 2010) and to act as a means of beginning to define the parameters of further research.

## Methodology

Over two semi-structured interviews in October and November 2019, I discussed with the Marketing and Communications team their approaches to producing digital content and marketing; its perceived value to the team and the wider organisation; and ways in which their own and audiences' behaviours on social media and digital platforms might influence the useful data the team could find to reach existing and new audiences. The interviews also examined approaches to the analysis of the success of digital marketing campaigns and how effective these are perceived to be, as well as considering how useful the analytics provided by social media platforms might be in providing insights into user behaviours that could be used to inform future campaigns.

## Defining the research protocol

### *Step one: interviews*

Initial discussions with the Edinburgh Science Marketing and Communications team explored user trust and the possible obfuscation of user identities online; the growing popularity of more 'private' communications on mainstream social media platforms, Facebook groups, for example (Edinburgh Science participants #1-3, 2019); and the

shift, reported anecdotally by the team, away from audiences using measurable behaviours such as ‘likes’ and ‘shares’ in their interactions.

The questions for the second interview were constructed through the transcription of and reflections on the first and the parameters for the research protocol were defined through these interviews and discussions with the team. The first interview with Edinburgh Science contributed to the definition of the first two of my research questions:

1. What is the value of communications in the cultural sector and how is it evaluated and measured? For organisations, workforces, and audiences.
2. How do the sector and its audiences communicate value and values, in Edinburgh and the sector more widely? What are the limitations and successes of current approaches?

The cancellation of the 2020 Science Festival resulted in the addition of the third research questions which focuses on possible impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic:

3. What has the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic been on communications of value and values? What lasting changes might it bring about?

#### *Step two: framework for social media data collection*

At the end of the second interview session, we discussed a framework through which to collect and analyse data from Edinburgh Science’s digital communications on Twitter. Twitter was selected partly for practical reasons. Of the social media platforms used by Edinburgh Science, it was – thanks mainly to my own access to skills and training on this platform – the most straightforward for me as a researcher to access via the platform’s API. In addition, its terms and conditions at the time explicitly stated that academics may use publicly available tweets for research, although this of course, as discussed in detail in the Methodology and Ethics sections of this thesis, does not mean that all users can be assumed to have read them (Rogers, 2019, p. 159). Finally, it

is a platform that the Edinburgh Science Communications team stated is central to their digital communications and one that is used as a “conversational” (Edinburgh Science participant #1, 2019) tool, and as such it was agreed with them that it might be an interesting place to explore inferences of audience behaviours on social media.

*Step three: defining parameters for data collection from the Twitter API*

The following search terms and digital objects were agreed with the Edinburgh Science Marketing and Communications team and used to query the API:

- Timeline of tweets by @EdSciFest – Edinburgh Science’s Twitter account
- Tweets which use the hashtag #EdSciFest – initiated by Edinburgh Science for the festival campaign each year
- Tweets which include the text “edinburgh science festival” to capture mentions which might occur outside use of the Edinburgh Science username and primary hashtag
- Tweets which mention the username @EdSciFest in the body text

*Step four: defining the period for data collection*

Discussions with Edinburgh Science at the end of 2019 noted anecdotally that frequencies of both their own tweets and those of audiences, stakeholders, partners, and press increase in the week immediately prior to the festival launch, peak on launch day and then reduce somewhat before peaking again closer to the start of the festival.

At this point, the data collection period was defined according to this peak in content, incorporating ten days prior to the launch, launch day itself – 20 February 2020 – and twenty days afterwards to capture the possible reduction of tweets post-launch and any fluctuations which might be linked to a particular piece of content or campaign.

This initial period of data collection was due to end on 11 March 2020, however the festival was cancelled in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 17 March, so the collection period was extended. Edinburgh Science were able to quickly produce a

digital programme of events which went live on their website on what would have been the first day of the festival – 4 April 2020 – and while the programme remained live on the Edinburgh Science website beyond the planned festival duration, the parameters of the new dataset were determined according to the original dates of the festival, 4–19 April. The data collection period for the adapted case study was therefore defined as 10 March–26 April 2020, capturing activity one week before the cancellation when the expected pre-pandemic festival marketing campaign was still running, and one week after what would have been the end of the face-to-face programme.

#### *Methods for collection of Twitter data*

A developer account was created on Twitter to access the free Standard API, which required the acceptance of the platform’s terms for developers (Twitter, 2018). The Twitter developer agreement was updated in 2020 to “better support non-commercial research”<sup>85</sup>, including support for academic researchers to conduct research that “helps improve conversational health on Twitter”<sup>86</sup> and a change which allows academics to distribute unlimited numbers of Tweet IDs and User IDs on behalf of an institution for non-commercial purposes<sup>87</sup>. However, as noted in the Methodology section above, recent changes to Twitter Developer access under Elon Musk have paywalled API access at a rate likely to be inaccessible to most researchers<sup>88</sup> and placed new restrictions on the number of queries and volume of tweets allowed, according to a tiered subscription.

An app for the data collection process was created from within the developer account dashboard and an access token generated to link the programming language and platform for data collection to the Twitter API. Data was collected using the programming language R, in the RStudio environment<sup>89</sup> using code adapted from an R

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<sup>85</sup> <https://techcrunch.com/2020/03/10/twitter-rewrites-developer-policy-to-better-support-academic-research-and-use-of-good-bots/> [Accessed 31 August 2022]

<sup>86</sup> <https://developer.twitter.com/en/developer-terms/policy#4-c> [Accessed 31 August 2022]

<sup>87</sup> <https://developer.twitter.com/en/developer-terms/policy#4-e> [Accessed 31 August 2022]

<sup>88</sup> See <https://www.wired.com/story/twitter-data-api-prices-out-nearly-everyone/> [Accessed 14 March 2023]

<sup>89</sup> RStudio download and documentation via <https://rstudio.com/>

training workshop at The University of Stirling which I attended in May 2019<sup>90</sup>. While it is possible to stream data from the Standard Twitter API in real time, streaming over the full period of data collection was not something I was confident with or had reliable enough hardware to run. Instead, data was collected via the historic REST API at regular intervals, using the search terms above and via the University of Edinburgh network, either on campus or using the VPN service.

The Standard API documentation (2020) stated that tweets can be extracted up to seven days in the past (Twitter, 2020), and data collection was timed accordingly, although on several occasions tweets from more than seven days in the past have been accessible. The final datasets were coded, de-duped and collated for analysis. Data has been pseudonymised and non-relevant user id information deleted, with each tweet being assigned a unique anonymous id, linked to its unique Twitter status id. The key to the status ids is encrypted and stored separately to the dataset. Status id links allow the dataset to be rehydrated and refreshed to remove deleted tweets, as well as those whose permissions have changed and become locked to the API after collection. Wherever possible and practical, where personal identifiers have been included or inferred within the content of a tweet, these have been deleted or redacted and would only be accessible via access to the status id key and rehydration of the dataset.

### *Limitations*

While there is justification for the focus of the social media element of this study beginning on Twitter, this is not to discount the problematic aspects of single-platform studies noted by Richard Rogers, that:

“Rather than being researcher led, the social media company also dictates the data, available, and the terms of accessibility.” (Rogers, 2019, p. 18)

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<sup>90</sup> Training via the Ancient Identities in Modern Britain AHRC-funded project, May 2019. Code available at [https://github.com/IARHeritages/R\\_FOR\\_HERITAGE\\_TRAINING\\_WORKSHOP](https://github.com/IARHeritages/R_FOR_HERITAGE_TRAINING_WORKSHOP).

In a chapter from the SAGE Handbook of Social Media, Rogers states that single-platform studies have “become the norm” (Rogers, 2018a, p. 93) because of the nature of collecting data through one API per platform. However, he notes that narratives which take place on social media may play out over multiple platforms, and that cross-platform analysis may provide greater insight into the story itself, as well as offering the opportunity to compare the conventions and digital objects which are specific to each one (Rogers, 2019).

This case study was the first test for my position as a practitioner-researcher (Stewart, 2007; Scott, 2016; Nelson, 2022), with my professional experience in arts marketing and digital communications, blurring the line but also contributing to the richness of the contributions offered during my interviews with Edinburgh Science.

#### *Adapting the case study*

The cancellation of the festival in Spring 2020 and the transition away from both face-to-face programming and face-to-face research methods, necessitated a change of focus both for Edinburgh Science and for my research. The timing of this case study – capturing the cancellation of the Edinburgh Science Festival and the rapid adaptation of some of the festival’s content to a digital programme – meant that my research too had to adapt alongside and in step with the changes that my participants are making as they explored the cancellation and its impact on content and audiences. In a crowdsourced publication put together by the Culture Capital Exchange entitled *Doing Arts Research in a Pandemic*, Laura Bissell describes this situation as the opportunity to:

“interrogate the impossibility of the live, the differently live, the new demands of audiences and performers as we navigate this moment.” (Bissell, 2020, p. 53)

As such, the adapted interview questions for the third interview with Edinburgh Science focused on the moment of initial response to the pandemic and the adaptations that quickly followed. Questions included:



- What has the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic been on approaches to the organisation's digital work?
- At this moment, what might the impact of digital adaptations be for the organisation in the future?
- What differences have occurred in the make-up and behaviours of Edinburgh Science's audiences during lockdown, and how are these differences being measured?

Interviews: reflections from Edinburgh Science on the work of communications before and during a global pandemic

### *Digital work and Edinburgh Science*

In the first of our interviews, the Edinburgh Science participants agreed that there are often two elements associated with their digital communications work: their own work to plan, produce and deliver digital content, and the labour of communicating how and why they are working in certain ways to other, often more senior, colleagues.

The organisation's digital strategy, for example, was acknowledged to be tailored particularly to the expectations of the board, rather than for informing their own work.

“‘Write a strategy...’ What they mean is ‘write something that I will understand’. You know, like, explain this to me ... I think in the past we’ve created strategies that we thought would work, or... would be effective ... We’ve produced multiple, multiple strategies and actually... for them it’s as basic as do you have more followers than the Book Festival...” (Edinburgh Science participant #2, 2019)

Some frustration was evident in this need to explain the opportunities and limitations associated with digital marketing. On some occasions this might be to justify digital work, on others to check colleagues' expectations regarding the direct conversions to ticket sales that were likely to result from social media posts. Another participant went further and expressed a view in line with ideas of platformization (Helmond, 2015) and the commodification, profiling, and surveillance implications of user data (Zuboff, 2019):

“I think fundamentally, creating content for social media is completely undervalued by almost every single user... Because the culture of social media is to produce content for free, which actually benefits the platform holder: Twitter, Instagram... So, to create content for work, every employee who is a social media user themselves does not put any value on that content because they put no value on their own content. Erm, on the flip side, I’ve moved away from using social media in my private time because I don’t get paid for it” (Edinburgh Science participant #3, 2019).

This blending of personal and professional social media use was an interesting discussion point. The participant who was the most comfortable with combining professional and personal use also actively sought out groups and channels that included other digital marketing professionals to share practice and experiences through the same platforms on which their work takes place.

We also discussed an example of a customer complaint where the response could only be delivered through an individual’s Facebook account. The participant who replied, noted discomfort with being forced to use their personal account, but acknowledged that it had had a positive impact on the subsequent exchange with the customer in that it had improved trust in the organisation and affected the tone of the conversation, which ultimately helped to positively resolve the complaint. The blending of personal and professional is fluid, balancing risk and discomfort with the value of digital interactions both for the person and the organisation.

The value of digital work can also be expressed, as shown in the quotation above, in time and money. A difference was noted between the labour of “broadcasting” content and that of engaging in “interactions” with customers which, while more time-consuming, were felt to be more worthwhile “because that’s where we sort of decided that the value is” (Edinburgh Science participant #1, 2019), even if this resulted in smaller audience numbers on social media. Interacting with audiences was felt to be a better strategy because:

“I think it feels like a more lasting connection with the audience... and I think I’d probably say that because, especially the way that things are going around the platforms themselves are moving away from ‘more people, more people, more people’, making that harder. You know, Instagram is the example of testing hiding likes and all of that sort of things. They are trying to gear us towards interactions because I think they also see that there’s more value in it in terms of, like I said, what you can get out of it. But also, it’s actually more fun to create content that sparks conversation or that is responding to an existing conversation, at least for me.” (Edinburgh Science participant #1, 2019)

Thinking of the economic value of digital work, while the team said that conversions to ticket sales were the main goal of Edinburgh Science’s digital marketing, Participant #3 also clearly noted both the monetary value of producing digital content, for example a short video, and how that can be undermined by measurements of value that focus on personal aspirations and reputational value. This example calls to mind Brooke Erin Duffy’s book, (Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: gender, social media and aspirational work (Duffy, 2018), which explores the gap between the small number of digital and social media content creators who can make a living through this work and the many who are not:

“... for those 15 seconds... the value of that is easier to calculate because it would take me a day. You know, it’s worth hundreds of pounds just to do that. And again, you know, content creators for those platforms will do it for free for their own personal brand.” (Edinburgh Science participant #3, 2019)

Following the cancellation of the festival and the rapid collation of a digital programme, the third interview with Edinburgh Science very clearly quantified the economic value of that programme and the labour associated with it in terms of the organisation hours of work:

“...it’s been 15 people full-time for two weeks. We’re talking 30 ‘people weeks’, we’re talking half an FTE [full time equivalent], minimum.” (Edinburgh Science participant #5, 2019)

### *Life course*

Approaches to and behaviours on social media and in personal use and in the profession of digital marketing have evolved, as have the platforms on which these behaviours are enacted. My fieldnotes from the first two interviews note a general sense that the participants enjoyed and valued the time and space provided by the interviews to reflect on their own working practices. While it is perhaps tempting for this research only to focus on the ‘newness’ of social media, at our first interview, one participant mentioned the life course of platforms themselves. They expressed a nostalgic view of “the chronological feed of the days of yore” (Edinburgh Science participant #3, 2019) which was backed up by another participant. Both expressed frustration that the platforms they used were not always able to provide the content they might want at the right time.

The member of the team already mentioned who was the most comfortable with blurred distinctions between personal and professional use and the pervasive nature of digital communications work also consistently displayed more trust in social media platforms than the other participants. When dissatisfaction about the way in which platforms’ algorithms present information to the user or hide social media posts from potential customers was expressed by others, this participant felt that a change to the user’s behaviour was required, not that the frustration with the platform and its algorithm was legitimate:

“Participant #1: I do sympathise with, you know, artists that feel like their content is not being seen anymore, and I do sympathise with, like, feeling like you’ve missed out on something. But then my response to that would be that actually, almost, that you need to change the way that you interact with that

- group, and you would need to change the way that you use that platform in terms of like...
- Participant #2: Go on more...
- Participant #3: You have to train the algorithm...
- Participant #1: Go on more. If you, if you're using a website or using a group that you feel like there's been a couple of occasions when you've liked something, but you don't always know that you're going to want it before you see it, then for me I would almost encourage you to change your habit with that.
- Participant #3: Stop lurking!
- Participant #2: [Laughs]
- Participant #3: That's the problem.
- Participant #1: Stop lurking!
- Participant #3: You created this!"

The participants all felt, although somewhat jokingly, that the nostalgia and the reluctance to change behaviours due to algorithm changes, and changes to platform features and layout, was attributable to the age of the user. This could be viewed as another layer of the life course of digital channels and platforms being incorporated into the work of the organisation. The frustration the team felt with presenting the work of digital marketing to more senior colleagues was cohesive, but the frustration of younger members of the team with the attitudes towards platforms and practice of "lurking" on social media of older colleagues creates a new divide.

### *The value of digital communications*

The fluidity of platforms, customers and the digital marketers trying to reach them was clear from the first two interviews with the Edinburgh Science Marketing and Communications team. By extension, the value of digital marketing – for Edinburgh Science and perhaps for any organisation operating on these platforms – is similarly fluid.

The participants noted the changes to user behaviour brought about by the “rise of the groups” (Edinburgh Science participant #2, 2019) on Facebook, which require approval before a user can gain access. This change was described as a positive feature in personal use of the platform, but it was also noted that this made measuring the success of marketing content on Facebook more difficult because any posts on these groups could not be tracked unless a member of the team was a member. Similarly, looking to the future, the team suggested that a comparable impact might be felt from ephemeral content including ‘stories’ – compilations of content which disappear from view after a short period of time – on Instagram, Facebook (the only platforms currently used by Edinburgh Science that offer this feature) and others (Villaespesa and Wowkowych, 2020).

But who controls the practice and value of digital marketing – the user, the marketer, or the platform? In an article considering marketing in the age of Big Data and surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), Darmody and Zwick put forward the idea that digital marketing must constantly balance the contradiction between the manipulation of customers through surveillance and the user’s sense of power in the making of a relevant choice that this brings:

“The narrative put forward by digital marketers suggests that the true empowerment of consumers in fact requires the algorithmic manipulation and modulation of consumers’ decision-making.” (Darmody and Zwick, 2020, p. 2)

This scenario centres on the provision of relevance, even hyper-relevance, to the customer. Relevance, according to Darmody and Zwick, is achieved through intimacy with customer data – the ‘interactions’ mentioned by the Edinburgh Science Marketing and Communications team – and the design of a personalised network of choice which allows the marketer to “nudge” (Darmody and Zwick, 2020, p. 3) the consumer towards a choice that they did not know they wanted to make but that seems to be ideal for them. Relevance is the communication of value, perhaps.

In addition, it could be argued that this vision of digital marketing is one of co-creation between platform, marketing, and customer. But there appears to be a lack of transparency between the actors in this narrative. The Edinburgh Science participants noted more than once in our interviews that platform algorithms can exercise control over communications practice to the extent that any change can have an immediate and detrimental effect on the measured success of digital content. The strategy of focusing on interactions is justified thus:

- “Participant #1: Certainly, trying to move more towards interactions now.  
Erm, yeah, because that’s where we sort of decided that the value is.
- Participant #3: Yeah.
- Participant #2: Where we can expand our audience.
- Participant #1: That’s been supported a lot by the way that various platforms have been developed, especially in the last year. So, there’s obviously a demand for it, so it’s, erm, it feels more natural that we follow the trend in that way.”

So, the marketer operates within the parameters set, and shifted, by the platform. Darmody and Zwick state that digital marketing can put forward the premise that is a decentralising and consumer-driven force – users, after all, share the details of their lives on these platforms and offer up the data which marketers are able to mine. However, at the same time they state that these interactions are delivered “knowing that what consumers truly want is their help in cultivating ways of consuming, producing and being that fits specifically with who they are.” (Darmody and Zwick, 2020, p. 5)

In Darmody and Zwick’s narrative, ‘pre-digital’, top-down, offline approaches to marketing are described in the past tense. However, it feels important to recognise that this type of marketing is not over. At Edinburgh Science, where this approach is described as ‘traditional’ marketing – through the festival’s brochure, for example, and print and display advertising – one participant acknowledged the distinction between

these traditional forms and digital marketing, but also noted the absorption of digital into perceived 'traditional' approaches:

“Probably just a lot more traditional stuff, I think. Well, it feels weird to say that because I guess social media is now becoming, well, is already I guess part of traditional media. But, erm, yeah just kind of listing[s] work, advertising both digitally and in print, erm, yeah, just branding. I don't know why I'm struggling now...” (Edinburgh Science participant #1, 2019)

Taking this back to the life course of digital marketing, for Edinburgh Science, this reclassifying of digital into traditional marketing suggests that in the future the need to justify digital communications work to more senior colleagues will wane. It is interesting to note that the comment above is made by the same participant who displayed the greatest trust in platforms and their algorithms. Perhaps the struggle to provide a more exhaustive list of traditional marketing elements employed by the team suggests that this participant will be instrumental, maybe persuasive, in recalibrating the perceived value of digital marketing in the organisation.

#### *Perspectives on communications and expertise*

There is a sense then that Edinburgh Science is in the process of developing expertise in the field of digital marketing, with one participant in particular driving change. My fieldnotes reflect upon the use of jargonistic language in our interviews, particularly around the processes of digital marketing. This could point on the one hand to expertise in the field by that individual, but conversely maybe to a sense that jargon and marketing buzzwords offer a confident and maybe convincing lexicon. Use of these terms is a way to demonstrate individual expertise and explain approaches to a fluid digital workplace where a lack of transparency on the platform causes marketers to look elsewhere for information and insight into platform structures.



Participant #1 acknowledged a lack of transparency in changes enacted by social media platforms and seemed comfortable with exploring ways to find information about these outside of the platform's own communications.

- “Participant #1: I personally follow, I’m part of a few different kind of social media and digital industry groups on Facebook. I listen to a couple of podcasts a couple of times a week and follow a lot on people in the industry on, like, Twitter and Instagram and stuff, so I get it through that.
- Researcher: Through social media, ironically!
- All: [Laughter]
- Participant #1: I know!”

I note here my role in framing this part of the conversation to draw out the discussion around responses to a lack of transparency in platforms and algorithms. This shared moment of laughter elicited a much longer discussion between the participants and brought more consensus between them that platforms are “trying their best” (Edinburgh Science participant #3, 2019) to get things right for their users. This is an example of where the practice-based lens used throughout this research offers opportunities for insight and connection.

The irony of searching for social media platform expertise on platforms is explored by Bishop (2020) who argues that self-styled ‘experts’ whose YouTube videos promise tips and secrets for greater visibility on the platform are in fact closer to search engine optimisers, reinforcing the often-unequal structures and logic of the algorithm they seek to expose. By attempting to game YouTube on YouTube, even if the videos produced are critical of the platform, these self-professed experts “have dependent, yet critical and elastic relationships with YouTube, which are tied to the logics of self-branding and uneasy processes of legitimization.” (Bishop, 2020, p. 5) While the content itself might extol the virtues of conducting experiments with the algorithm through “excitable talk” (Bishop, 2020, p. 5), Bishop notes that the experiments these experts

can conduct while still retaining and increasing the visibility of their YouTube channel are in fact very limited.

Instead, these experiments are revealed by Bishop to be subjective and “shot through with individually and culturally informed assumptions, theories, and understandings of algorithms and audience behaviour.” (Bishop, 2020, p. 7) These content producers operate and believe in YouTube as a meritocracy and ‘cherry-pick’ (Bishop, 2020, p. 5) ideas and examples which reinforce this belief, ignoring inequalities in representation both by the algorithm and by society more broadly. The focus on self-branding, noted by Bishop, is hinted at by the Edinburgh Science participant in the quotation above. There is a sense that the investment of personal time and labour in gathering information about platforms, on platforms, is a justification for the authority and confidence with which they speak of the rationale for and success of the organisation’s digital strategy. This also speaks to the performative nature of carrying out digital content production and marketing and the expert or performer’s tendency, described by Erving Goffman, to ignore or downplay challenges and to:

“foster the impression that they had ideal motives for acquiring the role in which they are performing, that they have ideal qualifications for the role, and that it was not necessary for them to suffer any indignities, insults and humiliations, or make any tacitly understood ‘deals’, in order to acquire the role.” (Goffman, 1971, p. 54)

The deal here is with the platform: placing trust in the decisions it makes; believing they are made for your own best interests; and framing the challenges resulting from these changes as positive opportunities. Here, the platform is not only a space from which to perform but is also an active participant in the performance. It is the infrastructure and medium through which the audience is addressed (Helmond, 2015), and it can change at any time.

### *Platformization, trust and user behaviour*

Platformization, as set out by Helmond (2015), is the extension of social media infrastructure and content on to the wider Internet, with the goal of redirecting content from outside social media on to the platform and facilitating access to the data and digital objects found there. The Edinburgh Science Marketing and Communications team acknowledged the centrality of social media in their digital marketing work:

“I think social media is taking over the majority of the ... Internet’s use. In terms of ... that’s where people are, that’s why people are online...” (Edinburgh Science participant #1, 2019)

This centrality was also demonstrated by some of the participants’ tendency to use the terms ‘Internet’ and ‘social media’ interchangeably, with the same or similar meaning. The team also noted the relationship between their website and social media. Where once the most important goal would be to make sure customers find the website through Internet search, the focus now was described as to drive customers there through social media and make sure that the website and ticket purchasing process reflected the simplicity of the experience on the platform. The importance of this shift is such that the team mentioned they were at the beginning of a process of redesigning the organisation’s website to reflect this approach.

The Edinburgh Science team’s – and particularly one participant’s – trust in platforms has already been discussed, but we also discussed how platformization and lack of transparency will have had an impact on user behaviour and user trust. The team felt that user behaviours on platforms had changed and were changing, making audiences more passive and less likely to click the ‘like’ button or equivalent. Interestingly though, these changes were not ascribed to a breakdown in trust linked to high profile issues such as the 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal, user resistance, or obfuscation behaviours (Brunton and Nissenbaum, 2011); neither trust between the customer and Facebook, nor between the customer and Edinburgh Science:

“I wouldn’t say that we suffer from any trust in platform issues with our audience.” (Edinburgh Science participant #1, 2019)

Instead, the feeling was that this behaviour could largely be attributed to platform and algorithm changes; the focus on interacting as a means of “trying to get you to give something away” (Edinburgh Science participant #3, 2019); as well as a more general feeling that having seen the content, without clicking on it, was enough. One participant captures this in their own on-platform behaviour:

“I tend to pick up my information more passively, so I don’t know how you would track that. You know, like, social media sells a great deal to me ... that’s kind of how I find out about things. But I’m not necessarily a commenter, or a click through... so yeah, does that just have to be part of your strategy that you accept that?” (Edinburgh Science participant #2, 2019)

Interestingly, the first reaction discussed in light of this statement was a possible return to more ‘traditional’, broad messaging on social media, but it was noted that this type of content would be penalised by the algorithm (Edinburgh Science participant #1, 2019) for not being ‘relevant’ (Darmody and Zwick, 2020) enough.

For measuring the success of the content and posts they produce, all the participants felt that platform algorithms were tracking behaviours that were not available on the analytics provided to users –

“They know exactly how long you looked at something that you didn’t dare like!”  
(Edinburgh Science participant #3, 2019)

– and this is also asserted by Darmody and Zwick who state that:

“Consumers’ manifold activities and non-activities, clicks and non-clicks, movements and inertia are continuously captured and coded by automated

passive surveillance into actionable data signatures.” (Darmody and Zwick, 2020, p. 6)

When discussing how useful the Edinburgh Science team found platform analytics to be, the team noted that they do not currently have the time and resources to check and work with these metrics other than to answer questions from other teams within the organisation – creating reports for board meetings, for example – or even more broadly for external funders or stakeholders. These are interesting points to consider in light of the picture painted by Darmody and Zwick of ‘hyper-relevant’ digital marketing which acts not on what has happened, but what is happening now and might happen next; one which makes marketing so relevant that it paints “ubiquitous marketing as the end of marketing” (Darmody and Zwick, 2020, p. 8). In practice, for Edinburgh Science and perhaps also for other organisations of a similar size and marketing resource, hyper-relevance is not an achievable goal, or even maybe a relevant one considering the organisation’s perceptions of the value of work on digital communications.

#### *Lurkers and likers*

Instead, the team agreed that it would be interesting for the focus of my social media data collection exercise and subsequent interviews to be on those members of the audience – which the team felt could be a large percentage – who were finding information about the festival on social media but not displaying behaviours picked up by available platform metrics and making their ticket purchase through less trackable means. The goal was not to convert these audiences to becoming more active social media users, but to acknowledge these audiences are there; consider their possible motivations for engaging, albeit passively, with Edinburgh Science’s posts; and to test what might happen if content was tailored towards them. Results would be measured through ticket sales and a comparison with platform analytics.

For my research, and considering approaches to digital methods, this scheme addresses Rogers’ notion of a programme (on-platform) and anti-programme (through and off-platform) query (Rogers, 2019, p. 28), addressing platformization and user

behaviours through two routes to engagement, albeit ones that are not necessarily opposite to one another. At this point, in November 2019, the timeframe for data collection around the high frequency period of the festival launch in February 2020 was agreed. And then came a global pandemic.

### *Cancellation of the Science Festival and the 'pivot' to digital*

A few weeks after the cancellation of the Science Festival and the UK lockdown, as I was in the process of collecting social media data from Twitter, I met with the Edinburgh Science team on Skype to discuss the cancellation and the subsequent work of pivoting content online to produce a digital 'festival', 'Elements of #EdSciFest'.

In this interview, this digital alternative was framed as building on work planned through funding from Scottish Government's Edinburgh Festivals Expo Fund<sup>91</sup>. This had been for "creating a digital immersive experience, supported by online content, and commissioning new digital artworks" (Edinburgh Science participant #5, 2020); for considering the digital tools and approaches used by the organisations and what skills and resources might be needed to put these to best use; and for exploring ways to use digital technology to expand the impact of Festival events.

As such, the digital programme neatly appears, from this conversation, to have entailed only a change of focus from the face-to-face element that was originally central to this funding to the online content that was previously planned to supplement the live event. The festival theme – the elements – also transitioned smoothly into dividing up the digital programme that featured 204 events on the Edinburgh Science website<sup>92</sup> which fall under the themes of Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

"I think because we'd said we wanted to do this on a small scale, we'd already had some of the conversations around platforms, difficulties, skillsets, logistical constraints... I think that put us in a reasonably good position to be able to say

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<sup>91</sup> See <https://www.gov.scot/policies/arts-culture-heritage/creative-talent-and-engagement/>

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/whats-on> [Accessed 29 June 2020]

‘OK, how can we take what we know, take what we’ve got, gather the rest and pivot rapidly to do something a bit different?’” (Edinburgh Science participant #5, 2020)

The justification for the pivot and the quick turnaround of a digital programme was to find an output that would continue some of the momentum of the six-week marketing campaign up to the point of cancellation; to honour some of the support from funders that had already been committed and spent on the live festival; and to retain, to some degree, what this participant calls a “festival feel”, as well as to seize the opportunity to reach a wider audience.

“I guess the first thing there was [to] go out to all of our partners, supporters, speakers and explain to them obviously that we’d cancelled, but that rather than sort of crawling into a corner and licking our wounds we were going to desperately throw our efforts into seeing what we could act as a kind of curator of from that network of partners, and indeed from the wider web.” (Edinburgh Science participant #5, 2020)

It was acknowledged though that from a practical perspective “the focus really was on what we could get up online that would be relevant” (Edinburgh Science participant #5, 2020), however there was also the sense that doing something to mark the festival period would always be better than doing nothing:

“I think so many others that have had to cancel have just done nothing. And I think the fact that we’ve tried to do something, erm, has meant a lot to partners and to supporters.” (Edinburgh Science participant #5, 2020)

The other strands of Edinburgh Science’s business – an education programme and worldwide events business, as detailed earlier – also made the organisation well-placed to deliver a digital programme. Content from these were repurposed, audio recordings from past festivals were edited, and some members of the organisation and programmed Festival speakers recorded video content. The in-house Edinburgh

Science creative team also took part in a partnership which programmed livestreamed events on YouTube.

One thread of this interview which stood out was the language used to express what the digital programme was felt by Edinburgh Science to be. Participant #5 states near the outset of the interview that they are deliberately avoiding the term ‘online festival’. It is never made quite clear why, but perhaps to avoid direct comparisons of quality or value of the live event. The language describing the content put together for the programme also feels somewhat strange. What would normally be called events are termed “content units”, which Participant #5 says was done to be less confusing but seems also utilitarian, rendering it a little unsettling and somewhat unclear. An “audio download” is straightforwardly descriptive, but how is it different from a podcast? A “downloadable resource” is a term used here to describe text-based content, but which is also ambiguous and broad. Edinburgh Science did not want to be seen to be replicating its live event, but in ‘pivoting’ a festival to a digital space, the language to describe the formats of the content found there seems like it is still to be developed.

The interview discussed in detail the ways in which the digital programme was put together and the time – mentioned earlier – and skills that were required to do it. It was interesting to hear a participant from the wider organisation express not only “a definite change in the appreciation of how much work is required to, kind of, do it” (Edinburgh Science participant #5, 2020) but also that digital outputs were generally felt to be the responsibility of the Marketing and Communications team and that that might need to change in the future:

“I think what we’ve learned along the way is that... we probably need to upskill more of the organisation in most of these things, just so that the burden’s not sitting quite so much with a small number of people, largely the MarComms team.” (Edinburgh Science participant #5, 2020)

However, despite the positivity put forward during this interview about the opportunities for new partnerships and audiences that digital programming might provide in the



future, Participant #5 is clear that the ‘Elements of #EdSciFest’ programme was only possible because of the cancellation of the live Festival and the redirection of skills and resources towards the digital offering. Not only that, they stressed that the focus on live events would continue and that digital programming would return as a “companion piece” rather than a standalone output. The reasons for this are purported to be both realistic and financial:

“...this concept of increasing the life and reach of our events through digital channels has always been of interest to us by way of the philosophical basis of what we do; by way of connecting as many people as possible with science. But also, from a more practical and fiscal perspective, erm, one of the struggles that we face as a live event is from supporters and sponsors who want legacy...”  
(Edinburgh Science participant #5, 2020)

This suggests that once face-to-face programming can return, even if cultural organisations are looking to increase digital programming and there is audience demand, this will have to happen alongside a greater commitment to this form of engagement from funders and sponsors, as well as finding ways to monetise the content available; all of which add complexity to decision-making about the future of the Science Festival’s programme. As Bernadette Cochrane’s article, ‘The Opportunities of Reduced Distance’, in the *Doing Arts Research in a Pandemic* crowdsourced publication puts it regarding streaming and releasing pre-records of live events:

“The live-to-digital paradigm is both a cultural and economic force with which to be reckoned.” (Cochrane, 2020, p. 50)

As later empirical research in this thesis – as well as other research in liveness and digital performance (Hawthorne, 2022) and events in the more ‘normal’ climate of festivals and events in 2022 – will show, the futures of the economic value of the work of digital communications and programmes is still not clear, particularly in a wider climate of growing awareness of inequalities in access to the cultural sector.

But, considering audiences for the Science Festival’s digital programme, as much as was possible at the time of this interview<sup>93</sup>, the team were very positive that the programme had been well-received and reached new audiences beyond Edinburgh and Scotland, with double the amount of visitors to the website on the first day of the Festival (4 April 2020) than on the Festival launch day in February, which is seemingly different to the pattern that Edinburgh Science stated it would expect. In terms of support from other organisations and partners, some were able to offer strong promotion through their website and email newsletter. If these organisations were not programming their own content, this arrangement might be more mutually beneficial than in times of live events, which is backed up by Participant #5:

“I joked... this week that we seem to have got much more love from our partners and supporters for having cancelled a festival than we ever get if we run one live!” (Edinburgh Science participant #5, 2020)

Looking towards the data collected through Twitter as part of this case study, this interview offered some suggestions of themes, practices and ideas that might be visible in the dataset. The first is the impact and process of cancelling the festival; the second is rapid programming of a digital alternative and the language used to describe it. Both themes will consider relationships and collaborations with partners and audience engagement.

#### Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset: quantitative analysis

##### *Analysis of the complete dataset*

As described in the methodology outlined above, data was collected from Twitter over 48 days between 10 March and 26 April 2020 inclusive, capturing activity one week before the cancellation of the 2020 Science Festival, and one week after what would have been the end of the face-to-face programme. Four queries were used to create a collection of tweets from the Twitter REST API:

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<sup>93</sup> 10 April 2020, during what would have been the live Festival period – 4–19 April.

- The relevant timeline of tweets by @EdSciFest
- Tweets containing the hashtag #EdSciFest
- Tweets which include the text “edinburgh science festival”
- Tweets mentioning the @EdSciFest in the body text

The resulting dataset comprised 2,660 tweets, comprising 737 unique tweets, 1,770 retweets, and 153 quoted tweets. 328 tweets across the dataset were replies to another user. Edinburgh Science tweeted 116 times. Figure 1, below, shows the frequency of these tweets over time, pulling out those delivered by Edinburgh Science and unique tweets underneath the total frequency curve.

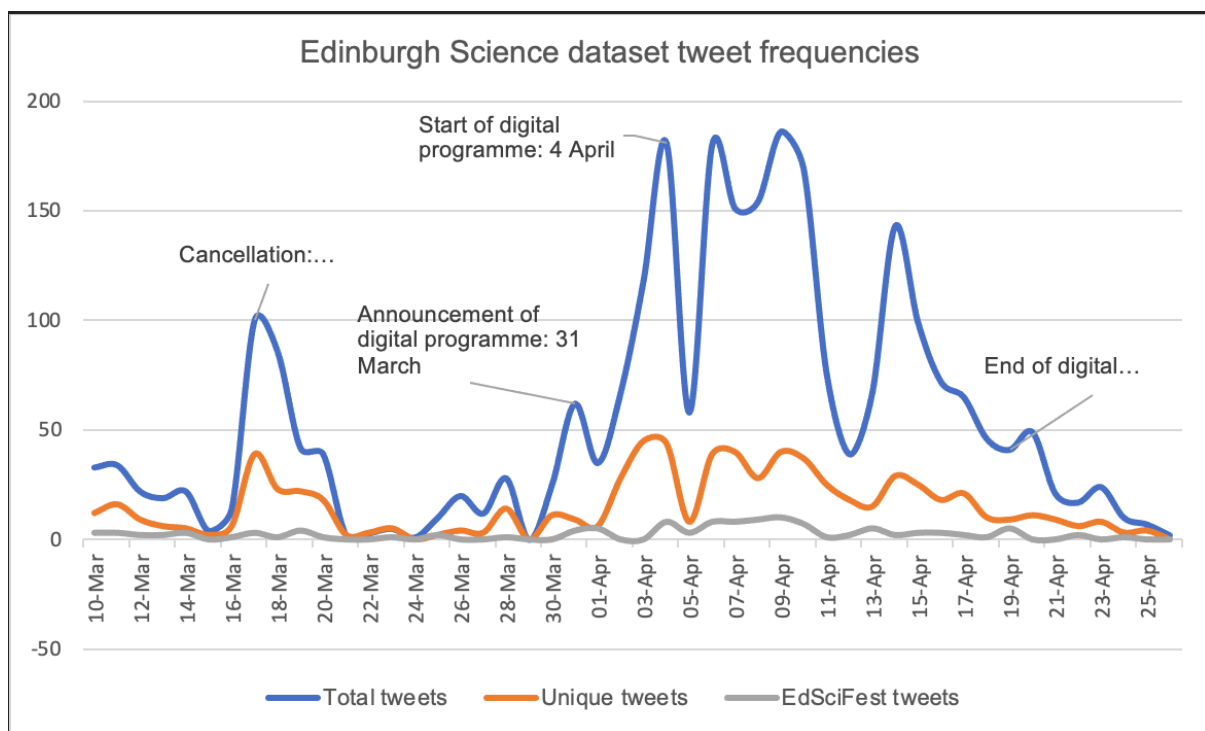


Figure 2: Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset: frequency of tweets over time 10 March–26 April 2020

Predictably, the number of daily tweets increases at key points over the span of the dataset: the point of cancellation of the Science Festival on 17 March 2020; the announcement of the digital programme on 31 March; the start of the digital programme on 4 April; and the end of the originally planned period for the face-to-face festival on 19

April. At its highest point, the digital programme generated 186 tweets in one day, while the Science Festival cancellation generated 100.

The number of tweets posted by Edinburgh Science throughout the period remains largely the same, which calls into question the extent to which the Marketing and Communications team was using the strategy of prioritising interactions with other users that they mentioned in my initial interviews, as we might expect to see more variation in daily frequencies across the period if this were the case. That said, however, with a rapid and unprecedented recalibration of the festival programme to contend with, a similar recalibration of digital communications work away from marketing campaign strategy would be understandable.

Another noticeable feature of the curves of this graph is the drop in frequencies across each of the lines on Sundays, 22 and 29 March and 5, 12, April, with a slight uplift for the last day of what would have been the face-to-face festival on 19 April and dwindling to no tweets at all on Sunday 26 April, the last day of collection of this dataset. This suggests that, despite the challenges of presenting a digital programme during a pandemic, Edinburgh Science and its partners and audiences are still observing a traditional working week. The desire for a “festival feel” (Edinburgh Science participant #5, 2020), which might be expected to encompass a seven-days a week presence for live events, has not been born out in the Twitter content posted by Edinburgh Science and/or by its audiences.

Using RStudio and adapted code from the same workshop as formed the basis of the data collection script<sup>94</sup>, I began some automated analysis of the text of the dataset to determine a strategy for selecting a subset of tweets for close reading, beginning with the most frequently used hashtags. The dataset includes a total of 3,257 hashtags, averaging 1.2 per tweet, and 382 unique hashtags. Of these, the table below shows the most frequently used (frequency is the column to the right of the hashtag).

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<sup>94</sup> Training via the Ancient Identities in Modern Britain AHRC-funded project. Code available at [https://github.com/IARHeritages/R\\_FOR\\_HERITAGE\\_TRAINING\\_WORKSHOP](https://github.com/IARHeritages/R_FOR_HERITAGE_TRAINING_WORKSHOP)

|                     | hashtags<br><fct>     | Freq<br><int> |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| A data.frame: 6 × 2 | 112 #EarthLiveLessons | 51            |
|                     | 237 #NAME             | 66            |
|                     | 124 #Edinburgh        | 71            |
|                     | 380 #YCW2020          | 89            |
|                     | 138 #EdUniEdSciFest   | 144           |
|                     | 131 #EdSciFest        | 1024          |

Figure 3: Frequency table of most used hashtags in the Edinburgh Science dataset, 10 March–26 April 2020, generated using R.

The clear popularity of the #EdSciFest hashtag, which is used by Edinburgh Science to promote the festival year-on-year, indicates that audiences are familiar with it.

Edinburgh Science’s own timeline only contains 116 tweets over the entire period of data collection, which would account for only just over eleven per cent of the hashtag’s use if it featured in each of the organisation’s tweets.

The second most popular hashtag, #EdUniEdSciFest, makes an interesting point about Edinburgh Science’s partnerships with other organisations. In my April interview, Participant #5 noted the value of the support of the University of Edinburgh in creating a page on their own website for Science Festival content. Without the context of reading the relevant tweets, the University’s use of its own, alternative, hashtag could perhaps be seen to subvert that support somewhat to promote their own Science Festival content above the rest. What this table does not tell us is whether the University used both hashtags together. A quick search of the front-end of Twitter reveals that most tweets did use both hashtags, and that the University variant was also employed by Edinburgh Science themselves. The partnership then is likely as strong as Participant #5 suggests, and this example illustrates the importance of context in working purely quantitative methods in large social media datasets. The #EarthLiveLessons partnership, which Participant #5 also mentioned in their interview also features in the top six, suggesting this has been as successful as the interviews with Edinburgh Science show that they had hoped.

The most frequently used words in the tweet text were analysed to produce a word cloud, shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Word cloud of frequently used terms in the body text of tweets, from the Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset, 10 March–26 April 2020, generated using R.

The nonsense words and symbols represent where my lack of experience in programming meant I did not successfully code the removal of hyperlinks and emojis from the text before generating the cloud. However, the words that are words do reinforce the themes for further analysis suggested by the three interviews: the cancellation of the festival and the promotion of the digital alternative. As already shown by the frequency graph in Figure 2, the smaller representation of the words “covid” and “cancelled” indicate the cancellation as being less represented on Twitter than the digital programme which followed it.

In addition to the word cloud, I also used R to find frequent terms within the body text dataset, which produced slightly different results, shown in Figure 5 below.



|               |     |       |    |
|---------------|-----|-------|----|
| Content       | 23  |       |    |
| Downloadable  | 12  |       |    |
| Entertainment | 8   |       |    |
| TOTAL         | 142 | TOTAL | 83 |

Table 1: Search term frequency breakdown of close reading dataset, selected from the full Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset, 10 March–26 April 2020

Before beginning the process of close reading, the frequencies of tweets in both datasets were plotted over time. The total number of unique tweets was included for comparison and to check for any anomalies, but the curve was largely similar, suggesting the close reading datasets combined are representative of the whole.

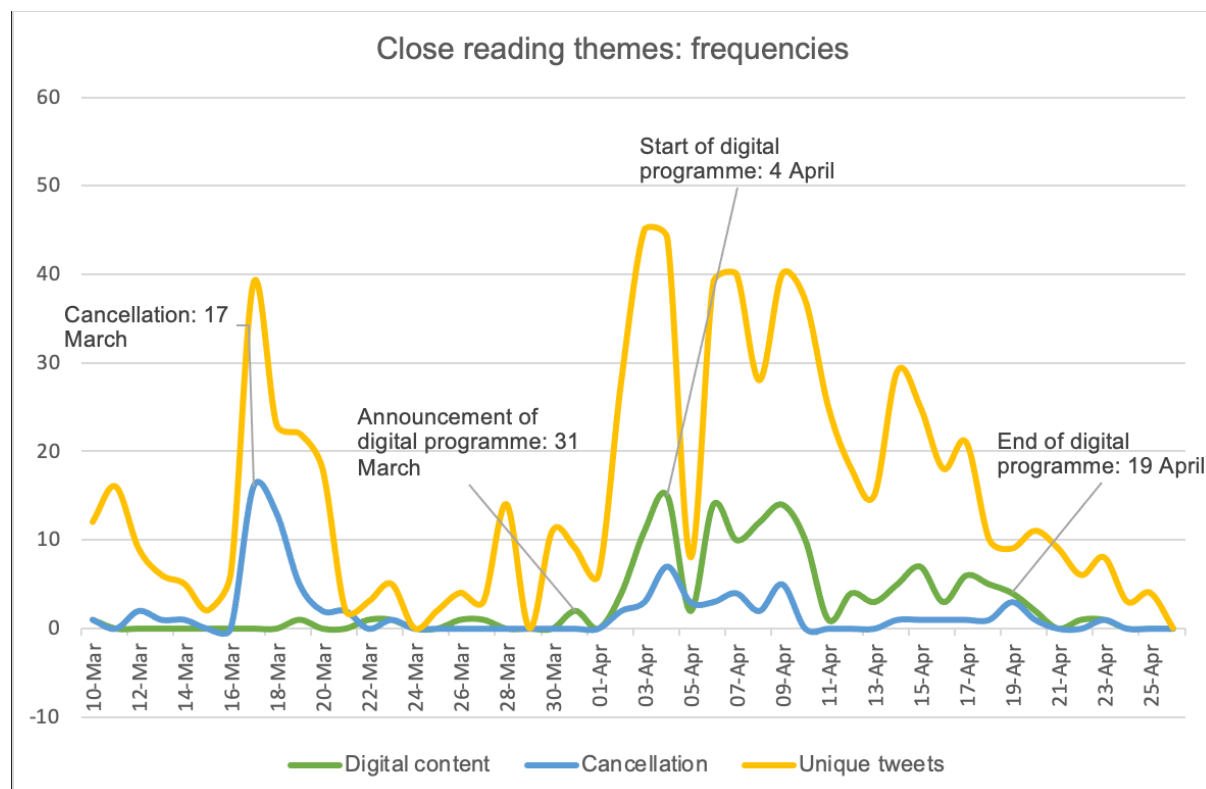


Figure 6: Frequencies of tweets over time for the 'Digital Content' and 'Cancellation' close reading datasets, set against the frequency of unique tweets in the full dataset, 10 March–26 April 2020

#### Additional quantitative analysis of the close reading datasets

While the primary focus of the work on these smaller subsets of tweets was on close reading of the text content, there are a few quantitative points which are of some



interest. The frequencies of some of the digital objects which are available to accompany a tweet – images and hashtags here – reveal something about the language and tone of what can be expected in the body text of the tweet. In the digital programme dataset, 77 of 142, or 54 per cent, of tweets include a photo, but only 21 of 83 tweets, or 25 per cent, of the cancellation dataset include one. This makes sense – what could there be to take a photo of or what image could you design to reflect the cancellation of a large public event? The lack of imagery could also reflect the speed with which users reacted to the news and rushed to share information or support through text content only. The inclusion of imagery in the digital programme dataset is more likely as its content will be more promotional, signposting perhaps to an event which is more easily supported by, and more engaging with an image, whereas the cancellation dataset indicates Twitter's role here is primarily as a tool for disseminating news and information.

Looking at the frequency of hashtags, however, only 41 of 142, or 29 per cent, of tweets in the digital programme dataset include at least one hashtag, yet 45 of 83, or 54 per cent, of tweets from the cancellation dataset include hashtags. This might suggest that users whose tweets are included in the cancellation dataset are tapping into more broadly used hashtags such as #coronavirus or #covid19. However, on closer inspection, the most used hashtag in this set remains #EdSciFest with 18 tweets, while coronavirus-related hashtags feature in only six tweets. Returning to the analysis of the April interview with Edinburgh Science, the low level of hashtags included in the digital programme dataset could support the view that the language of presenting and promoting digital only festival content, rather than that which accompanies live events, is yet to be formulated at this time.

As we might expect, the inclusion of URLs in the close reading datasets is more prevalent in the digital programme dataset – 117 tweets, 82 per cent – than in the cancellation tweets, which features 50 tweets, or 60 per cent of the dataset. In promoting the digital programme, unsurprisingly most of the URLs point to the Science Festival website. Around the cancellation, most tweets do not contain a URL, perhaps

for the same reasons they might not include a photo, but those that do are more often pointing to resources outside of the Science Festival URL.

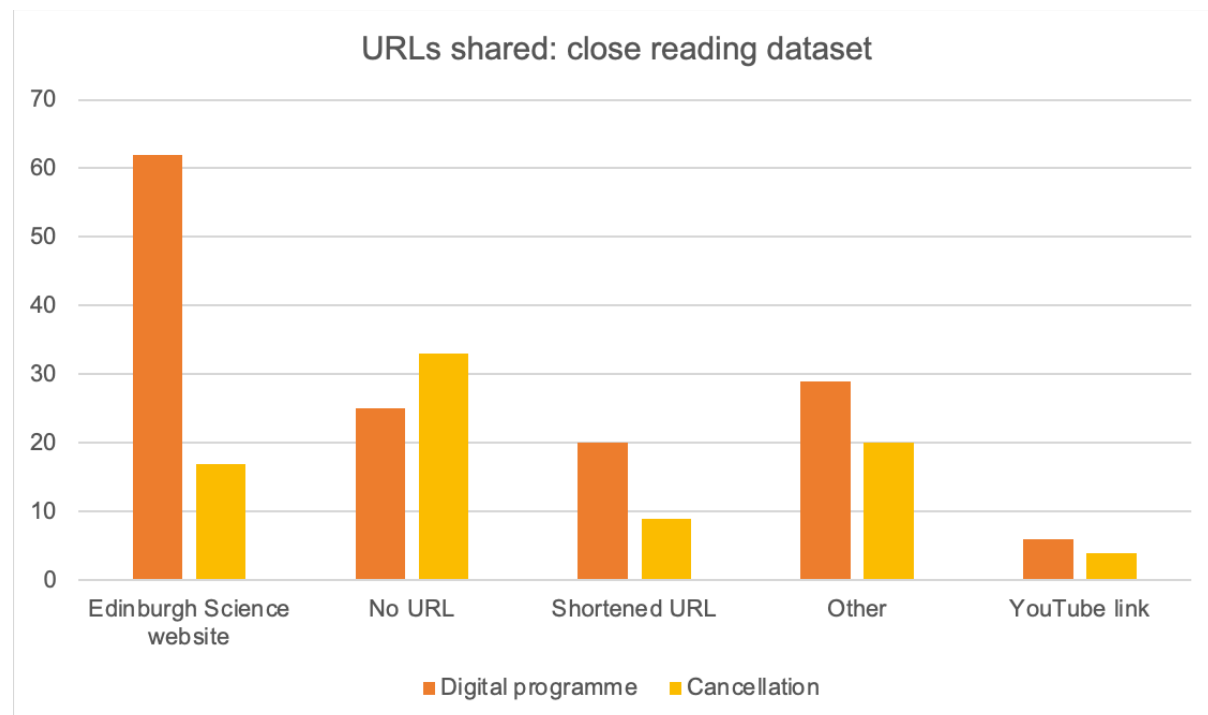


Figure 7: Frequency of URLs shared in both close reading datasets from the Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset, 10 March–26 April 2020

Thinking about the broadening of geographical reach of Edinburgh Science’s audience, which is mentioned by them in my April 2020 interview about events delivered on Facebook Live, this stated reach is unable to be backed up by the close reading datasets selected on Twitter. 52 percent of tweets do not include any location information, with the most popular location (25 per cent) of tweets delivered from Edinburgh. While tweeting with a location is optional on Twitter, perhaps the level of data provided to Edinburgh Science by the analytics in their back-end access to the @EdSciFest account might offer more detail, from a larger dataset.

This difference between the analytics available to Twitter account users and to academic researchers accessing the platform via the Twitter API, is an illustration of the challenges and limitations of conducting research on social media platforms, as outlined in the methodology section of this thesis. Reflecting on the process of

conducting quantitative analysis of these tweets and of employing strategies to determine the selection of a dataset for close reading, I am struck by the wealth of information and the number of inferences it is possible to make about their content, even from a relatively small dataset such as this one. I am also struck, however, by how much more difficult it would be to judge the importance and impact of the suggestions for further study gained through this type of analysis without the context and comfort provided by the ethnographic element of this research.

#### *Datasets for close reading: qualitative findings*

The 2020 Edinburgh Science Festival was cancelled on 17 March 2020 in four linked tweets, known on Twitter as a ‘thread’. As shown in Figure 8 below, the language and tone of the thread is direct and clear. The decision is described as “sad but necessary”, which is reinforced in responses below it from other users, who are ‘sad’ and ‘gutted’. Edinburgh Science also takes the opportunity to remind its audiences about its outdoor photography exhibition, which had opened a few days before, and that it was possible for customers to donate to the organisation. Without an accompanying image or emotive language, this is a carefully worded statement.



Figure 8: Tweet by @EdSciFest on 17 March 2020 announcing the cancellation of the 2020 festival. Available at <https://twitter.com/EdSciFest/status/1239981747426799621> [Accessed 15 March 2023]

The language around the ‘pivot’ to presenting a digital programme found in the festival cancellation Twitter dataset, however, is where the close reading datasets start to capture the uncertainty and strangeness – both for Edinburgh Science and for users interacting with them – of this shift of focus. One speaker due to be part of the in-person festival, themselves pivoting their event to an online format, describes the festival on Twitter as having “gone digital” (Twitter dataset, 9647), as though there had previously been no digital content associated with it. Another user states the festival is “bouncing back” (Twitter dataset, 4968) with a familiarity that belies the fact that it is probably, in fact, bouncing in a new direction.

Both the cancellation and digital programme close reading datasets capture this ‘bouncing’ through tweets from speakers who are reconfiguring their festival content for a digital space. From the tweets collected here, only organisations with an existing presence on digital platforms and publishers – ten were counted in these datasets – were able to make this pivot quickly. This could be perhaps attributed to resources and in-house digital skills through which to produce an alternative, which was usually pre-recorded video content but in one case a talk on Facebook Live. It might also reflect a lack of confidence or willingness among speakers at live events to present their content in this way, particularly as the data captured here is from the early few weeks of lockdown. Were this process to have happened to Edinburgh Science later during successive lockdowns, more speakers might have come forward with offers to produce digital adaptations.

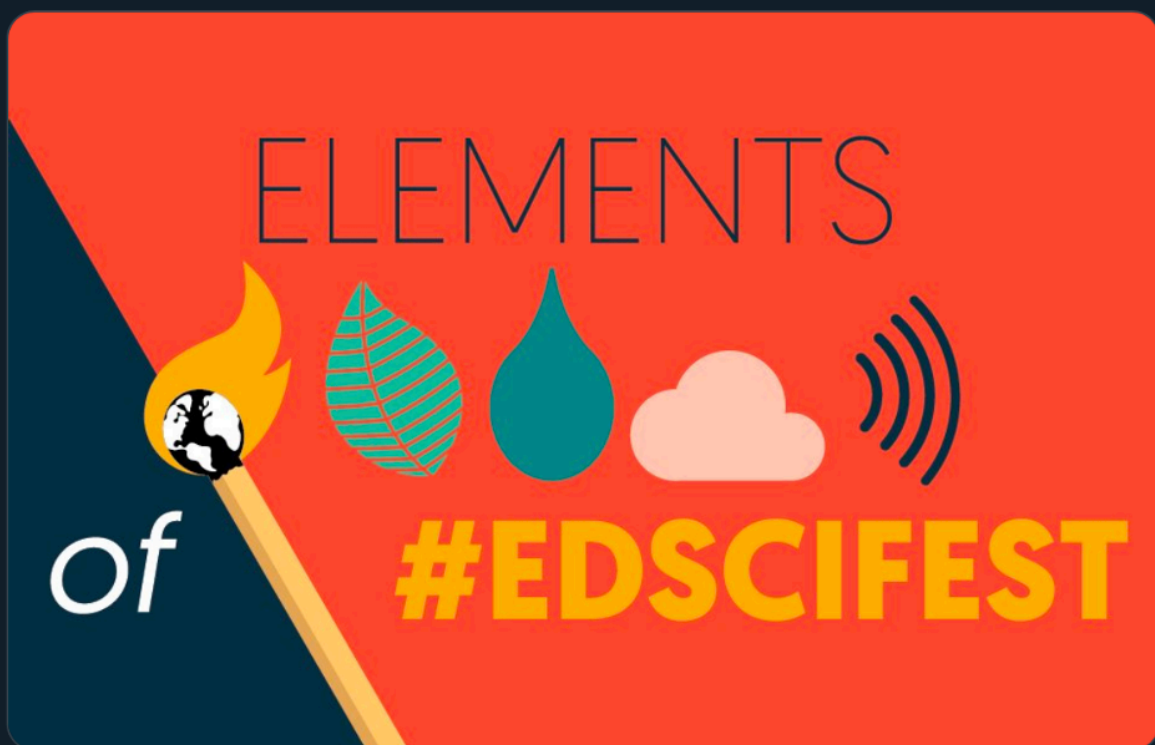
Perhaps the most striking of all the tweets that appear in both datasets is Edinburgh Science’s own announcement of the start of the digital programme (Figure 9). Where some of the comments and language noted above could be explained in the context of an off-the-cuff response which might be overstated through analysis such as this, this text is by Edinburgh Science, announcing the digital programme for the first time, and can be assumed to have been carefully crafted.



Edinburgh Science  
@EdSciFest

Despite covid scuppering our Festival, our team have been working hard to put together a digital alternative, Elements of #EdSciFest! 🌍☁️🔥🌊📶 It's live now and packed with great stuff – videos, curated articles, downloadable activities and much more!

[sciencefestival.co.uk](https://sciencefestival.co.uk)



10:00 am · 4 Apr 2020 · Hootsuite Inc.

178 Retweets 198 Likes



Figure 9: Tweet by @EdSciFest on 4 April 2020 announcing the start of the digital programme. Available at <https://twitter.com/EdSciFest/status/1246361968442834945> [Accessed 14 March 2023]

The choice of language in referring to the cancellation – that the festival has been ‘scuppered’ – is interesting. Scuppering has both nautical and military origins – it makes

me think of pirates – all of which add an undertone of a sense that Edinburgh Science has gone into battle and won. It stands out within my dataset, but of course would be less likely to be a predictable keyword a search for information about whether the live event had been cancelled. Another example of where social media data can potentially disrupt or distort findings if analysed in isolation.

Considering the tweet in Figure 8 in the context of the digital programme close reading dataset, it suggests a broad approach to marketing the programme, akin to the top-down (Darmody and Zwick, 2020) approach of what the Marketing and Communications team at Edinburgh Science previously called ‘traditional’ marketing. Apart from the use of emoticons and the programme title, no mention is made of the attempt, noted by Participant #5, to align this digital output with what were to have been the themes and strands of the live festival programme. The sense again is that the language to describe what is on offer seems to be somewhat jarring. “Curated articles” feels unclear – is this text, or photos of objects? “Downloadable activities” does not offer much sense of what downloading these items would give you and the rather empty sounding “and much more!” seems like it could be an upbeat way of saying ‘stuff that we are finding it very difficult to describe...’

Responses from other users also employ language that does not quite manage to provide a clue as to what is on offer. The digital programme is described as a “virtual #EdSciFest” (Twitter dataset, 6795), featuring “online talks” (Twitter dataset, 8442), “online activities” (Twitter dataset, 9663, 978, 8117), “online cyber lessons” (Twitter dataset, 731) and “downloadable online resources” (Twitter dataset, 3318). ‘Online’ is most likely added for clarity and avoidance of doubt in the sense that no face-to-face interaction is required. However, with the benefit of hindsight and close reading, the addition of the term perhaps adds as much uncertainty as it removes in communicating the essence and experience of what interacting with a digital festival might be. In writing up this thesis in 2022-3, when cultural organisations and festivals have had more time to reflect on recalibrating their live events and producing digital programmes, the language used to describe online events has developed and become more familiar. We

are now more equipped with terminology with which to describe online and hybrid events and performances, their forms of delivery, and the content they include.

### *Conclusion*

This case study was the starting point for exploring the shutting down of live performances and events as part of the first COVID-19 lockdown and its immediate impact. With the opportunity for face-to-face engagement abruptly removed, the distinction cultural organisations might usually draw between digital and social media audiences and those who physically attend their events became, in the immediate term at least, less relevant.

My initial interviews with Edinburgh Science exploring the first of my research questions on the value of communications, particularly digital communications, for the cultural sector, showed that not all existing or potential audiences are found through digital communications or on social media. However, these interviews with Edinburgh Science also show that their Marketing and Communications team were focused on and literate in strategies for communicating with audiences online, and in some cases explored these in ways that intertwined their professional and personal digital and social media use. This finding underpinned the development of my second research question, considering how communications happen and the challenges and opportunities of current approaches, as well as thinking about how the success or failure of these communications is measured, as outlined in the first research question.

Regarding the third research question on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, in the early part of the pandemic captured by this research, findings from this case study suggest that conventions and networks that already existed on these platforms still had an impact on reaching audiences. However, these networks may have grown and changed as more people begin to actively seek content online beyond the dates of this part of the research. And, when face-to-face events begin to return, the question might be how many members of any new audiences which have engaged



online might be converted to in-the-flesh attendees; and indeed, how many of them will be within the physical proximity of the event for that conversion to take place.

Looking particularly at the work of digital communications and marketing for Edinburgh Science, this would seem, from the first two interviews pre-pandemic, to already be in a state of flux in both the Marketing and Communications team and in the organisation more broadly. The time spent on digital communications and its perceived organisational value is, or was until the pandemic, situated at most alongside the work related to the delivery of live events and sometimes against it. The open acknowledgement in my third interview with Edinburgh Science during lockdown that there was a greater organisational awareness of the time, resource and skill required to carry out digital work suggests it may be recalibrated, both in terms of broadening the base of digital skills across the business and in levelling out perceptions of its value across the organisation. Yet, it was also very clear that, albeit it just a few weeks post-cancellation and post-lockdown, that a return to a focus on live events was both what Edinburgh Science wanted and expected, with digital programming returning to the role of ‘companion’ to live events. What cannot be determined here though is the extent to which the digital adaptation of the Science Festival might exert more impact on making changes to the organisation’s digital work than might have been expected at the outset, with the passage of time passively, or actively, embedding new digital practices and approaches that might stay with us beyond the pandemic.

Both the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the subsets of tweets selected for close reading support the position that digital work at Edinburgh Science and its perceived value could be seen to be fluid over the period of data collection and as the organisation responds to the pandemic. The choice of language used by the organisation across both datasets selected for close reading often feels clunky and not quite fit for purpose. As though the terms we would comfortably use to describe digital content presented in support or alongside of live events do not accurately describe an online-only programme, or that we were not yet comfortable, in the early phases of lockdown, in using these terms in that way. It is important to remember too, however, that the nature of selecting keywords from the texts included in the dataset can perhaps overstate the

emphasis and level of planning and thought that goes into the writing of the tweets I am studying.

Reflecting on these findings in the context of Bourdieu's description of the "three forms of cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986) – embodied, objectified and institutionalised – the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown and cancellation of live events affected each of these forms. Embodied cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, relates to our disposition and the labour and process of assimilating cultural knowledge that inform it. The stress and unprecedented nature of the pandemic coupled with the swift removal of face-to-face forums through which cultural capital enacted both immediate and longer-lasting changes to the form of that capital. For "cultural capital objectified in material objects and media, such as writing, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc." (Bourdieu, 1986) the rapid shift to communicating online and the removal of the sensation of touch and physicality in cultivating cultural capital presents challenges. In lockdown, the screen becomes the central material object, but it also communicates materiality in what is a disembodied, and perhaps unsettling, way. For institutionalised cultural capital, by way of education, the pandemic could be seen to have recalibrated the value of an academic qualification. No one, and perhaps especially not during the period of this case study at the very start of lockdown, had a "certificate of cultural competence" (Bourdieu, 1986) in COVID-19. Instead, the skills to acquire cultural capital through the pandemic must be learned or relearned, and the increased digital focus of this process brings about a reassessment of the work of digital communications and its value.

Considering the balance of study of the content of the interviews with Edinburgh Science and with the design and practice of collecting data from Twitter and using quantitative methods to narrow it down for closer analysis, this case study includes examples of where this work conducted without qualitative context can make inferences which are later proven to be incorrect or problematic. In this case, this may be because of the rapid and unprecedented nature of communicating through a global pandemic and the absence of language, images, hashtags, and external links that might signpost to other content on or off-platform. In other circumstances, tweets which

make richer use of the digital affordances of the platform might offer more information and more certainty through the quantitative markers of the content, strategies, and sentiments they represent. It may also be because of the speed at which the parameters of this case study were forced to change.

However, I suspect that this kind of quantitative analysis, particularly when automated over large datasets without context, could easily fall into the trap of assuming that “with enough data the numbers speak for themselves” (Anderson, 2008; Boyd and Crawford, 2012) even with attention paid to critical sources which challenge this view. The process of pulling these entangled words, hashtags, numbers, dates, and locations out of the body of the tweet, bringing them together and counting them is logical, satisfying and presents robust, seemingly inarguable results. But, as has been my experience with Edinburgh Science, qualitative work is required to create a framework for data collection and for the context through which to interrogate that data. Computational research conducted alongside specific qualitative engagement with the situations through which social media content is generated, feels more likely to offer insight, particularly for research such as this which seeks to study and respond to the rapidly changing and unpredictable situation of a global pandemic.

## Case study: Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society

### Introduction

The second case study which forms part of this research explores the value and values of communications made by the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society around the cancellation of the in-person Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2020. The aim was to address the same three research questions that were developed and considered through the exploratory case study with Edinburgh Science, through the same or similar methods. In making these comparisons between the two sets of findings, it is possible to draw out more detailed findings about the ways in which the work of communications is structured and valued in different cultural organisations; and, about the development of

digital programmes, events, and terminologies to describe them that the research hypothesised had become more embedded in understandings of cultural activities across audiences, workforces, and organisations.

## Methodology

Two interviews were conducted with a member of the Marketing and Communications team from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society (EFFS), the charitable organisation which “underpins the Edinburgh Festival Fringe”<sup>95</sup>, in August 2020. As discussed in Chapter 2, this ‘underpinning’ role is integral to the Fringe Society’s structure and values. This term informs its open access, non-curated structure; its provision of support for festival participants and audiences; and its promotion of the festival – its brand, and its values of inclusivity, experimentation, and imagination<sup>96</sup>.

The first took place at the start of August, at the start of a digital reimaged 2020 Fringe<sup>97</sup> in response to restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented the in-person festival from taking place. The second was conducted towards the end of that four-week festival period.

This case study broadly follows the pattern of that conducted with Edinburgh Science from November 2019–April 2020, which used interviews alongside quantitative and qualitative research into social media data from Twitter to capture the cancellation and subsequent transition of the festival programme from a live event to a digital alternative. As such, the broad themes for discussion with the Fringe – particularly the questions exploring digital work and the value of digital communications – were based on those that arose in discussions with Edinburgh Science. These themes were digital work; the value of digital communications; marketing and expertise; and platformization, trust and user behaviour. A few months further into the pandemic than my last conversation with Edinburgh Science, the discussion of the possibilities for delivering festival events

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<sup>95</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us> [Accessed February 2021] with description still live on other sites

<sup>96</sup> <https://tickets.edfringe.com/friends> [Accessed 29 May 2022]

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/learn/news-and-events/a-fringe-reimagined-how-were-supporting-venues-and-artists-during-crisis> [Accessed 1 September 2022]

online and of the longer ranging impacts of the pandemic in programming and cultural audiences builds on the data collected from the Edinburgh Science interviews.

Like with Edinburgh Science, data collection from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society's Twitter account and relevant communications by others also took place, and the findings from this case study are based on reflections from interviews, as well as quantitative and qualitative data contextualised by these interviews.

### Defining the research protocol

#### *Step one: interviews*

As noted above, the semi-structured interview questions for the two sessions with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society were based on the questions posed to and the responses of members of the Marketing and Communications team at Edinburgh Science during the previous, exploratory case study. Like the Edinburgh Science case study, this part of the research addresses the first three of the five research questions posed by this thesis and compares responses and approaches across these two organisations:

1. What is the value of communications in the cultural sector and how is it evaluated and measured? For organisations, workforces, and audiences.
2. How do the sector and its audiences communicate value and values, in Edinburgh and the sector more widely? What are the limitations and successes of current approaches?
3. What has the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic been on communications of value and values? What lasting changes might it bring about?

#### *Step two: framework for social media data collection*

Again, to facilitate a comparison between the two organisations, the same framework for analysing social media data was suggested to and approved by the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society.

### *Step three: defining parameters for data collection from the Twitter API*

As far as possible, the search terms and digital objects collected here were transposed from those used in the Edinburgh Science case study into an Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society context. As such, the following queries were selected for data collection and approved by the Society:

- Timeline of tweets by @edfringe – Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society’s Twitter account
- Tweets which use the hashtag #edfringe – a year-on-year campaign hashtag used by and about the Fringe
- Tweets which include the text “edinburgh fringe” to capture other mentions outside of the shortened username and hashtag
- Tweets which mention @edfringe in the body text

### *Step four: defining the period for data collection*

The dates for data collection were determined to create parameters as similar as possible to those used in the Edinburgh Science case study. The digital 2020 Fringe programme was announced on 13 July 2020 and took place from 7–31 August, in line with the planned in-person dates.

Twitter data was captured from the date of the programmed announcement on 13 July 2020, until one week after the planned programme end date, up to and including 7 September.

Interviews: reflections from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society on the work of communications before and during the global pandemic

### *Digital work and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society*

The participant I interviewed stated that the Fringe sees value in digital communications and work across the organisation and is comfortable investing time and resource in developing it. While they acknowledged that there is some ‘silo-ing’ of staff by team in

the organisation – exacerbated by the (pre-COVID) physical space in which they work, across two sites – they said:

“The Fringe itself is more digitally savvy than almost any organisation I’ve worked with.” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society participant #6, 2020)

As such, they suggested that the Fringe Society not only sees value in digital work but uses the organisation’s value to develop this digital work further. Staff were described as having the mindset, supported by resources, to experiment with digital projects and platforms. Recent examples cited were the Inspiration Machine<sup>98</sup> in 2019, a physical and online recommendation engine developed to help audiences navigate the Fringe programme and assist with ‘selection paralysis’ from the overwhelming number of shows on offer; and a less successful scavenger hunt digital project using smartphones, which was designed to encourage and incentivise audiences to access venues they might not otherwise visit.

The organisation is described as “agile” and good at learning from its experiences year-on-year, however the participant also noted that the speed and workload of this same year-on-year cycle, and the organisation-wide sense of being “on the treadmill”, has made the Fringe more conservative in its approaches in some areas than it might be with more time and resource to explore new ideas. It can be more inclined to stick with tried and tested approaches. The example they gave of this conservatism is a previous strategy that employed an embargo preventing all communications from the Fringe around that year’s programme from being released until a specified ‘launch’ date each June, alongside the release of the printed brochure, even though there were already shows from several venues already on sale. By refusing to acknowledge this early release, the organisation was not supporting ticket sales for these shows, but:

“...because everyone was so stressed and busy and it was always done that way, it just carried on.” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society participant #6, 2020)

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<sup>98</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/experience/inspiration> [Accessed 2 September 2022]

The participant questioned and subsequently changed this practice when they began working at the Fringe Society. They also described the pandemic as an opportunity to re-evaluate working practices and resources, including digital platforms and approaches which may have become embedded in the organisation's work, but are no longer appropriate or fit for purpose:

“COVID has been the moment of going through all the stuff you used to do, all the timeframes, all the platforms, all the deadlines. Everything is up in the air.”  
(Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society participant #6, 2020)

#### *The value of digital communications*

Exploring the perceived value of digital communications for the Fringe, this participant begins by noting that the organisation has shifted its marketing campaign to be almost “entirely” digital, focusing on digital advertising and social media. However, like Edinburgh Science, they also acknowledge the need for an additional, physical marketing presence, particularly the paper Fringe brochure, stating that:

“...we sometimes lurch to digital where... it's not necessarily the right route.”  
(Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society participant #6, 2020)

It is important to keep in mind the nature of the value and values of the Fringe while examining the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society's working practices. The Fringe's open access policy is underpinned by the Society's constitution, which states that the organisation can have no role in curating the festival programme or prioritising some shows or venues over others<sup>99</sup>. This means the Society is not able to promote individual shows or channels directly and instead its marketing campaigns focus on the experience of attending the Fringe as a whole and promoting the support the society offers for both audiences and participants. This participant pointed out, however, that

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<sup>99</sup> <https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us/the-fringe-story> [Accessed 2 September 2022]



this does not necessarily mean that shows and participants are unable to interact and share resources on digital platforms. This participant cited the use of the campaign hashtag, #makeyourfringe, by the organisation, audiences and participants as a means of amplifying the reach of the festival while also allowing the Fringe to capture data through social media metrics, to monitor and measure the broader reach of the campaign. As such, this participant argued, these two types of marketing are better able to complement one another and capitalise on each other's resources:

“We have half a million social followers, but they have content.” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society participant #6, 2020)

Considering social media insights and metrics as a tool for finding value in digital marketing, this participant described metrics as a “useful shorthand” for measuring the impact of content. In our next interview, however, they noted the danger of a strategy which feeds into a narrative of the organisation as pursuing relentless expansion which was described as a “ticking time bomb” for the Fringe, feeding into recent negative publicity around over-tourism in Edinburgh. It was also noted that Free Fringe events, which do not collect data from their customers as a matter of course, have the potential to skew audience insights towards a ticket buying audience.

On algorithmic recommendation, the development of the 2019 Inspiration Machine for the Fringe programme in response to the issue of what is termed by the organisation as ‘selection paralysis’ – the overwhelming amount of choice of shows available at the Fringe – led to an interesting discussion about the value of and approaches to recommendations in digital marketing and communications. The participant noted that automated recommendation algorithms are often built to seek out points of similarity rather than of difference, and so building a system that would recommend differences, alternatives or risky investments based on a profile was an exercise which they believed required a level of human intervention and input to add authenticity and the sense that someone was “joining the dots” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6). This exercise was similar, they stated, to an algorithm such as Spotify's which they understood was also augmented by human input to put forward a sense of authenticity.

While metrics are incorporated into the Fringe's evaluation of its digital communications as being of value, we also discussed the importance of instinct in its marketing. This participant felt that the values and sense of purpose that the organisation was trying to communicate could be effectively captured by a digital marketer responding to a particular moment in time in a manner that felt authentic. Their aim was to foster a culture in the communications team that being experimental and reactive in their content production was encouraged and that it was okay for these experiments to fail if you learn from them, citing economist Tim Harford's 2011 book, *Adapt100*. Their view was that instinct was almost more rather than less vital now that quantitative social media metrics are so accessible, as a reminder of the importance of authenticity and values. But they also stated that "we need to put it in a framework" (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6) to ensure these more reactive posts adhere to the Fringe's tone of voice guidelines.

#### *Perspectives on communications and expertise*

The Fringe's confidence and sense of expertise in its awareness of its interactions with audiences was evident throughout the two research interviews conducted. The participant reported having led the process of using existing data to compile a customer journey map, noting key milestones for customers in the cycle of the Fringe campaign and using them to predict audience behaviours and nudge customers in the desired direction of travel towards an engaged and devoted ticket buyer and advocate for the Fringe. This illustration is based on purchasing data and the results of a post-Festival evaluation survey completed by around 15,000 ticket buyers.

Thinking about the possible impact of obfuscation among audiences, which was the subject of much discussion and consideration in previous interviews with Edinburgh Science, the journey map is seen by the Fringe to represent an aggregated but "statistically significant" (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6) sample of its

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<sup>100</sup> Harford, T. (2011) *Adapt: why success always starts with failure*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux

audiences, resulting in a reasonable degree of certainty that even those audiences less likely to engage in measurable digital behaviours would be broadly represented in the model. The general correspondence of audience behaviours to this map also led the participant to express confidence that the Fringe was successfully communicating its values to audiences and achieving “authenticity” in its campaigns, approaching its marketing through “content threads” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6) which are relevant in their alignment with the values of its audiences. In the context of Darmody and Zwick (2020)’s analysis of digital marketing and communications use of language of authenticity, relevance, and hyper-relevance, my fieldnotes also reflect that this participant themselves displays confidence and expertise in their professional approaches to the value of digital communications.

The assurance with which the participant communicated the robustness and effectiveness of the Fringe’s communications strategy extended also into the Society’s role as a support system for artists and participants. Through the provision of a digital dashboard relating to ticket sales, which participants can use alongside the insights from any social media and digital channels they work with, and events and guidance through the arts industry programme which runs alongside the Fringe, the participant described the organisation as providing “metrics that matter” and sharing its expertise with its network. This structure both reinforces the Society and Fringe campaign’s ‘underpinning’ of the festival’s content and demonstrates security and certitude in the value and values of the organisation’s digital labour and communications. The assumption here, however, is that all Fringe artists will have the time, resource, and expertise themselves to access, analyse and act upon these metrics which, in fact, may not always be the case.

#### *Platformization, user behaviour and trust*

The sense of confidence in the Fringe’s digital communications work can be seen too in the participant’s comments and reflections on issues of platformization and its potential impact for user behaviours on, and trust in, social media platforms. They noted the extent to which platform-specific conventions might influence audiences’

expectations around content types and formats. They felt that meeting these expectations could result in organisations, particularly those with limited resources to spend on social media advertising, being less experimental in their content and strategies than might otherwise be the case. Specifically, for the Fringe, the participant noted that the differences in the offering of the festival year-on-year, coupled with the need to deliver an umbrella communications campaign that cannot be seen to be promoting individual shows, artists, or venues, can make producing and delivering content which is successfully amplified on social media hard to achieve.

Again, this participant displayed confidence during our interview in engaging with and responding to the potential for non-engagement with digital content arising from issues of trust in platforms. Digital marketing on social media was consistently portrayed as both a challenge and an asset for the organisation and it was stated that a degree of suspicion in social media platforms' data-gathering practices was accepted as valid. The ethics of being complicit in these practices through your own and your organisation's use of these platforms was acknowledged, and the participant noted that the Fringe was beginning to move away from marketing on Facebook, driven in part by a decline in audiences on the platform and in part by staff reluctance to engage with it. Interestingly however, it was noted that Instagram, which of course is also part of the Facebook company, now known as Meta, was a continued area of growth for Fringe audiences.

Considering the relationship between Fringe artists and platforms, the participant mentioned, like the views expressed in my interviews with Edinburgh Science, that social media algorithms had the potential to have very negative impacts on smaller companies and artists, especially those without the financial resources to invest in on-platform advertising. For these users, they stated, the moderate organic impact of their content could be "dis-incentivising" leaving them "disenfranchised" (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6) in their relationships with platforms. The participant felt that while it could be argued, and that platforms probably would argue, that algorithm changes were designed to benefit those users with a small, but active, audience, they were clear that:

“I’m not convinced that’s happened in the last five years.” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society participant #6, 2020)

What then, one might ask, might the Fringe Society as an umbrella organisation for these artists, shows and venues, do for them to address and recalibrate the balance of power between users and platforms? Although it has demonstrated its expertise in digital and social media marketing, its constitution prevents it from advocating and marketing on their behalf for greater prominence. So then, how might any action taken by the Fringe Society in this area uphold the organisation’s values and principles while addressing any inequities of access to the festival?

#### *Fringe audiences and audience development*

In our first interview, the discussion of Fringe audiences included consideration of the extent of a marketer’s influence over their audience and customers. To what degree can we rely on our ability to influence decision-making in a particular direction? And, conversely, to what extent are organisations obliged to listen to their audiences? The example was raised of a quote attributed to Henry Ford along the lines of ‘had he listened to other people he would have built a faster horse’. This scenario suggests the Fringe views its interactions with audiences in the form of a communicative, two-way relationship where both sides can make suggestions and demands, but each is not obliged to listen to the other. Thinking beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and towards the possibility of lasting digital festival programmes in some form, in my fieldnotes I wondered how the dynamic of the relationship between the Fringe and its audiences might be recalibrated through changing values and feedback loops available on digital platforms. With the return of an in-person Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2022, the discussion of findings later in the thesis will explore the extent to which the Fringe’s – and other cultural organisations’ – approach to its communications value constellation post-pandemic has been adapted by the organisation and/or by festival audiences.

While this participant's view seemed to be that we do not always have to listen to our audiences, the Fringe's digital communications work does focus – as noted earlier in the development of the customer journey map – on broadly understanding their audiences' demographics and responses to campaigns. I was told that they know, for example, that the Fringe audience on social media is mainly from the 18-24 age group. However, through ticket purchase data, they also know that the numbers of people from this group who are buying tickets is, in fact, in decline, highlighting a disconnect between the value of marketing on social media and its ability to convert audiences here into 'real-life' Fringe attendees. Audiences on social media might be more likely and have more opportunity to generate noise around the Fringe and are:

“...more active [and] have lots of views on lots of things, but are actually pretty much, much more often less predisposed to buy a ticket than someone who is less engaged.” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society participant #6, 2020)

For email campaigns, the participant said, the Fringe would normally expect high email open rates of around 50-60%, however in 2020, with the live festival cancelled, open rates had dropped to around 30-35% with the jury still out on whether this drop could be attributed to audiences feeling bored, fatigued by digital events, or simply more interested in a live, in-person festival.

Rather than encouraging audiences to behave in a certain way, the Fringe stated that it has directed its digital communications and marketing towards clearly communicating a value proposition and aligning shared values:

“...how do we meet them halfway to some extent and provide value in a frame that they are comfortable with?” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society participant #6, 2020)

The participant also reported positive responses to campaigns which extend this proposition beyond entertainment to a broader spectrum of social values. They cited a viral tweet in 2018 which captured the use of newly introduced (through external

sponsorship) sensory backpacks for autistic audience members, and an email campaign for members attached to an end-of-festival survey, which included copy detailing the organisation's socially conscious uses of membership fees. This email did not explicitly request renewal, but the Fringe found that early renewals increased following this email and attributed this increase to this approach.

### *Programming and delivering the 'reimagined 2020 Fringe'*

The 2020 Fringe digital programme consisted of four elements, as reported in my first interview with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society: a fundraising campaign for the Fringe Society, artists, and venues, delivered in partnership with Crowdfunder; a platform for uploading online performances and profile-raising activity for artists; a weekly livestreamed cabaret event; and digital arts industry events.

In our first interview at the start of the festival, the possibility of recreating a sense of a live event and its temporal dimensions seemed important to the Fringe. The goal was to use the live cabaret events – which required a ticket purchase per device, plus the opportunity to watch the show again for several days afterwards – as a means of generating collective digital spaces, complemented by some of the “water cooler moments” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6), managed through social media, that could go some way to suggest a live experience. Already, the Fringe had identified challenges and impacts on the festival's value proposition in its 2020 form, particularly from an economic perspective. For online or hybrid events to be viable, in this participant's view, the cost of producing digital events and content must be addressed. Without this, it would be difficult to develop a revenue generating model that will ensure people will pay to the same value as they are willing to exchange for time spent in a physical space.

By the time of our second interview, despite having almost reached its £200,000 fundraising target through Crowdfunder at the time of the discussion (a target that was met a few days later), these challenges were reflected upon once again in noting the “stress” of producing and marketing livestreamed shows and that the feeling that

digital, or hybrid events must evolve into a format that “captures the sense of live” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6). The ‘watch later’ function of the live cabaret shows had not been well used, suggesting a perceived value in the sense of scarcity that comes with a live performance, as well as of the peripheral collective experiences that take place in a physical space that are not replicable online. Broadly, in summer 2020, there was a sense of fatigue with digital alternative programmes both from within the Fringe’s digital communications work and without, in digital news, communications and social media more generally.

### *Looking beyond 2020*

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society participant noted at the outset of our interviews that the COVID-19 pandemic could be viewed as a “circuit breaker” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6) for models of cultural programming in Edinburgh and more widely. It was acknowledged that continuing physical distancing guidelines into 2021 would be likely to necessitate the dispersal of cultural activities around the city to remove the concentration of venues and events in the city centre, both during the Fringe and August festivals and year-round.

The issue of over-tourism and ‘festivalisation’ in Edinburgh, raised earlier, which has been often attributed to the Fringe in media reports, extends also to the issue of the need for cultural dispersal and the Fringe’s place in facilitating this recalibration. There is some sensitivity here, with the Fringe’s non-curatorial, open access constitution making it difficult for the organisation to be seen to be influencing participants’ choices of venues. That said, the participant pointed out that this feature means that the Fringe can disperse differently year-on-year. They noted a previous increase in Fringe venues in Leith, attributing some of this growth to the establishment of a ticket collection point in this area. They asked the question of who would be willing to take the risk of exploring new opportunities in this area, framing this as a problem for participants in the face of a “declining appetite for taking that risk”. It could be argued however that, because of broader issues around cultural infrastructure, funding, and support networks, it is not the appetite for risk-taking that has declined but the feasible opportunities to do so.



These are issues which my own research with the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project, discussed later in this chapter, went on to explore in the *Mapping Cultural Dispersal Report*, which was supported by the Fringe Society and published in 2022 (Jones and Currie, 2022). The influence of findings detailed in this thesis and their relationship with the aligned commissioned research I have worked on during my PhD are outlined in Chapter 2 and explored further in the remaining chapters.

Looking forward to 2021 and beyond, we discussed whether cultural dispersal would apply to attendances in Edinburgh year-round. As such we spoke about the Fringe's Edinburgh-based audiences in the context of their year-round patterns of behaviour. One third of the Fringe's annual audience – I was told – is from City of Edinburgh postcodes and the participant stated that their data shows that three quarters of these people are likely to see something different at the Fringe than they might during the rest of the year. This could suggest that these audiences are risk averse most of the time, but that the Fringe generates an atmosphere and a value proposition which encourages risk-taking. Or it could be that there are simply more risks to be taken in August, perhaps as a result purely of volume, or that the open access policy does not allow for curation of events and so risk is implicit. These ideas and comparisons between Edinburgh audiences at different times of year, suggested that there might be value for my research to look into changes to Edinburgh's cultural infrastructure which attempted to account for audiences shifting behaviours and values on a year-round cycle, asking what it means to be a cultural attender in Edinburgh and how that definition might change not only in response to the physical impacts of the pandemic, but to wider reconsiderations of social, economic and cultural value and values.

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Twitter dataset: quantitative analysis

#### *Analysis of the complete dataset*

As described in the methodology above, data was collected from Twitter over 57 days between 13 July and 7 September 2020 inclusive, capturing activity from the date of the launch of the digital programme until one week after the planned dates of the

programme. Four queries were used to create a collection of tweets from the Twitter REST API:

- The relevant timeline of tweets by @edfringe
- Tweets containing the hashtag #edfringe
- Tweets which include the text “edinburgh fringe”
- Tweets mentioning @edfringe in the body text

The resulting dataset comprised 23,302 tweets, including 11,426 unique tweets, 11,125 retweets and 4,612 replies to another user. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society tweeted 165 times. Figure 10, below, shows the frequency of these tweets over time, pulling out those delivered by the Fringe Society and unique tweets underneath the total frequency curve.

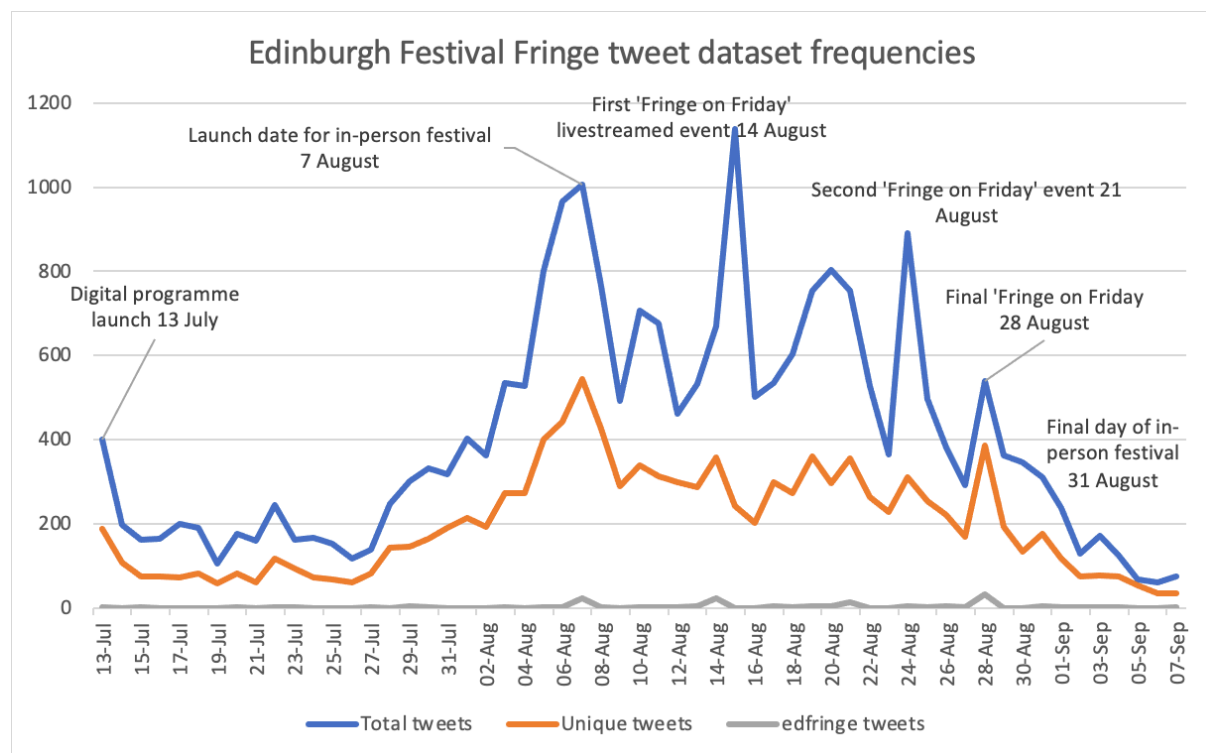


Figure 10: Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset: frequencies of tweets over time, 13 July–7 September 2020

What is noticeable immediately about comparing the datasets collected from Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society is the difference in the

volume of tweets between the two, even taking into account that the Edinburgh Science period of data collection is 9 days shorter. The spikes of activity around the 'Fringe on Friday' livestreamed cabaret events, programmed for three Friday evenings during the Fringe, were prominent, with more significant dips in between these events than was the case with the Edinburgh Science diagram. This could be accounted for in remembering that the Fringe model for communications is to promote the umbrella brand of the festival, not individual live or digital events, although Fringe on Friday was clearly an exception, as was the 2020 Fringe's crowdfunding campaign.

What is also extremely striking is the difference here between the total number of tweets in the dataset relative to the number of tweets from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society. The Edinburgh Science total dataset size represents only 11.4% of the Fringe total. The highest number of tweets collected in one day through this research was 1,137 on 15 August, a day where the @edfringe account did not tweet at all. Edinburgh Science tweeted 116 times, with an average across the period of 2.4. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society tweeted 165 times, giving a higher average of 2.9. But Edinburgh Science's tweets account for 4.4 per cent of the dataset, while tweets by the @edfringe account represent only 0.7 per cent of the total number of tweets in the dataset, suggesting a far larger reach of both the @edfringe account and its associated hashtags, particularly #edfringe, which was one of the queries used.

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe dataset also shows a significantly higher proportion of unique tweets than the Edinburgh Science dataset, as shown below in Figures 11 and 12. Unique tweets infer a degree of craft and attention in their creation because of the higher amount of work they take to produce and could be read as a sign of deeper engagement than the faster, easier click of the retweet button. Unique tweets make up 49 per cent of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe dataset, but only 28% of the Edinburgh Science one. But again, it is difficult to draw comparisons because of the difference in size of the datasets. At a push you might use this data as part of an evaluation of Fringe digital audiences during the pandemic to suggest that the Fringe has a loyal audience of social media users who are engaged and happy to magnify its communications.

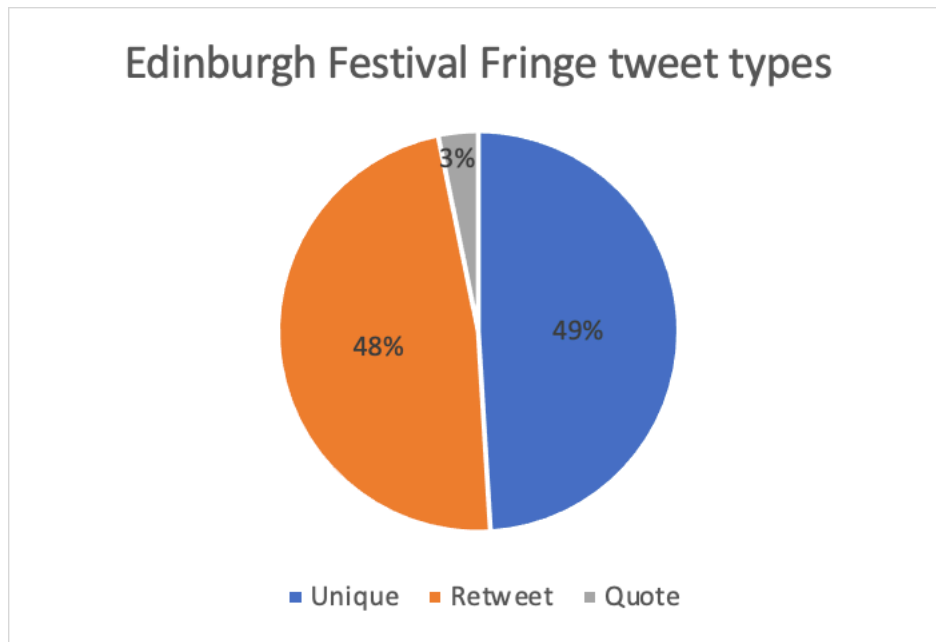


Figure 11: Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset: pie chart of tweet types, 13 July–7 September 2020

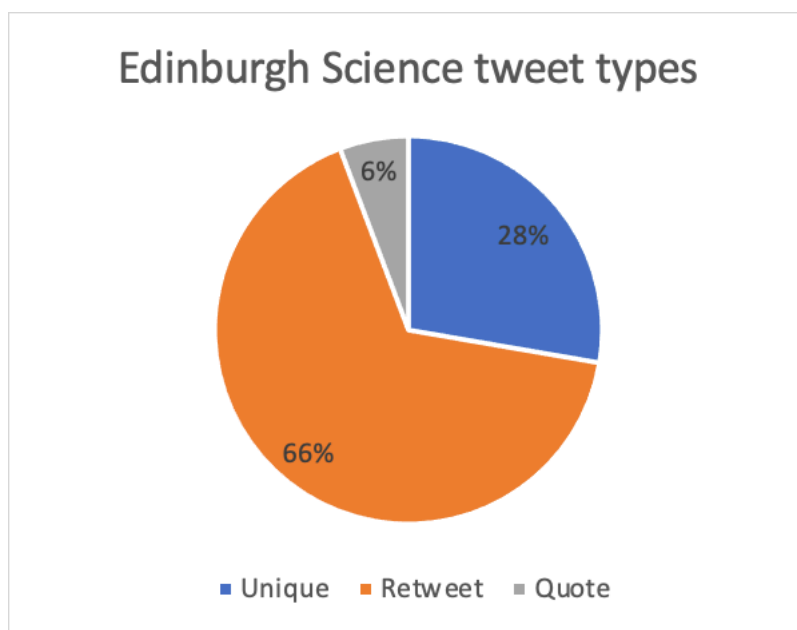


Figure 12: Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset: pie chart of tweet types, 10 March–26 April 2020

But loyalty might not be the only measure of social media reach in play here. Looking only at the dataset of tweets collected from Twitter with the #edfringe query, shown below in Figure 13) the distribution of tweet types looks much more like the Edinburgh Science diagram (Figure 12) above.

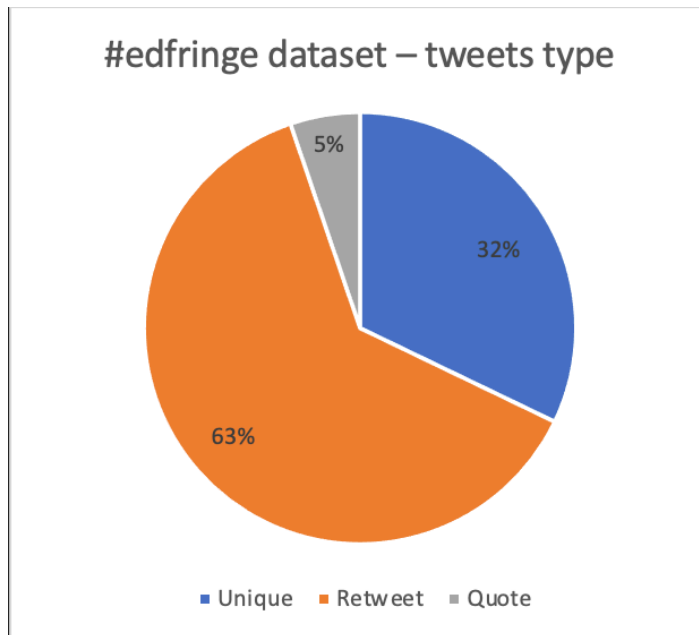


Figure 13: Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset: tweet types for #edfringe hashtag query, 13 July–7 September 2020

#### *Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Twitter dataset: qualitative analysis*

Using R in Jupyter Notebooks<sup>101</sup>, and the same code as for the Edinburgh Science case study, I again undertook some automated analysis of the text of the dataset, with a view to understanding whether it would be possible or useful for this research to devise a scheme for selecting a dataset for close reading. Like the Edinburgh Science case study, I once again began this process with some analysis of the most frequently used hashtags. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe dataset contains a total of 54,473 hashtags, averaging 2.3 per tweet, and 3,200 unique hashtags. Of these, Figure 14 below shows the most frequently used (frequency is the column to the right of the hashtag.)

<sup>101</sup> <https://noteable.edina.ac.uk/> [Accessed 3 September 2022]

|      | hashtags        | Freq  |
|------|-----------------|-------|
|      | <fct>           | <int> |
| 1749 | #lovelondon     | 1089  |
| 2784 | #thejohnfleming | 1418  |
| 367  | #blog           | 1422  |
| 855  | #Edinburgh      | 1713  |
| 827  | #EdFringe       | 1830  |
| 824  | #edfringe       | 4502  |

Figure 14: Frequency table of the most used hashtags in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset, 13 July–7 September, generated using R in Jupyter Notebooks

The #edfringe hashtag is by far the most popular in the dataset, even more so when you combine the frequency for its two uses in lowercase and uppercase formats, which R distinguishes between while the Twitter REST API seems not to. Like Edinburgh Science’s #EdSciFest hashtag, this demonstrates a familiarity with the hashtag that extends well beyond the Fringe Society account’s own use.

The other most popular hashtags are also interesting. The third and fourth most popular – #blog and #thejohnfleming – appear in the text almost exclusively always together. Further investigation in Twitter’s front-end application suggests that these hashtags appear through posting by a Twitter bot<sup>102</sup>, which uses software running through the Twitter API to automate tweets and tweeting behaviours. In this case, several location-based hashtags from around the UK, including #Edinburgh and the sixth most used hashtag in my dataset, #lovelondon, are used to magnify the sharing of image and text pictures (perhaps also auto-generated) and articles from a blog. This is an indication, once again, of the limitations of working with social media data analysis in isolation to make inferences about organisational communications strategies. It shows how problematic equating the use of a well-known hashtag with engagement with an organisation, let alone its values and principles, can be. That said, particularly with

<sup>102</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter\\_bot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter_bot) [Accessed 3 September 2022]

more detailed contextual work considered, this finding speaks to the potential value of the #edfringe hashtag as a magnifying force for any content, not just that which relates to the Fringe as a festival.

The most frequently used words in the tweets were analysed to produce a word cloud, shown in Figure 15, below. Again, as might be expected through the known communications strategy of general festival promotion rather than posting about individual events or even event genres, we see the prominence of more generic terms: ‘edfringe’, ‘edinburgh’ and ‘fringe’.



Figure 15: Word cloud of frequently used terms in the body text of tweets from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset, 13 July–7 September 2020, generated using R in Jupyter Notebooks

Unlike the word cloud from the Edinburgh Science dataset, which clearly showed the presence of content discussing or sharing the digital format of the programme and indicated a potential further query for a smaller dataset, there are no such clues in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe word cloud.

The dataset was also analysed using R in Jupyter Notebooks to find frequent terms within the body text of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe tweets, see Figure 16 below.

```
In [40]: #looking at term frequencies. #lowfreq can be adjusted
findFreqTerms(dtm, lowfreq=400)

'edinburgh' 'festival' 'fringe' 'part' 'comedy' 'next' 'still' 'year' 'aôs' 'cancelled' 'live' 'scotland' 'visitscotland' 'arts'
'end' 'world' 'youtube' 'edfringe' 'now' 'play' 'stage' 'get' 'ago' 'just' 'show' 'aôm' 'barnsleyisbrill' 'blog' 'book'
'live' 'london' 'lovelondon' 'rotherhamiswonderful' 'sheffielddissuper' 'thejohnfleming' 'uksopro' 'back' 'way' 'august' 'first'
'going' 'online' 'theatre' 'thespaceuk' 'time' 'well' 'love' 'work' 'virtual' 'will' 'festivals' 'today' 'years' 'digital'
'special' 'comedians' 'new' 'can' 'even' 'acts' 'amp' 'shows' 'weve' 'events' 'enjoy' 'amazing' 'great' 'aôre'
'thepleasance' 'venue' 'like' 'programme' 'see' 'full' 'film' 'photography' 'week' 'performing' 'c' 'one' 'two' 'also'
'saw' 'never' 'really' 'makeyourfringe' 'people' 'check' 'missing' 'find' 'cant' 'help' 'many' 'summer' 'available'
'come' 'miss' 'weekly' 'edffests' 'artists' 'much' 'covid' 'look' 'support' 'venues' 'aôve' 'best' 'make' 'want'
'future' 'every' 'home' 'lives' 'anyone' 'companies' 'month' 'take' 'experience' 'looking' 'thanks' 'please'
'edinburghfringe' 'got' 'thank' 'tickets' 'know' 'tomorrow' 'friday' 'share' 'ai' 'last' 'city' 'entire' 'day' 'hope'
'üög' 'without' 'made' 'join' 'dance' 'free' 'need' 'watch' 'good' 'right' 'thought' 'john' 'night' 'review' 'tonight'
'music' 'aug' 'diary' 'weekend' 'shorehambysea' 'edbookfest' 'edintfest' 'londonislovinit' 'fringeonfriday' 'fleming,aôs'
'minus' 'peterdibdin' 'httpscodmqypmpan' 'httpscokybeoqbck'
```

Figure 16: Frequently used terms in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Twitter dataset, 13 July–7 September 2020, presented as a list. Generated using R in Jupyter Notebooks, with the lowest frequency of use set to 400 times.

Due to the size of the Fringe dataset, to retrieve a list of a similar size to that used earlier in this chapter for the Edinburgh Science case study the lowest frequency setting was increased from 100 in the first case study, to 400 here. Even so, again we see more generalisation of the terms than with Edinburgh Science, and fewer clues as to where comparable datasets for close reading could be found. The term ‘cancelled’ appears in both lists, but with frequencies set at 400 tweets minimum, close reading of this dataset would still be a very large undertaking.

On balance, I decided not to attempt to dissect the data further to include close reading datasets for this case study. This decision was made considering the known organisational strategy of neutrality towards the promotion of anything other than the umbrella of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and, in the case of 2020, its own crowdfunding and livestreamed performances. The decision was also influence by the size of the dataset, and the absence – beyond the identification of anomalies such as the automated bot I encountered – of any standout terms of interest that could be used to create a practical and meaningful subset. However, I was struck by the low frequency of tweets posted by the @edfringe Twitter account relative to the dataset size, and so this became my focus for further analysis and closer reading.



### *Exploring the @edfringe Twitter timeline*

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the 2020 version of the Twitter Standard API documentation stated that tweets can only be extracted from the historic Twitter REST API from up to 7 days in the past. In conducting this research using RStudio, this was almost always the case. However, one query for the @edfringe account timeline returned tweets from the account dating back to 2018.

Having been struck by the low frequency of tweets by the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, this accident allowed me to compare the accounts tweets across 2020, 2019 and 2018, to consider why this might be and to determine whether this was an anomaly particular to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Quantitative analysis of the @edfringe Twitter timeline

As we might expect as the originator and umbrella organisation of the festival brand, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe's timeline during the period of data collection in 2020 contains mainly unique tweets – 70 per cent – with 23 percent retweets and 7 percent quote tweets. As shown on the analysis of the whole dataset above, the frequency of tweets spikes at the start of what would have been the in-person festival on 7 August, and on each of the three 'Fringe on Friday' livestreamed events.

The Twitter API's return of @edfringe tweets dating back to 2018 allowed me to compare the number of tweets by the society year-on-year. The festival dates are not the same each year, but the duration of the festival, 25 days, is. This allowed me to compare directly between the three festival years, with the data showing a significant drop in tweet frequency for the 2020 reimagined Fringe. During the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe, @edfringe tweeted 601 times, compared to 400 times in 2019 and just 135 times in 2020<sup>103</sup>.

Figure 17 below shows the pattern of tweets over time for the 25-day festival period for each of the three years. While the number of tweets for 2020 is obviously significantly

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<sup>103</sup> The earlier reported total of 165 tweets is for the period of my data collection but has been shorted here to the planned in-person festival dates for comparison.

lower, the pattern of tweets across the period for each year is similar apart from two spikes. The first is on day 18 in 2018, which front-end Twitter investigation shows was the result of an incident at a Fringe venue that was widely shared on the platform and @edfringe developed an ‘official’ response to. The second, on day 22 in 2020, seems to relate to the final iteration of the live-streamed ‘Fringe on Friday’ event, which was directly promoted by the Fringe and therefore likely received more promotional resource on Twitter than would normally have been the case in the final few days of the in-person festival.

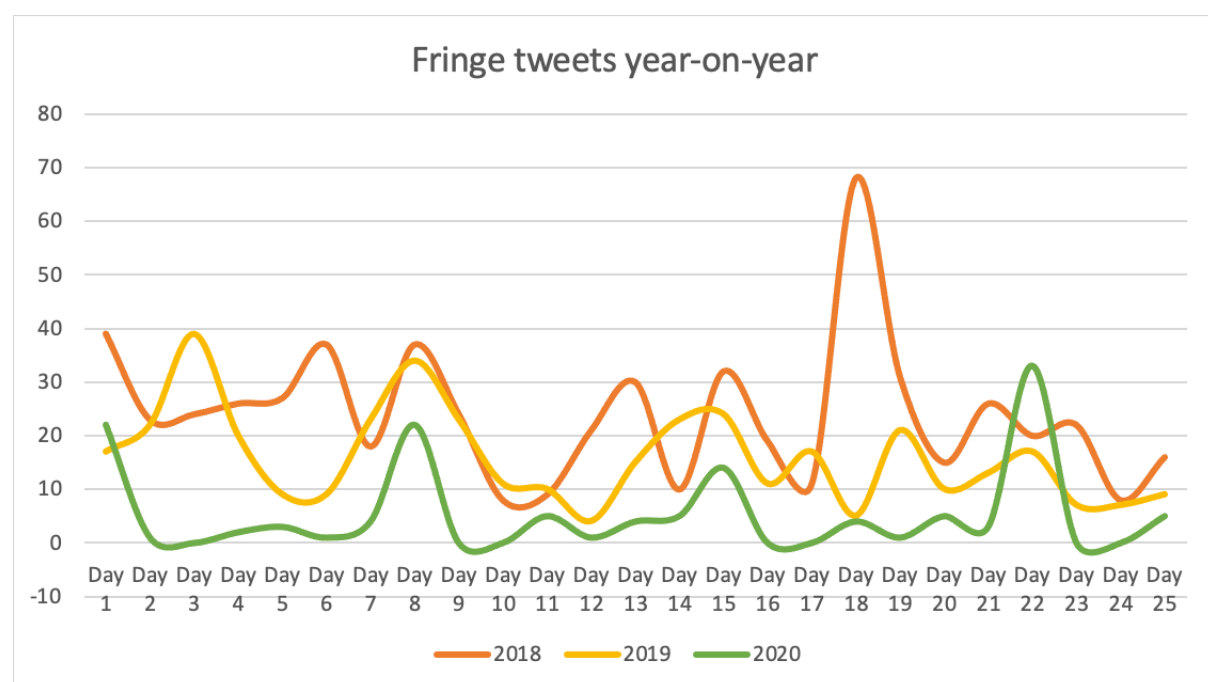


Figure 17: Frequency of tweets by @edfringe over the August festival period, compared year-on-year from 2018-2020 inclusive.

Based on the content of my interviews with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, there are a few factors which might, independently or together, contribute to the significant drop in the number of @edfringe tweets in 2020. The first is resource, there were perhaps fewer members of the Communications team during August 2020 as the organisation would not have recruited temporary, seasonal staff as it might have in the previous years. The second, is having less to say. As the organisation the operates the umbrella marketing campaign but also the citywide logistics of the festival, in 2018 and 2019 there would have been more operational information to share on social media –

street performers, access information, locations of ticket collection points, for example. The third, which has already been discussed, is the open access policy of the Fringe, which prevents (usually; see the final discussion of findings for more on this) the promotion of individual events via @edfringe accounts.

There may be other reasons too, and this is expanded here as a point of interest, not as a suggestion that tweeting less frequently represents any sort of a problem with the Fringe Society's communications strategy. With access to a comparable dataset across all my queries to the Twitter API for 2018 and 2019, I would be able to compare the proportion of tweets posted by @edfringe as a percentage of the dataset total year-on-year as a suggestion of the reach of the account relative to the work that goes into creating it. However, having retrieved the additional timeline data by happy accident, this comparison is not possible within the framework of Twitter's Developer terms in place at the time.

#### *Some qualitative analysis of the @edfringe Twitter timeline*

Having captured the announcement of the cancellation of the 2020 Edinburgh Science Festival in the previous case study and analysed the language used to present it, I decided to look for some roughly comparable content from the @edfringe timeline from this case study's Twitter dataset. The cancellation of the in-person Fringe took place before the data collection period but tweets that mark what would have been the opening and closing days of the festival feel apt for comparison.

The tone of the opening day tweet on 7 August 2020 (see Figure 18, below) is positive and warm, and the second part of the thread is collegial in its referencing of the other summer Edinburgh festivals that are unable to take place in-person due to the pandemic and are also delivering alternative programmes. Like Edinburgh Science's thread about the festival cancellation, it also feels carefully worded, but understandably with less gravity and urgency, and without focus on the Fringe in competition with other festivals but rather as a creative component of celebration through Edinburgh's role as a 'Festival City'.

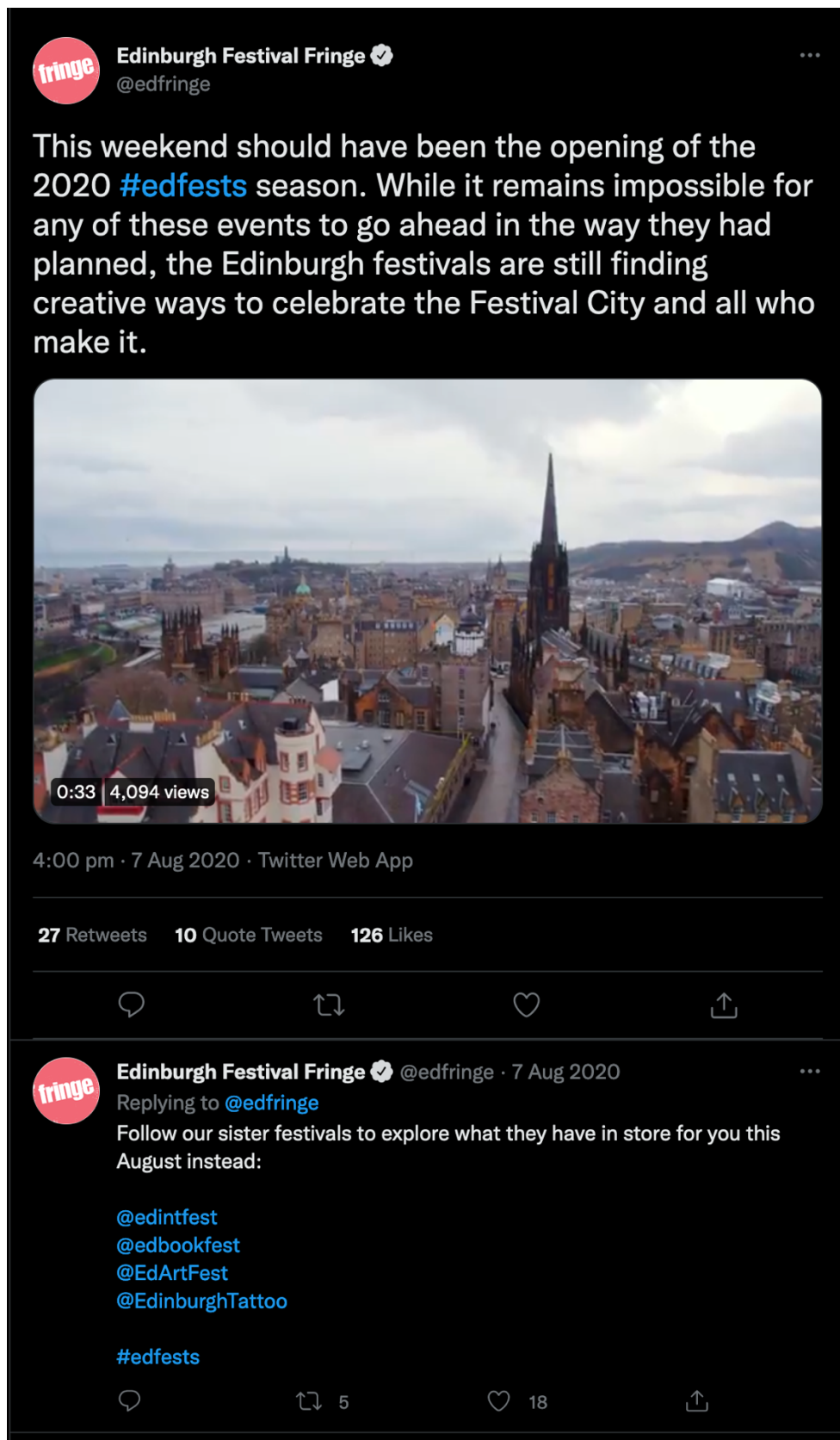


Figure 18: Tweet by @edfringe to mark what would have been the opening day of the festival on 7 August 2020. Available at:

<https://twitter.com/edfringe/status/1291750956250484738?s=21&dt=LFbUWnB1xo7UKIf5m3Eyuw>  
[Accessed 14 March 2023]

The closing tweet on 31 August 2020 is similarly light in tone and includes a GIF from the US comedy television series Parks and Recreation<sup>104</sup>.

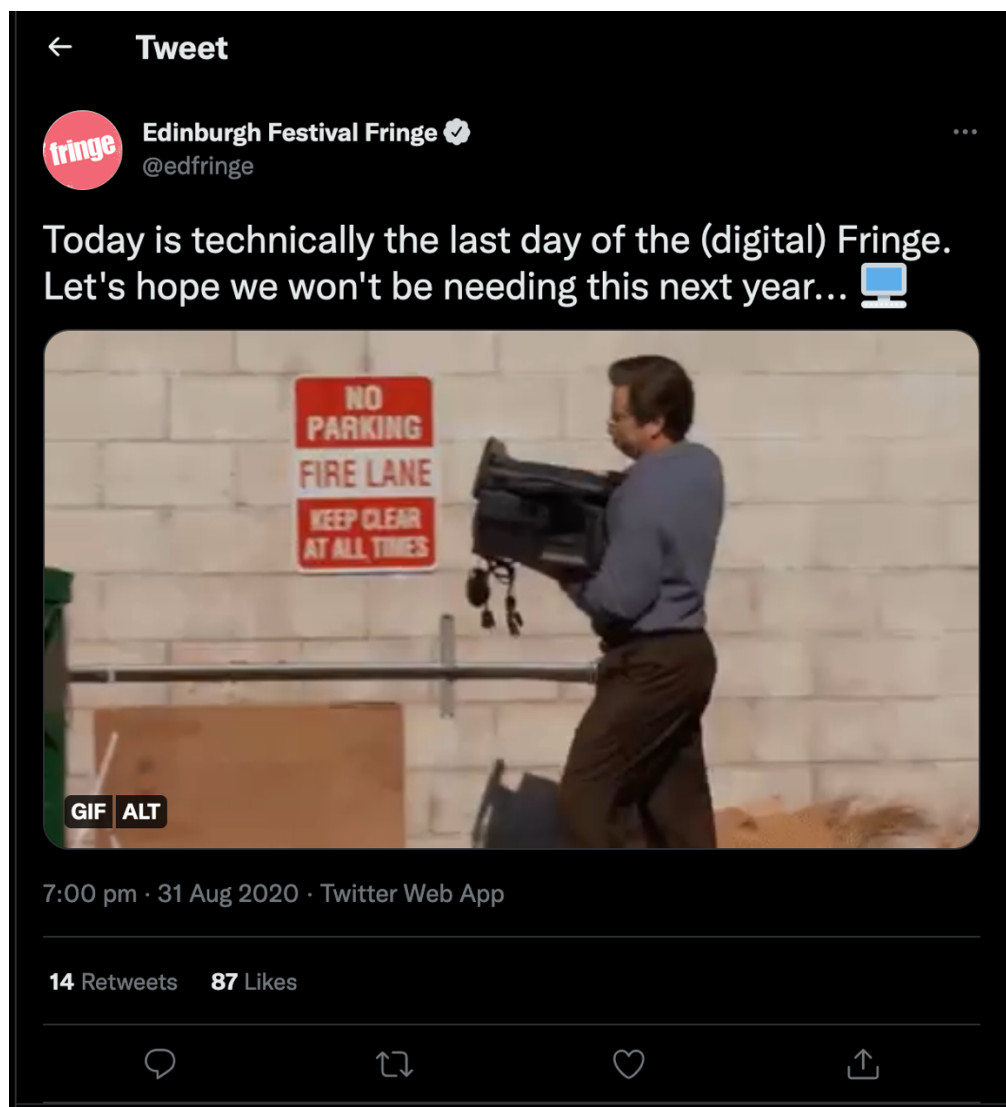


Figure 19: Tweet by @edfringe to mark what would have been the closing day of the festival on 31 August 2020. Available at: <https://twitter.com/edfringe/status/1300493557938049024> [Accessed 14 March 2023]

While intended to be humorous, the undertone of hope and expectation that digital festivals can be abandoned in future years feels – particularly, with further iterations of

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1266020/> [Accessed 3 September 2021]

the Fringe having taken place at the time of writing – naïve but also captures the extent to which festivals, audiences, people were ready to return to ‘normal’ by August 2020.

Another point of interest is in the replies to this tweet, where one user states that they had enjoyed the Fringe’s online platform for its artists’ hub, Fringe Central as part of the 2020, and asks whether some of this programming might remain in place. In reply, @edfringe tweets the following:



Figure 20: Reply by @edfringe in a Twitter thread (see Figure 18 above) on 31 August 2020. Available at <https://twitter.com/edfringe/status/1300493557938049024> [Accessed 14 March 2023]

## Conclusion

This case study built on findings from the work with Edinburgh Science towards an explanatory case study (Mills *et al.*, 2010) about how digital methods and research through social media might operate – both by itself and alongside contextualising material, in this case research interviews – as a means of understanding the value of these communications for cultural organisations. The use of the same or as similar as possible methods for defining the research protocol and conducting both the interviews and research on Twitter, has allowed me to make comparisons between the two case studies at each point in the findings above.

My research hypothesis for this case study was that communications around digital events and programmes had become more comfortable in the months since the Edinburgh Science case study in March–April 2020. From the work with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society in August–September 2020 and qualitative analysis conducted

on Twitter; this does seem to have been the case. While earlier I noted Edinburgh Science's somewhat awkward language around the digital festival programme, the Fringe Society's messaging feels more confident. However, this tone might also suggest a greater sense of public awareness of and familiarity with digital and online events as a format, rather than comfort and expertise that can be particularly associated with the Fringe. And, of course, the different structure of the communications for each organisation makes comparison between the two difficult. Edinburgh Science curates and promotes individual events in its festival programme, while the Fringe Society does neither of these.

My interviews with the Edinburgh Fringe Society displayed confidence and conveyed a sense of expertise in digital communications. They included discussion of strategies for measuring their value and values both through platforms and in other methods. The strategies and decisions mentioned when we spoke were well-developed – particularly the Fringe's customer journey mapping framework – and it felt as though audience evaluation and development, as well as an awareness of the value of the work of digital communications, was strongly represented in and through the participant I spoke to. These findings address the first of my research questions around the value of communications in the cultural sector and how is their value measured. The participant also addressed the second question around how value and values are communicated through digital communications, citing an example from a previous year's campaign which used communication of social values to engage audiences and recruit for the Fringe Society's membership schemes. While Edinburgh Science in their interviews during the pandemic seemed to suggest the value of digital work in the organisation had grown and would continue to grow, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society suggested that the organisation more broadly was already 'digitally savvy' and had attributed value to this work since before COVID-19.

Regarding the third research question on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as noted earlier, the tone of the Fringe Society's communications and those around it is very upbeat and positive for the Fringe's reimagined 2020 offer, perhaps almost relentlessly so. Certainly, the volume of tweets in the dataset suggests a broad and

extensive reach for the Fringe on Twitter, despite having itself posted significantly less than in previous years. In the conclusion to the previous section, I noted that in the earliest phases of COVID-19 lockdowns, no one had a “certificate of cultural competence” (Bourdieu, 1986). However, the Fringe’s Twitter communications a few months later display a confidence and ease which suggests that much learning about communicating during a pandemic had been done, and quickly.

Due to the different nature of the communications strategies between Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, and to the difference in size between the two datasets collected from Twitter, these two datasets were less comparable than I might have hoped for and expected at first. Each dataset presented its own set of conditions and conventions, some through the platform – the prevalence of tweets generated by a bot in the Fringe dataset, for example. Others developed through outside contexts such as the timing of the Science Festival cancellation and confusion at the start of the pandemic, or the open access policy at the Fringe that restricts the content of what the Fringe Society can post and promote on its social media channels. This contextualising work, both on and off the Twitter platform, has been instrumental in decision making through the social media collection and analysis, and has allowed me a degree of confidence in steering my way through the data, in particular with the Fringe where the volume of data was much greater.

## Exploring value and values messaging through content analysis

### Introduction

The purpose of this part of the research was to extend understandings of where and how Edinburgh festivals, and specifically Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, communicate their value and values beyond the Twitter platform which was the focus of the study of public-facing communications in the case studies above. Through the exploration of the more organisational, corporate communications texts on



festivals' websites, the aim was to broaden the data collected and analysis conducted beyond Twitter in response to my second research question:

How do the sector and its audiences communicate value and values, in Edinburgh and the sector more widely? What are the limitations and successes of current approaches?

This element of the research was designed to further contextualise communications of cultural value and values and test the robustness of the concept of a 'values gap' (Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2021) in organisational messages, as discussed above. However, these findings must also consider the fluidity of meaning in the keywords I draw out for analysis, particularly in the context of the immediate (in 2020) and ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on production and consumption in the cultural sector. The findings from this research were used to further the iteration of the research methodologies towards the final part of my empirical research, conducted through the Future Culture Edinburgh event.

This section will begin by revisiting the case study interviews and Twitter datasets through the lens of a 'values gap', which is defined here as an identifiable disconnection of language between the values that the organisation reports to hold in case study interviews, and the values that can be read through its communications on Twitter. It will then introduce an analysis of organisational value statements made both by computational and manual means. These findings will be used to further contextualise the communication of value and values in Edinburgh's cultural sector through the perspective of organisational, more corporate focused, messaging.

## Methodology

This part of the research collected text from Edinburgh festivals' websites: from the 'About Us' or similarly titled pages, which were found through desk research to be the most likely places that would contain evidence of an organisational values statement.

Once any references to human subjects had been manually removed from the texts, the statements were collated in a Microsoft Word document and uploaded to the online analysis environment Voyant Tools<sup>105</sup>, to produce text visualisations and sentiment analysis. Alongside this visualisation and analysis, close reading was also conducted manually to allow for comparison of computational and human approaches, and for broader, multiple perspectives of the complexity of the language cultural organisations use to describe their value and values<sup>106</sup>.

The findings presented here will focus on a comparison between Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society. They will explore the idea of a ‘values gap’ between what an organisation says it does and what it does, and how; and about communications of value and the value of communications, in response to my second thesis research question. The analysis will also begin to address the third research question about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on understandings of value and values in the cultural sector and the inequities of access that were pre-existing but brought into sharper focus in 2020 and 2021, as discussed in the literature review.

#### Contextualising and building on case study findings

The findings from case studies with Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society show the complexity of the nature of these organisations’ communications of value and values, and the pivotal core role of these organisations’ communications teams to do this work and do it well. We have seen that the value of the work of communications in organisations is not always straightforward, particularly when it comes to the value of producing digital communications. In addition, the work of connecting the values of cultural organisations with audiences new and existing is complex and multi-layered, mediated through multiple platforms and delivered in many contexts, both on and offline.

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<sup>105</sup> <https://voyant-tools.org> [Accessed 22 June 2022]

<sup>106</sup> At the time of writing, it would have been possible to explore these methods through newer platforms such as ChatGPT to consider the keywords and tone of messaging aimed more directly at funder and stakeholder audiences.

As the conclusions to the case study findings above have shown, working off-platform with texts from social media like Twitter, which are made with platform conventions in mind, can be problematic because on-platform digital traces and affordances do not always clearly translate to other contexts. This was shown above by the prevalence of bot-generated tweets in the Fringe Twitter dataset.

Of course, the cancellations of live elements for both the Edinburgh Science Festival and the Fringe due to COVID-19 renders the communications around their 2020 programmes unique and non-standard for what datasets may have been available for analysis in other years. However, it should be noted that, for the Fringe, quantitative analysis of Twitter data shows that the pattern of outgoing communications was broadly like that of previous years.

Exploring a possible ‘values gap’

#### *Interviews*

The marketing and communications workers I spoke to at Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society spoke confidently and in detail about their work communicating value and values.

For Edinburgh Science, the value of digital communications work was expressed in both time and money. A difference was noted between the work of “broadcasting” content and that of engaging in “interactions” with customers which, while more time-consuming, were felt to be more worthwhile “because that’s where we sort of decided that the value is” (Edinburgh Science Participant #1, 2019), even if this resulted in smaller audience numbers on social media.

Interacting with audiences was felt to be a better strategy because of the relationship it is perceived to generate between the organisation, specifically the member of the team posting on social media, and audiences:

“I think it feels like a more lasting connection with the audience... and I think I’d probably say that because, especially the way things are going around the platforms themselves are moving away from ‘more people, more people, more people’, making that harder. You know, Instagram is the example of testing hiding likes and all that sort of thing. They are trying to gear us towards interactions because I think they also see that there’s more value in it in terms of, like I said, what you can get out of it. But also, it’s actually more fun to create content that sparks conversation, or that is responding to an existing conversation, at least for me.” (Edinburgh Science Participant #1, 2019)

Participant #5 (2020) noted the conscious decision not to frame the 2020 digital programme as a festival, suggesting the sense that the live festival programme is at the heart of the Edinburgh Science’s organisational value proposition. Given the longer-term impacts and developments, which are still ongoing, it is worth questioning whether, with hindsight, that participant would feel the same.

My interviews with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society strongly suggested that the organisation sees value in the work of communications and marketing and that they use organisational values to inform the practice of those members of the team involved in this work. The Fringe’s ‘open access’ structure – the organisation’s central value proposition that says that anyone with a show and a venue to perform in is welcome to do so – is repeatedly reported to be at the heart of the Fringe’s work and ethos for promoting the festival.

The participant felt that the values and sense of purpose that the organisation was trying to communicate could be effectively captured by a digital marketer responding to a particular moment in time in a manner that felt authentic. They offered examples of where these instinctive posts on platforms had been successful in generating large levels of engagement, as measured by social media metrics. Their aim was to foster a culture in the communications team that being experimental and reactive in their content production was encouraged and that it was fine for these experiments to fail if you learn from them. Their view was that instinct was almost more rather than less vital

now that quantitative social media metrics are so accessible. They told me that instinct acts as a reminder of the importance of authenticity and values, but that “we need to put it in a framework” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6, 2020) to ensure these more reactive posts adhere to the Fringe’s tone of voice guidelines. However, as findings from the Fringe’s 2020 Twitter dataset above show, most of the communications shared by the Fringe over the period of data collection were quite homogenous in their messaging, with a low number of tweets in comparison to the overall size of the dataset. This suggests a gap at the Fringe Society, between organisational values communicated to me for the purposes of research, and the evidence and inferences of the communications shared on Twitter.

The Fringe was the most confident of the two organisations in expressing its expertise. They had created a customer journey map, the success of which they felt showed that the Fringe was successfully communicating its values to audiences and achieving “authenticity” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6, 2020) in its campaigns. They discussed approaching the Society’s marketing through “content threads” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6, 2020) which are relevant in their alignment with the values of its audiences and encourage co-creation of value between the organisation, audiences, and festival participants. For artists and companies taking part in the Fringe, this interviewee was also confident in the organisation’s provision of “metrics that matter” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Participant #6, 2020) and that they were sharing the organisation’s expertise with its networks. The interview demonstrated the interviewee’s sense of security and certitude in the value and values of the Fringe’s communications strategy.

That said, the Fringe noted a disconnection between the value of marketing on social media and its ability to convert audiences here into ticket-buyers, stating that they are, in fact, less likely to purchase tickets than those who do not engage on these platforms. This observation might, along with other on and off-platform metrics and measurements of audience engagement and behaviours, offer some clues as to the Fringe’s audience demographics. On social media, the Fringe participant stated that the

organisation has directed its digital marketing towards clearly communicating a value proposition and aligning shared values, including broader social values.

#### Twitter data

##### *Numbers*

As discussed previously, in distilling and counting single terms without analysing the context of the phrases which surround them, analysis of term frequencies and hashtags is reductive and not a reliable indication of the presence or absence of values-led communications. However, these terms can serve as indicators of the themes around which users are connecting with one another on the platform (Venturini *et al.*, 2018).

For both case studies, quantitative analysis of tweets was conducted using R in the RStudio environment, as detailed above. The two most popular Fringe hashtags (which are in fact one and the same apart from capitalisation) show that the year-on-year campaign centred around #edfringe is and has continued to be despite the programme changes in 2020, central to driving and magnifying communications on the platform. 'edfringe' is also the most used term in these tweets alongside 'edinburgh' and 'fringe', reinforcing what we know about the Fringe Society's open access structure and associated values – that this campaign and the content of its tweets is more concerned with the Fringe as a brand, rather than the content of the events it is promoting.

In contrast, while Edinburgh Science's most popular hashtags – #EdSciFest and #EdUniEdSciFest – are also campaign-led, the greater prominence of frequent terms around the content of the programme offers more sense of the existence of direct communications about the form the digital programme on offer in 2020 takes.

| Edinburgh Science                                                                 |                   |       | Edinburgh Festival Fringe                                                          |                 |       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------|
|  |                   |       |  |                 |       |
|                                                                                   | hashtags          | Freq  |                                                                                    | hashtags        | Freq  |
|                                                                                   | <fct>             | <int> |                                                                                    | <fct>           | <int> |
| 112                                                                               | #EarthLiveLessons | 51    |                                                                                    |                 |       |
| 237                                                                               | #NAME             | 66    | 1749                                                                               | #lovelondon     | 1089  |
| 124                                                                               | #Edinburgh        | 71    | 2784                                                                               | #thejohnfleming | 1418  |
| 380                                                                               | #YCW2020          | 89    | 367                                                                                | #blog           | 1422  |
| 138                                                                               | #EdUniEdSciFest   | 144   | 855                                                                                | #Edinburgh      | 1713  |
| 131                                                                               | #EdSciFest        | 1024  | 827                                                                                | #EdFringe       | 1830  |
|                                                                                   |                   |       | 824                                                                                | #edfringe       | 4502  |

Table 2: Frequent terms word clouds and most used hashtags from case study Twitter datasets from Edinburgh Science and Edinburgh Festival Fringe, analysed in RStudio

### Close reading

The Fringe is led by its ‘open access’ policy which prevents the direct promotion of individual shows and performances and makes its own timeline of tweets feel quite repetitive. It is difficult to communicate value and values in this context and there is little evidence that they are central to these tweets with any regularity. Edinburgh Science Festival is curated and promoted by Edinburgh Science and is therefore able to promote its programmes in a more creative and varied fashion. However, this is not clearly demonstrated by the dataset collected in this research, which is likely to be largely because of the circumstances of the cancellation of the live festival and its

proximity to the announcement of the UK's first lockdown. In the Edinburgh Science Twitter dataset, the deliberate choice of language that is not aligned with live events feels wordy and cumbersome, particularly when subjected to close reading with little context. From the evidence of this dataset, alongside analysis of interview transcripts, Edinburgh Science demonstrates a top-down approach to marketing, which does not support some of the statements around value and values made during interviews. This suggests a 'values gap' in that strategic work around values takes place at a high level, but this is not effectively communicated or monitored internally to those members of staff responsible for the day-to-day delivery of communications. However, this may in part be because of the range of the team I interviewed at Edinburgh Science – from those delivering communications to those strategizing around both marketing and the festival overall – in comparison to having spoken only to the individual with responsibility for communications strategy at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society.

#### *Website text analysis*

For both case study organisations, the 'About Us'<sup>107</sup> or similar pages on their websites summarise their offering and value proposition and include some information about the organisation's values. The data analysed for the Fringe also includes descriptor text for the 'Fringe Blueprint', the Society's commitments for the organisation from its 70th anniversary in 2017 to its 75th in 2022. Computational analysis using Voyant Tools (Table 2) included word clouds of most frequent terms. Network diagrams, shown below, show keywords in blue with collocates (words in proximity to keywords) in orange.

Interestingly, these diagrams do not show much evidence of terms which might be explicitly linked to organisational values and the cultural value of their work. The most frequent terms shown in the word clouds are direct and descriptive, and the same is

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<sup>107</sup> Edinburgh Science: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210624102312/https://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/about> [Accessed 22 June 2021, archived link dated 24 June 2021]; Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210710022505/https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us> [Accessed 22 June 2021, archived link dated 10 July 2021] and <https://web.archive.org/web/20210622134819/https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us/blueprint> [Accessed and archived link dated 22 June 2021]



largely the case in the network diagram keywords, although there are some suggestions of value and values-based statements. With Edinburgh Science, these include ‘engagement’, ‘celebration’ and ‘education’ as keywords and ‘explore’ and ‘create’ as collocates. For the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, keywords and collocates are formed around the word ‘support’ and ‘audience’, alongside more festival participant led practical references to ‘marketing’, ‘media’ and ‘campaign’.

Analysis of the keyword diagrams in Table 2 goes some way to suggesting who these statements might be for. Edinburgh Science’s keywords suggest a more generalised and central value proposition around engagement with science which could be relevant to multiple stakeholders across all strands of the year-round programme, which includes educational programmes in and for schools, and the management of events taking place worldwide. For the Fringe, the ‘About Us’ pages seem more directed towards festival participants, with the Fringe Society acting as a support network connecting participants with audiences.



## Edinburgh Science:

### SCIENCE ABOUT

Edinburgh Science Foundation is an educational charity, founded in 1989, which operates Edinburgh Science's Education and Festival programmes. We are best known for organising Edinburgh's annual Science Festival – the world's first public celebration of science and technology as a festival and still one of Europe's largest – as well as our science education outreach programmes, Generation Science and Careers Hive and our community engagement work. Our mission is to inspire, encourage and challenge people of all ages and backgrounds to explore and understand the world around them. As leaders in our field of Science Communication, we work year-round to create and deliver dynamic hands-on workshops and exhibitions and inspirational shows, discussions, debates and performances that continually push the boundaries of public engagement with science. Communication and engagement is at the core of all our work and we strive to ensure that this is embedded in all aspects of our organisation. Our 2019 Festival spanning Saturday 6 – Sunday 21 April saw major success in the shape of our programme and our new Festival Hub – The Pleasance. With a focus on Frontiers in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the moon landings, we welcomed 175,000 visitors to explore the world around them, ask the difficult questions and get hands-on with science, technology, engineering and maths. Our education touring programme Generation Science reached more than 55,000 pupils at 560 across all 32 of Scotland's local constituencies. Secondary schools careers event Careers Hive welcomed nearly 3000 of students to the National Museum of Scotland to explore real-world STEM careers, discover their own strengths and chat to industry volunteers. Edinburgh Science also operates a large-scale international programme of work under our Worldwide arm. It regularly presents events overseas and is currently the Major Programming Partner of the annual Abu Dhabi Science Festival, helping to curate, produce and deliver the event. For international partners, the team at Edinburgh Science provide engaging content, curatorial advice on programming and business planning support, along with expert staff and training for local science communicators.

Figure 21: manual content analysis of Edinburgh Science 'About Us' text from

<https://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/about> [Accessed 22 June 2021]

## Fringe:

### FRINGE ABOUT

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society is the organisation that underpins the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The founding principle at the heart of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe is to be an open access festival that accommodates anyone with a desire to perform and a venue willing to host them. No single individual or committee determines who can or cannot perform at the Fringe. The Fringe Society is the custodian of the Fringe's core values of open access and freedom of expression. The Fringe Society has three core objectives: Provide support, advice and encouragement to all participants. The Fringe Society supports and encourages anyone who wants to take part – all the amazing artists, producers, venues, arts industry professionals and members of the media. From choosing a venue to creating a successful marketing campaign, the Fringe Society is on hand all year round with one-to-one tailored advice, events, facilities and online resources. Assist the audiences who come to Edinburgh to navigate what's on offer. The Fringe Society provides ticketing through a centralised box office, offering tickets to every show on the Fringe, and a wealth of information via the official Fringe Programme, website and mobile app. We continuously improve and expand our services to ensure the best possible experience for Fringe audiences. Celebrate the Fringe and what it stands for all over the world. The Fringe Society markets the Fringe in its entirety – locally, nationally and internationally – to participants, the public, media and arts industry to retain its position as the world's leading arts festival. As well as delivering a high-profile annual marketing and media campaign, the Society works closely with media outlets all over the world to maximise publicity for the Fringe. How the Fringe is supported? The Fringe Society is a registered charity which relies on both the support of sponsors and partners and the generosity of our Angels, Patrons, Friends and supporters. Continuing to deliver and develop our core aims of supporting participants, assisting Fringe audiences and promoting this wonderful festival to the rest of the world requires the support of many individuals and organisations. We ask you to join us in supporting this creative endeavour and ensuring that the Fringe remains a platform for the arts to develop and thrive. Visit the support us section of the site to find out more. We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to express themselves through creativity and experience the thrill of live performance. No matter who you are or where you come from, everyone is welcome on the Fringe. No individual or committee determines who can or cannot appear. You, the audience, curate your own festival. It all began in 1947 with eight companies taking a risk, turning up uninvited and performing on the 'fringe' of the inaugural Edinburgh International Festival. Over 70 years later, the Fringe has grown to become the greatest platform for creative freedom in the world. It is at the centre of a global movement of over 200 fringe festivals, each following in Edinburgh's footsteps. Taking inspiration from the original eight, the Fringe Society – a charity established by participants to act as the custodian of the Fringe – is making eight firm commitments that together make up the Fringe Blueprint, a statement of intent that will inform everything we do between now and our 75th anniversary in 2022. Much like the Fringe itself, we can't achieve any of this on our own. It will require a huge collective effort – from participants, audience members, government, councillors, businesses, partners and funders – but together we can make the world's greatest platform for creative freedom even more accessible, affordable, connected and relevant than ever before.

Figure 22: manual content analysis of Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society 'About Us' text from

<https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us> and <https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us/blueprint>

[Accessed 22 June 2021]

Although the computational analysis has picked up keywords across each of the texts, this short visual analysis shows that there is also more values-based language

contained within them. The manual content analysis has highlighted some standalone words aligned with value and values which were not deemed keywords in Voyant Tools. But perhaps more importantly, it has highlighted longer phrases linked to values that do not appear in the diagrams in Table 3, suggesting that communications of value and values are likely to be complex in narrative construction and difficult to measure through reducing a text to individual vocabulary.

While the website analysis above shows the clear limitations of computational reading analysis as a means of studying communications, the inferences around the intended audience for each of the texts and central value proposition suggested by the Voyant Tools analysis is borne out in closer reading of each text. Edinburgh Science situates its organisation as a charity with a central “mission” and an educational focus that will appeal to multiple stakeholders across several programmes and strand of its work: audiences, but also schools, other event producers, and crucially funders and supporters. For the Fringe, the “core values of open access and freedom of expression” and “core aims of supporting participants” are focused on festival participants, as indicated in the computational analysis. The Fringe also positions itself as a service provider for both audiences and participants, reinforcing the suggestion that the organisation acts as a support structure and network through which participants and audiences can communicate their own value and values, adding another layer to the value proposition of the Society.

As was the case with the findings from my interviews and Twitter data, the two organisations once again do not feel directly comparable. What is similar across both organisations though is the evidence from the analysis of Twitter and website texts that suggests a possible lack of attention to audiences and stakeholders in their communications, which seem both generalised and generic. As such, this stage of the research backs up the previous findings of a ‘values gap’ between the structures and practices of communication discussed in my case study interview and the evidence provided by records of the day-to-day work of marketing and communications (Glow *et al.*, 2021).

### *Conclusions and further iterations of this research*

The purpose of this short exercise was to broaden my analysis of the communication of value and values beyond social media data collected from Twitter. By including organisational, corporate-style communications texts in my analysis, I hoped to understand more of the layers of communications that make up the work of communications in my two case study organisations, and to explore these through lenses that reflect more of the audiences these organisations seek to reach. As I know from my own professional experience, organisations' websites are, of course, more static in their content than a social media platform. The content stays there longer, it is written to be a concise but illuminating description of that organisation's core purpose or value proposition.

With that in mind, two things stood out to me in the findings from this short piece of research. The first is the extent to which organisational statements about value really do seem quite hollow, particularly when viewed through the lens of the uncertainty, precarity and disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. The second is the sense that these 'About Us' statements seem to be attempting to speak to a completely different audience or audiences than the communications I found on Twitter. This may seem obvious – these statements are likely aimed at stakeholders, funders, sponsors, or other organisations, rather than individuals and audience segments – but why must the two necessarily be different? And what would happen to the overall strength of the organisations' values and sense of cultural value if these two modes of communications spoke to one another more directly?

These questions return us to the tensions between the commercial concerns of cultural organisations, festivals and cultural destinations who have an economic imperative to market themselves as a brand and to attract funding and sponsorship, and notions of cultural value linked to ideas of innate human creativity and the value of art that is perceived to transcend, and is therefore able to ignore, economic imperatives through a sense of a moral high ground. These ideas are addressed in the literature review and will be revisited in the overall discussion of findings. Similarly, the sense of an emerging



‘pivot to purpose’ (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022) in the cultural sector as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic is shown through my case study findings and in the literature review to have had a disruptive effect on the language and terms cultural organisations and festivals use to describe themselves, which is demonstrated particularly by Edinburgh Science in the wake of the festival cancellation in March 2020. Again, this observation seems obvious, but the question really is what will come next? How will organisations address the perceived gap between the values they state and the values they enact which is suggested by this research, and who can influence this shift, and how? As footnoted above, since conducting this work, the hype and increased awareness surrounding Large Language Model Generative AI text platforms such as ChatGPT and their use as potential authors of the kinds of communications studied here<sup>108</sup>, brings a different perspective to computational text generation and analysis in research of this kind. As an avenue for further development of communications research in the cultural sector, experiments with large language models of this kind – including their use in producing communications messaging and its reception by audiences and stakeholders – would be an area for further exploration.

However, when this part of the research ended in 2021, generative AI was not yet a part of public conversation about inequities and shifting expectations of cultural sector workforces and audiences. Instead, the backdrop of broader and more urgent, public calls for addressing inequities in access to cultural activities and jobs in Edinburgh and around the UK brought about the design of the final iteration of this research, *Future Culture Edinburgh*.

## Aligned research

As outlined in Chapter 2, this research has taken place alongside and been informed by my aligned research practice, in particular my work with the Edinburgh Culture and

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<sup>108</sup> See for example corporate insights provider Gartner’s reflections and FAQs about ChatGPT, 5 April 2023 <https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/your-7-biggest-chatgpt-questions-answered> [Accessed 8 June 2023]

Communities Mapping Project and with Creative Informatics, funded by the AHRC's Creative Industries Clusters Programme<sup>109</sup>.

The Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project's research, over several projects, demonstrated awareness of inequalities of access to cultural infrastructure and activities. This began with workshops conducted in 2019, which used cultural mapping (Lee and Gilmore, 2012; Duxbury *et al.*, 2015; Currie and Correa, 2021) to identify cultural hubs and organisations in Edinburgh's communities outside the city centre. Reflections from the Culture and Communities Mapping Project outlined Currie and Correa in a 2021 paper titled 'Tangibles, intangibles and other tensions in the Culture and Communities Mapping Project', note that the epistemologies of cultural mapping extend beyond traditional cartographical approaches by mapping spaces alongside values. As such, Currie and Correa state that:

“cultural mapping offers a democratic approach to regional cultural policy – both in terms of *who* can define and access culture and shape cultural policy and in terms of *what* gets counted and funded as part of the cultural landscape.”  
(Currie and Correa, 2021, p. 3)

They note that cultural maps are able to “engage, sometimes simultaneously, these different epistemological registers” (Currie and Correa, 2021, p. 4) and overlay multiple contexts and perspectives – those of participants in the mapping process, but also other datasets including, in the case of the Edinburgh Cultural Map, public datasets such as the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020<sup>110</sup>, City of Edinburgh Council funded cultural organisations over multiple years, and city transport network data. As such, cultural maps can “accommodate subjective experiences, varied social values and multiple interpretations, just as they can capture more utilitarian data to produce cultural metrics.” (Currie and Correa, 2021, pp. 4-5) Cultural mapping, for the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project, is a method which can incorporate tangible,

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<sup>109</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/creative-industries-clusters-programme/> [Accessed 14 August 2024]

<sup>110</sup> <https://www.simd.scot> (Accessed 27 February 2022)

quantitative information – geographical coordinates, for example – alongside tangible qualitative information, such as descriptions of the materials of a physical place or space. In turn this method also captures intangible information – participants’ feelings and perceptions about a place, and the stories which explain the codes and values embedded in these perceptions – and codifies it to the extent that each of these “modalities of representation” (Currie and Correa, 2021, p. 5) can interoperate and overlay one another. For the purposes of this piece of work, this layered approach to understanding multiple perspectives on decision making about cultural value, offers opportunities for considering the communication of value and values in Edinburgh’s cultural sector through multiple lenses, and connects to a visualisation of Edinburgh’s cultural map, in its broadest sense, as being a value constellation which is not entirely aware of the feedback loops within it and the opportunities for value exchange and co-creation that may present themselves there.

In 2020, the Art in and Out of Lockdown project explored the power of culture to transcend crisis and support people at a very local level, through cultural activities but also through the networked support of services and connections that cultural community hubs can deliver (Jones *et al.*, 2020). In 2021, the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project worked on research supported by Festivals Edinburgh and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society to explore perceptions of Edinburgh’s Festivals in workshops with communities around the city. This work, and the *Mapping Cultural Dispersal Report* (Jones and Currie, 2022) that resulted from it, has particularly informed the development of the ideas that contributed to the design of *Future Culture Edinburgh* and the findings presented in this thesis. These workshops, programmed in collaboration with community hubs around the city, included perception of a lack of engagement with the city’s communities outside the city centre is not only present around work specifically with and for communities, but also in a feeling that festivals are not engaging Edinburgh’s communities with their centralised, core ticketed offer. Also expressed were views about festivals-related tourism and the idea that the August festivals are a particular version of Edinburgh; the extent to which participants felt part of or outside the concentration of festivals in the city centre; and barriers to access for communities. The groups included voices celebrating the festivals as a part of the city’s



cultural ecosystem, and a desire for festivals to market themselves more directly to residents in communities that might be easily dismissed because of their status on the city's geographical peripheries. Perhaps most powerful of all were stories of when festival events had been programmed *in* Edinburgh's communities, attracting tourists to areas of the city they would not usually be expected to explore (Jones and Currie, 2022). The Culture and Communities Mapping Project continues to update the Festivals and Communities Map<sup>111</sup>, and I have also led the development of another map looking at aspirations for open data and audience insights with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, funded by the Data-Driven Innovation initiative (DDI) in summer 2023<sup>112</sup>. These projects show there is willingness in cultural sector organisations to engage with research that explores challenges and inequities and offers insights and ideas into how to understand them that might not be possible from within the cultural sector alone.

This distinct perception of a lack of connection between Edinburgh's communities and the festivals (Jones and Currie, 2022) could be a result of Edinburgh's particular geographies, but this does not mean that a connection could not be made. Lynch and Quinn (2022) suggest that festivals' construction of place, and the place's construction of festivals, might bring about a co-created "Mutually inter-dependent process between the festival, place and the creative process" (Lynch and Quinn, 2022, p. 15). What the Culture and Communities Mapping Project found, however, was that in Edinburgh, the 'creative process' part of this co-creation was not linked to the city's communities, unless it was devised as a particular programme of community engagement which takes place outwith the festivals' central, public-facing programmes (Jones and Currie, 2022). In addition to the ideas of cultural dispersal proposed by the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project (Jones and Currie, 2022) with regard to the city's festivals, the pandemic and resulting lockdowns could be viewed as a moment of pause in which to consider whether cultural programmes and outputs, the workforce that produces them and the audiences which consume them, could be developed and expanded to create a cultural infrastructure that is more equitable and open to broader

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<sup>111</sup> <https://www.edinburghculturalmap.org/research/festivals-communities-map/> [Accessed 14 June 2023]

<sup>112</sup> Map available at <https://www.edinburghculturalmap.org/research/edinburgh-festival-fringe-open-audience-insights-map/> [Accessed 2 July 2023] More information about the funding is available at <https://ddi.ac.uk/what-we-do/academics/previous-open-call-summaries/social-change-opencall/> [Accessed 14 June 2023]

and more inclusive participation. This recalibration might involve cultural organisations rethinking programming; marketing and audience development; and community engagement and learning programmes. Policymakers and other stakeholders might shift approaches to funding; access to cultural spaces; and inequalities in accessing opportunities to enter cultural work and professions.

The Creative Informatics project that produced *FestForward* Magazine in 2022, which explored how digital technologies, data-driven innovation and online platforms for performance can support equitable and sustainable futures for festivals in Edinburgh and South East Scotland in 2030, was initiated shortly after *Future Culture Edinburgh* in 2021. Findings and reflections from the Leith Theatre event informed the scoping of the landscape for this research, which from there took a more formulated speculative design-led approach (Kozubaev *et al.*, 2020) than *Future Culture Edinburgh* had done to devise imagined possible and preferable futures for festivals in 2030. In addition to the creativity expressed through the *FestForward* Magazine output as an artefact, the research conducted through this project suggests the value of futures-focused thinking and research, that was also explored through *Future Culture Edinburgh*, as a means of enabling change and changemaking. The framework of participatory futuring (Kozubaev *et al.*, 2020) allowed the research to step back from the immediate challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and consider ways in which to make and hold space for complex conversations about futures for the region's cultural sector. This was not to ignore contemporary challenges and contexts of economic precarity or known inequities of access to cultural production and consumption, but to use our positionality as researchers to encourage participants to acknowledge these positions and take the opportunity to imagine possible and preferable near futures. For research participants, these imaginaries acted as hooks on which to hang discussions that incorporate contemporary ideas, opportunities, and challenges while playfully imagining diverse future outcomes. In addition, as a speculative artefact, *FestForward* Magazine continues to act as a tool for discussion and for creatively imagining preferable futures – for those who make and consume live experiences, but also as a way of sharing their experiences with funders and policymakers with a view to redesigning creative economies to be more equitable and sustainable.

As someone who worked in the cultural sector, as an arts marketer, in Edinburgh, before beginning to research the city's cultural sector, I am conscious of an obvious difference when I approach the challenges addresses in this thesis and in the work detailed above as 'a researcher'. The conversations I have, and the experiences cultural sector workers share with me, are different but not dissimilar to those I would have previously had when those who are now research participants were my colleagues and peers. But, in carrying out the research in this thesis and on these projects, I have learned new, practice-aligned ways of building relationships with those who work in and programme Edinburgh's cultural sector and festivals that I hope will continue to inform my own research into cultural policy studies, arts management, and the creative industries, and commitment to a more just, open, accessible, equitable and sustainable cultural sector. Research – partly but not only through the additional resources researchers provide in time, space, and funding – has the capacity to support the cultural sector to have and hold sometimes difficult conversations, in a more neutral setting, that might otherwise be brushed under the carpet in the cycle of 'business as usual'<sup>113</sup>. It can introduce and support new ways of evaluating and reflecting on practices of cultural production and consumption and offer alternative lenses on complex problems. It can, as *Future Culture Edinburgh* sought to do, offer platforms to voices that have been traditionally less heard in public discourse around cultural policy and practice. Or, as in *FestForward* Magazine, it can bring together challenges that might not immediately be perceived as related, such as digital technologies and equity and sustainability, that *Future Culture Edinburgh* found were not previously strongly linked in the sector's view.

During my PhD research I have faced challenges in balancing my professional practice experience and knowledge with my role as a researcher, and in using this practice-based lens to study the practices of defining and actioning cultural value and values. In my aligned research with the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project there have also been challenges in navigating parameters and expectations from

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<sup>113</sup> A useful lens of a broader sense of the position and privilege of those able to work on emerging futures can be found in the work of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Emerging Futures programme of work. For example, at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/building-alternative-futures> [Accessed 19 June 2023]

partners and participants. Supported by Festivals Edinburgh and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, in producing research and reports on the Mapping Cultural Dispersal project, we were required to balance relationships and expectations between the research team, a festival, and a strategic festivals organisation, who may have seen this work as part of the work of communicating and justifying their existing value propositions – ‘the way things have always been’. This is not always easy. And, in order to take a socially engaged and practice based approach to cultural research – as proposed in this thesis and in the aligned research, sometimes commissioned, I have been part of alongside it – I hope my findings make a case for openness and transparency around expectations around research outcomes and their communication, even when those may challenge the value and values that researchers, organisations and participants hold. In fact, in exploring these points of tension, it is possible to make interesting observations about practitioner, researcher and participants approaches to navigating the complexities that arise from these co-creative partnerships, and to test the limits of reflexive practice in negotiating the professional and ethical dimensions of when, where and how these findings may be shared.

## Future Culture Edinburgh

### Introduction

As my case study findings about the nature of work in digital communications show, marketers are seemingly self-sufficient, knowledgeable, and confident in their work for, with and on digital platforms. They have had to acquire and adapt the skills to do this themselves over time as this type of cultural work has grown and developed, and the process of producing and consuming cultural events and activities has become further mediated by and through platforms and online channels. However, as this research also shows, there is a difference between the value of the work of communications as the public-facing arm of an organisation, and their perceived value to the organisation,

where communications staff reported having to justify their work to others in the organisation, particularly at a board or strategic level.

The analysis of organisational statements of their vision and purpose above supports the idea of a disconnection between more corporate, brand focused communications on organisations' websites and that of the day-to-day delivery of organisational messaging on social media. This disconnection, supported by evidence from case study interviews, seems to go beyond the reasonable expectation that different platforms for communications are aimed at different audiences. Instead, the evidence of communications of value in both case study organisations, albeit in different ways, suggests a 'values gap' (Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2021) – a more fragmented and unequal picture of cultural value that speaks to an absence of creative justice for cultural work (Banks, 2017).

During the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, calls grew for a need to address the inequalities of access to cultural activities in Edinburgh demonstrated by research, including my own aligned research discussed above, such as the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project (Jones and Currie, 2022). UK-wide research demonstrates inequalities of access to cultural events and activities, but also jobs and professions (Brook *et al.*, 2020), as well as a trend towards projecting 'omnivorousness' and openness rather than snobbery in cultural tastes and tastemakers (O'Brien and Ianni, 2022) – those in cultural jobs – that indicates a shift towards a values-led cultural sector and a "new theory of value, both of the value of culture, and of the value of persons" (Brook *et al.*, 2020, p. 282).

*Future Culture Edinburgh*, a symposium-style event, was devised by me and freelance creative and former independent producer Morvern Cunningham and held in September 2021. The aim was to inspire creative thinking and collective action towards new theories of value that prioritise more equitable and inclusive futures for Edinburgh's cultural sector. This part of the research addresses my fourth and fifth research questions: experimenting with research methods and approaches that could support change and help address inequalities; and exploring how a values-led cultural sector in

Edinburgh might look and feel, what it might do, and how its success could be measured.

Following on from reflections on devising, programming, and presenting the event in the Methodology chapter, this section will address findings from *Future Culture Edinburgh* based on the content of the discussions that took place on the day, and data collected through activities during the session. It will consider what we term ‘values for change’ and changemaking and suggest principles and mechanisms which the event found might continue to drive policy and practice dialogues on these topics towards creative justice (Banks, 2017). These specific findings will be addressed here, and these ideas will be carried through into the context of the entirety of this research in the discussion of findings section, with developments in both my own and the sector’s approaches since 2021 considered in the thesis conclusion.

*Future Culture Edinburgh* is also documented on the Edinburgh Futures Institute website<sup>114</sup>, where links to full recordings of the event are available, and in a report from which the findings presented here have been adapted and updated (Jones and Cunningham, 2022). The findings presented below are based on this report, but with the benefit of further hindsight, and revisited in the context of the broader perspective of the research.

## Methodology

*Future Culture Edinburgh* was devised using an action research approach (Stringer, 1996) to allow for the potential to both examine issues and challenges and explore resolutions during the event. As such, the work considered cultural value, the values of the cultural sector, and the practices of valuation undertaken by those who produce and consume culture. These multiple lenses were introduced to attempt to interrogate the complexity of multiple forms of value and values (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014) and practices of valuation (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013; Banks, 2017; Whitham *et al.*,

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<sup>114</sup> <https://efi.ed.ac.uk/future-culture-edinburgh/> [Accessed 20 November 2022]

2019) that are interwoven through the structures of Edinburgh's cultural sector in the manner of a value constellation (Normann and Ramírez, 1993; Speed and Maxwell, 2015). The active part of the work was to examine points in that constellation where positive changemaking might occur and to imagine possible futures for the city based on those areas.

Particularly important to our research design was clearly stating our aim as being openness, and to platforming voices who might not always be invited to or offered a platform at events that discuss the city's cultural strategy. Event speakers were diverse and wide-ranging in their experience of Edinburgh's cultural sector, with an emphasis on community-based and other underrepresented voices, including those of people of colour and creative freelancers. Other than the programme of speakers, guests were not invited to join the event, either online or in-person. Participants in the venue were selected at random from those who opted into a ballot to join us in Leith Theatre. Speakers were programmed from outside city centre cultural organisations with the hope of opening up the discussions within the event to broader, futures-based thinking.

The aims of the event were:

- To create an accessible space in which all interested stakeholders, regardless of their profession or connections to existing cultural infrastructure and organisations, could imagine and engage in open discussion about their ideas for an equitable future of culture in the city.
- To explore hybridity in event programming and production, trying as much as possible to ensure parity and balance between the experience of participating in the event on Zoom and at the venue.
- To contribute both to this research and to the future writing of a pamphlet by Cunningham, building on previous pieces of work, *You'll Have Had Your City?* (2020)<sup>115</sup> and *Edinburgh Reimagined: the future will be localised* (2021)<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> <https://www.theskinny.co.uk/art/features/building-edinburgh-back-better-in-a-post-pandemic-world10> [Accessed 18 November 2022]

<sup>116</sup> <https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/the-future-will-be-localised-morvern-cunningham-3196341> [Accessed 18 November 2022]

During the event, participants were asked to consider what they would keep, lose, and change about Edinburgh's cultural infrastructure, before keynote speaker Rob Hopkins invited them to take a time machine to 2030 and imagine what the world, and culture in the city, would look like. Following provocations from speakers in Leith Theatre around ideas for the future, participants worked in groups on Zoom and in the venue to consider their own ideas and potential impacts, and how their own actions and those of others could help to realise them. The final part of the event looked at initiatives and research already underway towards exploring collective action for an equitable future of culture in Edinburgh including contributions from Morgan Currie, who leads the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project<sup>117</sup>, and representatives from the Future Fringe Project, conducted in 2020 and supported by both The University of Edinburgh and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society<sup>118</sup>.

## Findings

### *Values for change and changemaking*

Reponses from online participants were collected on Zoom using Miro during the event. Reponses collected on paper in the venue were transcribed to Miro before both datasets were coded. The coding scheme was developed in collaboration with Morvern Cunningham, using responses from both exercises conducted as part of the event and used to identify key themes and the frequency with which they appear. The coded exercises are included in this thesis in Appendix 3.

Themes identified from this analysis that were used to build the coding terms were:

- Value, values, and vision – the practice of valuation, and the balance of social, cultural, and economic value
- Festivals
- Digital – online, hybrid, technology, data, and innovation

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<sup>117</sup> <https://www.edinburghculturalmap.org> [Accessed 20 December 2023]

<sup>118</sup> <https://climatefringe.org/futurefringe-moving-towards-a-more-green-diverse-accessible-and-fair-fringe-festival/> [Accessed 20 December 2023]



- Community – a sense of community with the cultural sector, and referring to Edinburgh’s communities
- Cultural work and structures – incorporating collaboration and the sharing of skills and resources
- Finance and funding
- Space and infrastructure – including the dispersal of cultural events
- Access – incorporating equity, diversity and inclusion, and access to learning and education opportunities
- Sustainability – structural, economic, and environmental

Further analysis, again conducted with Cunningham, of the content of the responses identified four core and interlinked areas, values, and principles which participants felt could drive change and improve Edinburgh’s cultural sector and cultural infrastructure:

- Equity – of access to cultural activities and cultural work
- Access – active facilitation of broad opportunities for creatives, communities, and audiences
- Diversity – of stories and of representation
- Sustainability – the sensitive integration of environmental and economic strategies for long term benefit and support of the sector

There are clearly limitations in the reductive nature of analysing responses according to frequency, however the points at which these codes overlap and intersect are particularly interesting for analysis. These themes and values for change will be explored and further analysed through the documentation of each of the event activities below, in the discussion of findings in the following section of the thesis, and in the conclusion.

### *Keep, lose, and change*

As noted in the methodology section, some of the public discussion points around culture in Edinburgh, and particularly the impact of the Edinburgh festivals that take

place in August on life in the city, are well-worn and cyclical. At *Future Culture Edinburgh*, we aimed to steer away from known issues, challenges, and points of disagreement. Instead, we hoped to encourage participants towards imaginative, solutions-based futures thinking, moving towards addressing challenges and seizing opportunities for changemaking in Edinburgh's cultural ecosystem.

In advance of the event, we asked participants to consider what they would like to keep, lose, and change in Edinburgh's cultural ecosystem, recording their responses on a Miro board (see Appendix 3a). We offered time to add to these thoughts and reflections at the start of the event, before writer and podcaster Rob Hopkins spoke about his work, which is not specifically grounded in the arts and creative industries or in Edinburgh. As the co-founder of Transition Town Totnes in Devon, England, and the Transition Network<sup>119</sup>, Rob asked participants to reflect on the power of their imaginations to initiate and action change, asking what they thought culture in Edinburgh could look like in 2030 (see Appendix 3b).

In the data collected on Miro from this exercise, the theme of community and communities scored highest for things to keep, and this was linked to Edinburgh's year-round variety of cultural spaces and events, as well as the city's festivals, large and small, and to the spirit of collaboration in the sector, all of which contribute to a rich cultural ecosystem. While festivals were most frequently cited as things to lose, the focus of these responses was on perceived concerns with access for a diverse cultural workforce, a known issue (Brook *et al.*, 2020) not entirely specific to the Edinburgh festivals. Another broader concern, again not specific to the festivals, was economic, social, and cultural barriers to access and a sense of a lack of engagement with communities. This idea is backed up by my own work with the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project (Jones and Currie, 2022), which shows that this perception of a lack of engagement with the city's communities outside the city centre is not only present around work specifically with and for communities, but also in a

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<sup>119</sup> <https://transitionnetwork.org/about-the-movement/what-is-transition/> [Accessed 20 November 2022]

feeling that festivals are not engaging Edinburgh's communities with their centralised, core ticketed offer.

These issues were key areas for discussion during the event. However, the fact that most participants completed this activity in advance speaks to the centrality of these issues for the sector before they had heard from speakers at the event and beyond a focus on specific stakeholders and organisations. This is reinforced by responses in this activity which pointed to opportunities for positive structural change, with the most numerous responses referring to cultural work – particularly the need for increased support for artists to facilitate the development and sustainability of creative careers – and for an increased commitment to engagement for Edinburgh's communities. Other points of interest in the responses included some recognition of the importance of the online events and activities that were programmed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the perceived need for the dispersal of the city's cultural offer both as a response to crowding in the city centre and as a means of improving access to culture for Edinburgh's satellite communities (Jones and Currie, 2022).

Some participants noted the value of Edinburgh's reputation as an internationally recognised and globally connected cultural city in this activity, as well as the potential dangers of ignoring international perspectives on the issues raised at the event from voices both within and without the city. Responses also recorded the complexity and importance of considering the balancing of social, cultural, and economic needs for the sector in thinking through what comes next as we move on from the pandemic and as Edinburgh's cultural ecosystem evaluates and develops its approaches to climate action. Our interpretation of participants' reflections is that this will require a rethinking of what internationalism means in and for Edinburgh, and the development of a vision for the future that preserves the best of the local and hyperlocal focus that was so prominent during lockdowns (Jones *et al.*, 2020), alongside a sustainable approach to maintaining the open and positive spirit of global collaboration which Edinburgh's cultural sector is both renowned for and proud of.

### *Making change: what, who, and how?*

Thinking about what could happen next, in the second part of the event three speakers presented ideas: Leah Black, Chief Executive of WHALE Arts in Wester Hailes spoke about improving funding structures in the sector through long-term approaches; interdisciplinary artist and researcher Rosie Priest put forward the idea of a ‘steering group’ for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe; and writer and editor Arusa Qureshi shared their experiences and suggested ways in which the lack of diversity in Scotland’s cultural and creative workforce might be addressed. We then asked participants to work in groups – at tables in the venue or in breakout rooms on Zoom – on their own ideas, and to consider what the impact of these might be as well as what actions they and others (individuals, organisations, funders, for example) would need to take to make these a reality (see Appendix 3c).

As was the case with the first exercise, the theme of value and values was prominent here. This theme overlapped with, and had the same frequency of responses as, the theme of cultural work, with a focus on the need for collaboration to bring about change. This suggests a strong perception of a link between changemaking in the structures and practice of cultural work as means of developing a more equitable, accessible, diverse, and sustainable cultural sector for Edinburgh. This finding aligns with our four identified ‘values for change’ of equity, access, diversity, and sustainability. It also sits alongside framings of a moral economy of cultural work (Banks, 2006), the need for cultural policy to support ethics of care (Belfiore, 2022), and imbalances of power and representation in the cultural sector (Belfiore, 2020).

As acknowledged above, the quantitative analysis of responses to workshop activities is only of limited use in understanding the layers and complexities of the issues the groups discussed. Breakout room conversations were not recorded to allow participants to discuss their ideas freely before recording responses, and issues of time required to complete the activity – the event ran largely to time, but the questions we asked were broad – needed to be considered in analysing these findings. Looking generally at a top-level frequency analysis, the volume of responses about what

changes should be made suggest both comfort and engagement with generating ideas and imagining impacts. However, responses recorded about actions participants could take towards these ideas, who would help them and how a change would be made were far fewer. This could be due to a lack of time, but likely also reflect the complexity of the questions we were asking. We could also suggest from these findings a disconnection, or another ‘values gap’ here. Participants were confident in identifying values, principles, and visions for change, but perhaps felt much less supported in the act of changemaking and the finding of the resources, skills, and collaborations to transform the sector.

Ideas put forward by participants focused most prominently on the restructuring of funding for culture based on long-term support, trust and positive risk-taking, as suggested by WHALE Arts Chief Executive Leah Black, and what this could do to support a wider distribution of funds to underpin cultural activities around the city. Alongside these ideas were the suggestions of more structured support schemes for creative freelancers, as well as the need for increased access to space for year-round cultural activity.

The suggested impacts recorded were broad but very much values-led: the reduction of precarity in cultural work, tackling inequalities, facilitating access, and increasing diversity in programming and in the workforce to create a sustainable cultural sector. These ideas and imagined impacts are of course interlinked. It is logical that increased distribution of funds would increase equity; support schemes for creative freelancers would reduce precarity; and greater access to space for creative activities would contribute to greater diversity in the creative workforce. As such, as already stated, equity, access, diversity, and sustainability are the core ambitions and ‘values for change’ for *Future Culture Edinburgh* participants.

In addition, suggestions towards positive futures included increased collaboration opportunities for exchange of ideas and approaches across the sector, greater visibility for local arts and cultural activities, more focus on year-round programming outside the summer festivals, and more generally an increased recognition of the importance of

culture for our society. As those with careers or other interests in the sector were of course heavily represented in our participants, it is no surprise that our findings show a very clear articulation of cultural value and its part in imagining futures for Edinburgh. The ideas put forward in presentations at the event – imagining futures without constraints, rebuilding funding structures, developing principles for equitable access to cultural activities and careers, shared responsibility for tackling inequalities, dispersing cultural events across the city – felt to me, intangibly in the experience of being present at the event, positive and transformative, but also radical, sometimes divisive, and complex.

Revisiting these findings with some hindsight, and with the presence of even more urgency around economic crises, building closures and the climate emergency, these ideas feel more urgent to secure Edinburgh's cultural futures. *Future Culture Edinburgh* took place while many pandemic restrictions of events and mixing socially were still in force, and in the face of a global pandemic the city's cultural sector along, with other cities around the world, had shown how being reactive through the delivery of swift, radical, and hyperlocal responses had provided much needed support. However, in terms of the speed at which changemaking could have, and still could, move forward post-*Future Culture Edinburgh*, the complexity, positivity and considered nature of our collectively recorded presentations and findings suggest that to be radical we do not necessarily have to be reactive. In the continued imagining of futures for Edinburgh's cultural sector, it could be that long-term, collaborative, people-centred and values led approaches to changemaking would be both radical and sustainable.

That said, the questions of who will collaborate with you towards change and how that change will happen were where far fewer responses were recorded than in other sections of the event activities. Interestingly, the responses that were recorded spoke to a need for cultural leadership as a framework for collaboration through which to tackle core issues of precarity in cultural work, equity, and diversity that the event raised. Leaders, we found, were also seen as important to enable a clear, transparent, and public articulation of values for changemaking. Some participants also expressed an interest in the programming of more events of this type to continue to facilitate

conversations towards putting the values articulated at *Future Culture Edinburgh* into action. On that basis, the assumption might be that it is the job of these leaders to initiate and facilitate change. And, while some of those stakeholders perceived as cultural leaders may have been present, either in Leith Theatre or on Zoom, we asked participants not to focus too much on sharing biographies and achievements with one another, and to respect the voices of those who are not always invited to be a part of these kinds of conversations. This may account to some degree at least, for these representatives of perceived cultural leadership holding back from public facing conversations during the event. Together with leadership, our findings speak to the need for collaboration with grassroots artists, organisations, and practitioners to encourage inclusivity and work towards a more equitable balance of power across the sector. This would, our findings suggest, move towards cultivating a sense of reciprocity, shared responsibility, and accountability for the value and values of Edinburgh's cultural infrastructure that would benefit both those traditionally perceived as 'leaders' and grassroots organisations, creatives, and audiences.

Some of our speakers – addressing their ideas and research about open access policies at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in their examples, but also speaking more broadly of the need for equitable and inclusive practices across the sector – considered the idea of devising a set of principles, guidelines, or rules to achieve this reciprocity and accountability. In some ways, the introduction of a framework to address issues of equity in a landscape that professes openness may seem counterintuitive. However, the very existence of a cultural sector of Edinburgh's size, complexity and international reach is evidence that there is already a framework of tacitly agreed actions, codes, and practices in place for accessing cultural jobs and events, including the Fringe. This arises from current business and funding models, as well as programming structures, but because it is not written down it is open to flexible interpretation and manipulation in the ways in which the city's cultural sector communicates its value and values to audiences. When these multiple interpretations are brought together, as this research seeks to do, the gap between values expressed and values enacted by some of the city's cultural organisations and actors becomes apparent. This finding has been important in framing the recommendation made in this research about further interrogation of what

is termed the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’ where complexity is conjured into a shorthand version of a place, with little room to think critically about whose cultural value in that space is prioritised (Durrer *et al.*, 2023). It also draws parallels to Lechelt and Cunningham’s findings around participatory policymaking in Calgary and its performativity (Lechelt and Cunningham, 2020). What our speakers and data from *Future Culture Edinburgh* suggest is that Edinburgh’s might enact radical change towards creative justice and also preserve a valuable ecosystem through the reformulation and more explicit articulation of these codes towards creative justice and our core principles of equity, access, diversity, and sustainability. However, there is also the danger, as noted by Jancovich and Stevenson (2023), that in framing our event around key questions of cultural policy and cultural value, we could have inadvertently been simply reproducing policy discourse, rather than enhancing it or driving change.

One theme that we might have expected to be more prominent, particularly given the development of online cultural events and activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, was the theme of ‘digital’, encompassing related terms of hybrid, online, technology, data, and innovation. References to the potential of digital and data-driven technologies for innovating and enacting change in cultural infrastructure were noted as things to keep in the ‘keep, lose, change’ activity, but had the fewest mentions by a significant amount in the second activity addressing making change happen. This finding suggests that the sector does not currently readily connect digital technologies and communications with values-driven agendas for changemaking to cultural infrastructure, which is backed up by my case studies and analyses of organisational communications. It may also infer a preoccupation at the time *Future Culture Edinburgh* took place with the perception of a need to emerge from lockdowns to provide a model as close to ‘business as usual’ as possible, despite the acknowledged access equity opportunities of online and digital programmes for some audiences. Perceptions of value of digital technologies and data within the cultural sector have informed my research outside of this thesis, discussed above, particularly in work with Creative Informatics.



## Conclusion

*Future Culture Edinburgh* found a lot to celebrate and value in Edinburgh's cultural sector. Data from the event clearly demonstrated participants' shared sense of the value of culture and cultural activities as a core aspect of our city and our society.

Event activities focused on imaginative, creative, and values-led prompts to consider current challenges in the sector. The event was deliberately programmed after the reduced summer festivals programme in 2021 to coincide with reflections from those events and from the longer moment of pause in cultural activities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Acknowledging calls for change in the sector, my collaborator Morvern Cunningham and I sought to bring those with an interest in Edinburgh's cultural sector, and particularly previously underrepresented voices, to think about what changes could be made, why, how and by whom.

Through our coding, we found that participants identified four 'values for change': equity, access, diversity, and sustainability. These are broad and wide-ranging terms, which bring a real danger of tokensim and box-ticking in their use, as my previous analysis of vision and values statements made by my case study examples has shown. With this in mind, in reporting these values we have tried to ground them in more tangible calls to action that refer more directly to changemaking as a practice: to reduce precarity to achieve sustainable cultural work and programmes; increase equity through collaboration, responsibility, reciprocity and accountability; commit to and act to increase diversity in access to cultural jobs and activities; and embed sustainable business models, funding structures, employment practices and programming in our cultural policy.

These calls for change though, are still broad, complex, and wide-ranging. As these findings demonstrate, and as event activities at *Future Culture Edinburgh* showed. it is difficult to imagine and document the detailed and probably incremental actions require across the sector to bring about changes that address challenges and communicate our values, even though the act of imagining futures is very much

supported by culture (Banks, 2017). Future research may wish to go further or use alternative methods or more structure frameworks – based on creative justice and/or the Edinburgh Imaginary framing – to encourage more detailed articulation of change and changemaking. As already mentioned, my own research in collaboration with colleagues at Creative Informatics has done this around the theme of digital technologies and data-driven innovation<sup>120</sup>.

*Future Culture Edinburgh* participants looked towards cultural leadership for structures through which to continue discussion and to collaborate and engage with the core themes and values that the sector seems to share. However, they also hoped to achieve change through the collaborative development of specific structures and approaches which support change through addressing power imbalances between the cultural ‘gatekeepers’, often perceived to be city centre cultural organisations, and the more vulnerable and precarious workforce in the sector. It seems likely that if both actions were able to take place at the same time, it would be possible to encourage and achieve sustained collaboration, shared responsibility, reciprocity, and accountability that might align with Banks’ framings of creative justice through objective respect, parity of participation and reduction of harms (Banks, 2017). There was recognition at the event that to achieve the positive change desired by participants, it would be vital for those currently in positions of power in the sector first to recognise and accept the existence of deep-rooted inequalities, to listen to and honour the experiences of those at the receiving end of exclusionary practices, and to commit to changemaking at a structural level. From the mood of the discussions during the event, these circumstances could catalyse change that might be significant, not through sweeping gestures of change or revised terminologies of value and values, but through incremental and sustainable structural adaptations.

This event was designed as an exercise in solutions-based futures thinking. It attempted to harness the activism of the imagination that was particularly evident in the immediate period post-pandemic, and the sector’s belief in positive change to consider

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<sup>120</sup> <https://creativeinformatics.org/news/creative-horizon-3-envisioning-digital-futures-for-equitable-and-sustainable-festivals-in-2030/> [Accessed 20 November 2022]

new solutions to the complex cultural challenges that anyone who works in or attends Edinburgh's cultural programmes is familiar with. The programme of activities was devised according to an action research approach (Stringer, 1996) and offered participants the opportunity to both explore challenges and devise solutions through this framework. Our approach embraced the ideological basis of an action research inquiry – and for me particularly in producing this thesis the role of the practitioner-researcher (Stewart, 2007; Scott, 2016; Nelson, 2022) – and in presenting the event ourselves, Morvern Cunningham and I were very much present and aware of our role of researchers as potentially disruptive (Stringer, 1996, p. 117). I would consider our clear articulation of the aim to platform underrepresented voices and not dwell too much on the experience of traditional cultural leaders and gatekeepers represented both a success and a limitation of the research. Through our presentations, provocations, and activities we were able to present alternative futures and approaches to imagining, and to create an atmosphere where change and changemaking felt possible, positive, and collaborative. In steering away from the voices of existing cultural leaders though, we may have inadvertently closed opportunities to begin work on the top-down and bottom-up approaches to change which the data from the events suggests are needed. Similarly, in our desire to be both radical and democratic in our approach, aligned with Stringer's action research methodology, we may not have provided as much time and space to consider and encourage the documentation of how changemaking might take place. Furthermore, and as suggested by comments and feedback from participants on international perspectives in Edinburgh's cultural ecosystem, I can understand why the activities and events may have seemed more closed to those voices in its focus. Edinburgh is a cultural imaginary which has complex and overlapping meanings and identities for the city's residents, visitors, audiences, and workforces, and these might have been more openly and directly acknowledged in our presentation.

On the exploration of hybridity as a format, this was something we considered carefully and worked hard on to create an experience of parity between our participants in Leith Theatre and on Zoom. This required substantial economic resources and would not have been possible without a large team of technicians and event support on Zoom. The value of hybrid for events and performances is still very much up for debate, particularly

in context of rising costs and cutbacks to cultural programmes. Feedback from *Future Culture Edinburgh* included an observation that we had perhaps overcompensated for our online audience not being in the venue, to the point where those in Leith Theatre might feel excluded. For us as presenters though, the experience of speaking to presenters and participants through a huge projection screen, in amongst a room full of people, and for Zoom audiences to see that setup via their own screen, felt special, particularly with many social distancing regulations still being in place at the time.

Published in February 2022, our report from *Future Culture Edinburgh* concludes with the following statement:

“Since the event took place in September, our contributors who presented work-in-progress findings have continued to produce outputs, and we are aware of conversations taking place about the future of culture in Edinburgh, as well as around Scotland, the UK and further afield. *Future Culture Edinburgh* and these findings are part of what we hope will be an ongoing dialogue and collaboration towards and equitable, accessible, diverse, and sustainable cultural sector.”  
(Jones and Cunningham, 2022, pp. 8-9)

Our event captured a point in time at which Edinburgh’s cultural sector was considering its value and its values. It sought to situate a research point of view amidst the people and practices of the sector, exploring “the potential of examining value negotiation within a community, rather than from the perspective of an external assessor” (Whitham *et al.*, 2019, p. 4). Since September 2021, summer festivals season has continued to be accompanied by a cycle of debate about challenges of access around the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in particular; closures of buildings at long-established institutions<sup>121</sup>; and cuts to workforces at organisations who we would have considered to be part of that network of cultural gatekeepers<sup>122</sup>. Our half-day symposium was not designed to overhaul the city’s entire cultural ecosystem but has added a collective

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<sup>121</sup> <https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/edinburgh-filmhouse-administrators-called-in-over-edinburgh-international-film-festival-and-cinemas-collapse-3869556> [Accessed 21 November 2022]

<sup>122</sup> <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/edinburgh-international-book-festival-to-cut-jobs-scale-back-programme-and-drop-live-streaming-3922482> [Accessed 21 November 2022]

voice to calls for a recalibration of the city's cultural value and values. Both my own and Morvern's research and work has continued and will continue to develop these ideas in different contexts, some of which have been addressed in the thesis so far, and many of which will be considered in the conclusion to this research. For this thesis in particular, the lack of clarity around how changes might be made and who by, whether that be through leadership or as part of collective action, is an important finding from FCE and supports the arguments made here that a lens or framework such as creative justice (Banks, 2017) could be a useful framing for positive challenges to broad and established inequalities in cultural work and cultural objects and activities.

## Chapter 4: Discussion and Summary of Findings

### Introduction

The previous section documented the findings from each section of the research in chronological order, showing where findings from previous parts of the project had informed the design of the next. This section of the thesis will explore and discuss these findings from the perspective of the research questions, pulling together framings from the literature review and key findings, and moving towards the conclusion of the research, which summarises the link between the study of communications work and ideas of cultural value and creative justice (Banks, 2017) and makes a case for further study of and through the concept of the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’.

### Communicating cultural value and values

The literature review explored definitions of cultural value and values, including a discussion of concepts and definitions of cultural value (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007; Belfiore, 2012, 2019, 2020; O’Brien, 2013; Banks, 2017; Brook *et al.*, 2020; Oman, 2021; Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023). It also situated cultural value and values within the context of frameworks for understanding broader forms of value, including social and economic value and values (Skeggs, 2014), and the concept of value constellations (Normann and Ramírez, 1993; Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014; Speed and Maxwell, 2015) through which value is exchanged. Cultural value is understood within broader schemes and structures of social, political, and economic value that construct the ‘creative industries’ within the context of economic growth and innovation (Peck, 2005; Pratt and Hutton, 2013; Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015; Hesmondhalgh, 2019; Belfiore, 2020); intermediaries and imaginaries (Peck, 2005; Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008; O’Connor and Shaw, 2014; Benghozi and Paris, 2016; Bennett, 2020) and ‘creative cities’ (Florida, 2002, 2003). The practice of valuation is framed as a social and relational practice (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013; Banks, 2017; Whitham *et al.*, 2019, Oman, 2021), visible through multiple lenses. The value of cultural work is considered in

the context of values often associated with access to culture, such as moral values and a sense of benevolence (Skeggs, 2014; Oman, 2021; Belfiore, 2022), that situate culture as a gift to its audiences facilitated by capitalist logic, and also through the lens of creative justice (Banks, 2017), the principles of which are supported by the recommendations in the thesis conclusion.

In the field of arts marketing, digital communications are shown to offer ways to understand cultural audiences and measure successful campaigns through platform metrics and the accompanying digital traces (Rogers, 2013; Nuccio and Bertacchini, 2021) that are rendered as objects through online communications. The literature review discussed the role of arts marketing related to cultural value and values, whether the practice of arts marketing is an art, telling stories about a cultural output (Bradshaw, 2010); or, conversely, whether art itself could be viewed as marketing (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2010). Whichever framing we choose, there is a clear value in communications for the cultural sector, which interoperates with and not just alongside cultural production, artworks, and programmes. The lens of practice – both communications and research practice – that runs through the empirical findings presented here and in those included from my aligned research captures negotiations of cultural value and values during cultural production, promotion and consumption, to offer insight into the continuing cycle of valuation practices that support culture and make it ‘valuable’.

Critiques of the role of platforms in communicating value and values in the literature review and in interview transcripts show an imbalance of power between platform businesses and their end users, which include commercial brands, organisations – including cultural organisations – and individuals. The concept of ‘platformization’ (Helmond, 2015) demonstrates how this power imbalance has allowed platforms to dominate online structures and economic models. Studies of work and labour in terms of online cultural production and online creation frame this imbalance as being both open and restrictive at once. Anyone with access can post on platforms but the unpaid (Duffy, 2018) labour you perform and store there is at the mercy of platform conventions, highlighting “the role that platformization plays in both enabling and constraining creative expression.” (Poell *et al.*, 2021, p. 20). For the two case studies

included here, as live events mediated through platforms this imbalance takes a particular form. On the one hand, social media platforms are a space to reach audiences, but on the other, cultural organisations are ‘users’ of the platform like any other, subject to changes to platform conventions and algorithms that offer little or no transparency in their structures or support for these organisations. This tension and sometimes conflict between openness and structural restrictions is pertinent in the discussion of ways in which to improve equitable access to cultural work and activities which is a central part of this research because, like the structures that inform cultural value and values, there are unequal power relations embedded in platforms’ modes of production, distribution, and consumption.

Later in this section, these ideas will be discussed in the context of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and its relationships with its participants and the city of Edinburgh. However, the case study with Edinburgh Science shows the ways in which platform conventions – and changes to the black box algorithms that underpin them – can have unpredictable implications for the work of digital communications and undermine its perceived value at an organisational level. While organisational awareness of the value of digital technologies and communications has perhaps shifted somewhat as we emerged from the pandemic (Noehrer *et al.*, 2021; Coldicutt *et al.*, 2023), the elusive nature of platform data and metrics and their terminologies for success and value – as well as the challenges of making them fit for purpose for measuring responses of online audiences for live experiences – is still emerging. My research with Edinburgh Science in 2019 and early 2020, particularly the transcripts of interviews with its communications teams, demonstrates the extent to which the work of marketing and communications is deemed peripheral to its programmes, rather than as a core part of the organisation’s storytelling about the Edinburgh Science Festival. While the organisation itself reported a greater understanding of communications work and the structures of platforms in our final interview, later research I have conducted – both in this thesis and researching festivals with Creative Informatics – suggests this awareness has not yet translated into a recalibration of its value at a cultural sector scale.



Festivals themselves can be considered as ‘platforms’ in a physical sense, but also in a digital sense. Continuing from Helmond’s 2015 work on multiple definitions of platforms within the notion of platformization (Helmond, 2015), this research predicts that interdisciplinary approaches to platform studies that consider the influence of platformization on cultural production that moves from a digital to a physical space, could support the development of live events mediated by, with and through platforms. Research in this space is an opportunity to explore digital technologies, platforms and the value and values of live culture as an evolving and fluid value constellation, rather than through binary techno positivist or dystopian lenses. This thesis shows that digital platforms and technologies are not yet fully integrated into cultural work, or even into communications work in the cultural sector. This suggests, as was explored by my aligned research in produced *FestForward Magazine* in 2022, that applying emerging concepts of platform studies to live events and envisaging in-person and online festivals as platforms in themselves, could be an expansive framing for future research. Specifically, platform studies, and its digital and physical affective properties, would be a useful lens of further inquiry into developing contexts of ‘liveness’ (Miles, 2018; Hawthorne, 2022; Jones and Elsdon, 2024) and ‘hybrid materialities’ (Noehrer *et al.*, 2021) both for amplifying discussions around ways in which digital technologies mediate live events and for exploring modes of production, consumption, and distribution.

The Edinburgh Science communications team demonstrated a high awareness of the opacity of the economies behind their marketing through digital platforms, acknowledging the limitations of platform metrics for measuring success and the unpaid, aspirational labour (Duffy, 2018) that many of us undertake in creating and maintaining our online ‘selves’. This awareness did not necessarily lead them down the route of avoiding that work, however. In fact, several of the team were comfortable with and saw value in the blending of personal and professional profiles and accounts as beneficial to the organisation and their own profiles. One member of the team told me that, outside of work, they actively sought out content online that would improve their understandings of platforms and their algorithms to put their personal and professional content to best use. There was a sense that developing and demonstrating expertise

was, for this member of the team, a core part of their job and one they found rewarding and valuable.

Regarding measurements of success in communications within this context, what is also evident from the literature review and empirical research findings – particularly the two case studies – here is the evidence that a skills and resource gap (Osborne *et al.*, 2024; Nuccio and Bertacchini, 2021) exists around digital technologies and data in cultural organisations. This results in tensions and difficulties in gathering, interpreting, and presenting qualitative and quantitative data and measurements about the value of digital communications both internally, within organisations, and to audiences. While theoretically at least, cultural organisations have access to more information about segments of their audiences than ever before, these are not always accompanied by the skills to interpret them. Thus, our online performative selves (Goffman, 1971) may reveal less about cultural audiences than the platforms that produce these metrics would like us to believe. As well as communications practice, this finding has implications for evaluation practices that impact cultural sector organisations not only in their marketing, but in audience development, funding and advocacy for a just and equitable cultural sector.

My case studies with Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society show the fluidity of skills, expertise, and practices of arts marketing in Edinburgh's cultural sector, and place this in the context of what it means to 'do the work' of arts marketing, and its value to organisations, their employees, and their audiences. Findings from my Edinburgh Science case study explore in detail the nature of working in communications in the arts and cultural sector, and in digital communications specifically. In our 2019 interviews, the Edinburgh Science communications team suggested that the nature of their work with digital communications is twofold – sharing content with their audiences and external stakeholders, whilst also reinterpreting this work for an internal audience which is not, at board or senior management level particularly, valued within the organisation. The team expressed frustration with the perceived need to justify the work they do on digital channels to others in the organisation, and that this additional layer to their work created unnecessary pressure

on what is already, during festival campaigns especially, a high-pressured working environment. The team also told me that the lack of awareness of its work could sometimes manifest as unrealistic expectations of what digital communications could achieve in terms of converting online audiences to ticket buyers. They balanced their internal communications by attempting to check organisational assumptions about their activity, as well as working hard to justify its value to the organisation more widely. This is a detailed example of creative *injustice* (Banks, 2017), that demonstrates the lens that the study of the work of communications can bring to the broader landscape of cultural work. As noted above, on revisiting this question again with Edinburgh Science in 2020, I was told that the organisation had developed greater awareness of the extent of the work that is required in making digital content because of the shift online during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I would be interested to learn the extent to which this attitudinal shift remained in place now live events are much more central, or even often the only option, in festival programmes.

It was quickly apparent in my interviews with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society that the organisation reported to value communications and digital communications differently and arguably more highly than was the case with Edinburgh Science. It is important to point out though that I only spoke to one team member from the Fringe rather than the five from Edinburgh Science, leaving less room for plural voices and perspectives in my analysis of my interview findings. The participant from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society was very clear that the organisation was “digitally savvy” (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Participant #6, 2019), and they borrowed heavily from start-up methodologies, as well as online-only content creation models and language in their ‘agile’ approach to mapping customer journeys. There was evidence of this approach in their examples too, which showed understanding of the similarities and differences between algorithmic distribution of content through platforms, contrasted with the organisation’s role in supporting audiences to curate their programme of live events. While ‘the algorithm’, the participant stated, was looking for points of similarity in its data handling, the Fringe Festival’s approach to promoting its programme pointed audiences clearly towards enhancing their experience by trying something new and different to their previous choices, presenting a unique challenge.

The Fringe's open access, non-curated structure and programme prevents the promotion of individual performances in its communications strategy, and the participant openly acknowledged that digital communications are not directly linked to, and in the Fringe's case can feel separate from, ticket sales. However, measured purely quantitatively, the size of the organisation's online following and the perception of 'success' those numbers might be seen to demonstrate, most likely contributed to the comfort and confidence of the participant's approach to digital communications, even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this well-developed awareness of strategies and approaches for making communications of value a success, alongside promoting the value of communications internally, the Fringe participant did acknowledge some reluctance to change around aspects of the organisation's cycle that were just 'the way things had always been'. However, they reported feeling well placed and supported by colleagues to work with data and instinctive approaches and to make changes.

At the most general level, the marketing and communications outputs and strategies of my two case study organisations would seem to have a lot in common. Both part of the Edinburgh Festivals umbrella network, with multiple venues around the city. On the other hand, the scale of the two festivals is very different: the Fringe is much larger in terms of venues and ticket sales, takes place over a longer period of time and is a very central part in the vision of what I have termed 'the Edinburgh Imaginary', that is framed through the literature review in Chapter 1 and will be further developed in the thesis conclusion. Crucially too, Edinburgh Science Festival's programme is curated, whereas the Fringe is – although arguably, due to known economic and social barriers to access to culture discussed throughout this thesis – open to anyone with a show to put on and a venue to host them. In fact, in marking its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in summer 2022, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society set out "a new vision and set of values" and six "development goals". The headline for this announcement was the ambition to "give

anyone a stage and everyone a seat”<sup>123</sup> which seems to serve as a reaffirmation of the organisation’s commitment to its definitions of open access for the festival, and hints at an ambition to maintain, or even grow, its place in the Edinburgh Imaginary.

Existing organisational structures, and the way in which communications is embedded as a result, are of course hugely influential in determining the value each organisation places on communications. Both organisations show a developed understanding of the challenges and opportunities of digital communications, but from the language and tone of the Fringe participant’s communications with me during our interview, there is a very clear sense that the Fringe Society values communications more highly at an organisation level. This could in part be down to expertise and the development of communications strategies, which the Fringe described very articulately. However, Edinburgh Science also showed, across their team, a nuanced understanding of the opportunities and limitations of the work of communications. What was obviously different was the reporting of the extent to which the work of communications was valued by the organisation more broadly. The Fringe’s internal and external communications styles felt more confident, perhaps because the work of communications felt more valued. And this suggests their success, and skills of measuring that success, were more valued as a result.

The nature of the way my case studies were organised – incorporating analysis of communications texts (Twitter and organisations’ websites) and contexts in which they were made – allows for detailed analysis of both communications outputs and the working environments in which they were created. As such, the value of communications in Edinburgh’s cultural sector, specifically for my case study organisations, is shown to filter through internal organisational values, to cultural workers and to audiences, and my findings suggest that where an organisation values the work of communications, it is better placed to communicate its values to others, including audiences. In terms of measuring value, my two case studies show the ways

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<sup>123</sup> Fringe Development Goals available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20230316123246/https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us/fringe-development-goals> [Accessed and archived 16 March 2023]

in which cultural organisations are dependent on platforms and their conventions. They also show that cultural organisations occupy a relatively unique position in opaque digital platforms' systems and the way in which their communications mediate the live and the digital of cultural programmes and, by extension, perceptions of their cultural value, which speaks to findings explored later in this chapter about interdisciplinary connections between platform studies, arts management research, and cultural policy studies.

My role as a researcher – but also as a practitioner who is still, somewhat, embedded in this work and its challenges and opportunities – suggests a productive opportunity for collaboration and co-creation between researchers and cultural practitioners to continue to explore current ideas and contexts of cultural value and creative justice through the study of communications work. The findings from the two case studies presented here, and the practice-centred nature of their acquisition, were instrumental in the development of the methodologies employed in the programme and delivery of *Future Culture Edinburgh*. The findings and key 'values for change' of equity, access, diversity, and sustainability that were identified through that event are not, in themselves, unexpected or controversial. But the methods and principles through which it was devised and presented are an opportunity to explore cultural policy and cultural value – both in current and imagined forms – through practice and participatory methods (Schön, 1983; Stringer, 1996) and socially engaged practice (Barrett, 2007; Scott, 2016).

## The work of communicating cultural value and values

As noted above, the literature review explores complex and interoperating ways of conceptualising cultural value and its measurement and how these have developed and evolved. This includes intrinsic notions of cultural value as well as instrumental framings of culture that position it as imbued with a moral power and/or the power to be economically and socially transformative while also retaining a sense of exclusivity,

distinction, and taste (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1986; Banks, 2017; O'Brien and Ianni, 2022). My work confirms this complexity and shows how the study of the work of communications acts as a lens for the study of power imbalances in the cultural sector, where balancing cultural value and values is made challenging by the power imbalances built into digital and platform-based systems, as well as the social structures of cultural production and consumption more generally.

The literature review also explored the sectoral belief in meritocracy in access to cultural work and professions (Taylor and O'Brien, 2017; Brook *et al.*, 2020) which has, until the COVID-19 pandemic at least, largely masked the structural inequities of access to cultural programmes and careers. If, as Babak Ganjei suggests, art is the thing nobody asked you to do (Ganjei, 2021), what circumstances need to be in place for you to do it, and what would your response be when someone asks you to make art, if that is no longer art? In *Structurally F-cked: an inquiry into artists' pay and conditions* (Industria, 2023), a report by the artist-run network Industria<sup>124</sup> and based on data provided by anonymously by visual artists about experiences of working with and for publicly funded institutions, that is in itself an articulation of the network's framing of cultural value and values, the authors argue that an artist's economic capacity to absorb the precarity of artmaking is the first and central condition that controls who gets to be an artist.

“The logic of precarity seeps into almost everything; cultural institutions repackage the decadence of elite art movements in their shows to hide the misery, they succumb to reactionary cultural politics, under the watchful eye of state cuts to funding, they die a slow and painful death – killing off the artists concerned with ‘identity’ first. To assume that the art world remains untouched by the cruel logics of precarity is to assume that those who control it have our best interests at heart. This is a fatal mistake. Like most elite configurations, the art world responds to the state and its austerity-driven economy.” (Industria, 2023, pp. 10-11)

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<sup>124</sup> <https://www.we-industria.org/> [Accessed 14 June 2023]

This assertion suggests a link between concepts of value and concepts of power and plays with the multiple lenses through which society negotiates, evaluates, and re-evaluates cultural value and values, and the circumstances that need to be in place for us to do that ‘successfully’. In fact, recent research into cultural sector workers’ attitudes to values show that communications of their own values have shifted towards a framing of taste that very clearly eschews snobbery and concepts of greater value around traditionally ‘high’ culture (O’Brien and Ianni, 2022). Findings in this thesis, developed through my own practice-based approaches in case studies and responses at *Future Culture Edinburgh*, support this finding. What is difficult though, as already noted in the *Future Culture Edinburgh* findings above, is finding ways to make space for critical reflection about cultural value and values, and how they can be supported and developed, without simply reproducing existing inequalities and policy dialogues (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023). While Morvern Cunningham and I had considered this and built in some mechanisms to address this potential challenge, we perhaps did not reflect enough until after the event that the symposium *itself* could be viewed as an exercise in communications of value and values, and how this might affect the diversity and representation of our audiences.

Value and values expressed in, through and by cultural outputs are shown through this research to be fluid, but also mapped together through complex networks, and visible through both tangible – the Edinburgh Cultural Map, for example as a tool for discussion and interrogation of the city’s cultural infrastructure (Jones and Currie, 2022); or the social media texts and digital traces inscribed by interactions with audiences on Twitter – and intangible (Currie and Correa, 2021) means that include our instincts and expectations around how the cultural sector should be and has always been. This complexity is somewhat disentangled through the observation and study of the ways in which conversations about cultural value are held, and stories of the value of culture are told, and by whom. This research seeks to capture both the tangible and the intangible through its practice-led, mixed participatory methods and interdisciplinary activities. It considers ways in which cultural value and values can be and are being recalibrated, with new forms of distribution and feedback loops but also with clear links



to histories of the terminologies of cultural value and values (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007; Belfiore, 2012, 2019, 2020; O'Brien, 2013; Banks, 2017; Brook *et al.*, 2020; Oman, 2021; Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023) and theories of cultural production and consumption (McLuhan, 1967; McLuhan, 1994; Brunton and; Hall, 1973; Nissenbaum, 2011; Woodstock, 2016; Venturini *et al.*, 2018; Duffy *et al.*, 2019; Poell *et al.*, 2021).

In 2019, Ben Walmsley wrote that arts audiences are “demanding an increasingly participatory and co-creative role in both artistic production and meaning making” (Walmsley, 2019, p. 34). However, the extent to which this is true depends very much on the chosen process of valuation and its framing of what ‘counts’ as participation. It could be that the work of audience development, which sits most often within marketing and communications teams but could arguably be more effective as an organisational and policy remit (Hadley, 2021), maintains and reproduces a system of classifying participation that actively retains ideas of ‘high’ culture (Oman, 2021).

This politicised and policy-centric view of cultural policy in practice and the ‘development’ of audiences, is also supported by notions of the ‘creative city’ (Florida, 2003) and economic growth-led framings of the creative industries (Peck, 2005; O'Connor, 2015). Through these lenses, culture can be framed as having been instrumentalised as a tool for economic and social wealth, while at the same time ignoring and exacerbating inequalities in access to culture and perspectives of cultural value, at the expense of creative justice (Banks, 2017). The Edinburgh Festival City destination imaginary is shown to be part of this performative culture of presenting and promoting the creative city as a brand, in a global network of brands. As a result, the rationale for these cultural destination framings – of Edinburgh’s cultural sector as a whole, not just its festivals – can in part be understood as the performance of cultural policy for policymakers, while the day-to-day work and activities of the cultural and creative sectors remains outside the measurements and communications of cultural value and values that abound in the creative city. This is why the study of communications work presented here, research that is embedded in cultural organisations, offers perspectives and insights into ideas of creative justice that go

beyond the performance of the creative city, applicable in Edinburgh and further afield and present a framework through which cities and citizens can:

“think critically about who gets to make policy decisions locally and in particular who gets to define what ‘cultures of place’ are valued” (Durrer *et al.*, 2023, p.16)

Directing attention to how Edinburgh’s cultural sector and festivals, and specifically Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, communicate their value and values, the media through which this happens include digital communications – platforms, email, websites – and more ‘traditional’ approaches in print, through display advertising and engagement with legacy media. Both organisations balance all these activities within small teams, where newer, digital skills have been learnt on the job or through personal interest – this is particularly demonstrated by one member of the Edinburgh Science team – in addition to contracted work. Earlier on in the process of UK-wide cultural organisations’ digital adoption, cultural policy reports spoke loudly of the promise of digital technologies (‘Digital Culture 2017’; ‘Culture is Digital’, 2019, for example) to diversify audiences, boost sales, improve access, and transform creative practice. My 2019 case study interviews show some evidence that this sense of promise exists, particularly in one Edinburgh Science participant’s use of platform jargon, terminologies and sense of expertise that translates into the belief in a user’s ability to ‘train’ the algorithm to their liking (Bishop, 2020), as well as the idea that social media platforms are ‘doing their best’. However, more prominent was a sense of realism about the time-consuming work of digital communications: the time and resource required; the expectation (rarely met) that digital communications translate to increased ticket sales; and frustration around a skills and ‘values gap’ – in Edinburgh Science as an organisation especially – that make the work of communications harder. The team at Edinburgh Science did not have a balanced, or empowered relationship with platforms, which they could live with, but the lack of value attached to any relationship they might have with platforms from within their own organisation was more demoralising. These gaps in skills and awareness at organisational level already documented seem, from incorporating analysis of Twitter and organisations’ websites into this research, to contribute to these gaps, as demonstrated by the comparative analysis of case study

findings alongside values-led messages from both organisations' websites. Messaging across all these channels by Edinburgh Science does not feel tailored to platform specificities as they might have hoped to do at a less critical time, but more of a one-size-fits-all broadcast, particularly exacerbated by the uncertainty around COVID-19 cancellations which the data collected for this research captures.

The terms and keywords analyses conducted on cultural organisations' websites' 'about us' pages, which contain organisational statements about visions, values, and missions, is shown in this research to be similarly reductive. Reading and manual keyword analysis revealed more than the computational analysis conducted did about Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society's approaches to communicating value and values. These are shown to be delivered in what could be general and hollow, or could be more abstract and non-committal, terms. Whichever of these framings best captures the circumstances in which these texts were produced, overlaying these findings with data from my case studies shows that top-down organisational messaging around value and values, captured from the organisations' websites, does not sit comfortably with the data I have collected from Twitter and interviews, echoing findings of Glow *et al.*, (2021) discussed in Chapter 1. In part, this could be attributed to the methods chosen for this research, however, this finding is an interesting signal of the limitations of current approaches to digital communications work. It provides evidence of the gaps in communication between top-down stories of value and values from an organisational perspective, and the messages and tone created by those within the organisation who do the day-to-day work of communicating on its behalf. Yet, in thinking about this issue through the lens of creative justice (Banks, 2017) as a way to encourage action towards more equitable cultural work, the presence of both these approaches is encouraging, what is missing is a collective approach to cultural value and values that just, while also engaging audiences.

Approaches to and expectations of the communication of value and values by the cultural sector certainly changed through the pandemic. With louder discussion around inequalities in the sector, to which this research in part responds, ideas of 'co-creation' of new approaches with people not already in positions of power, or in possession of

traditionally held cultural capital that makes accessing culture easy, also grew. These are explored in the Edinburgh context in this research through *Future Culture Edinburgh*, which takes a broader lens on ideas of creative justice (Banks, 2017) and cultural value, and who decides and negotiates valuation practices. Co-creation with platforms, however, is only possible to a certain extent, which cements a power imbalance while at the same time employing the rhetoric of platforms as a place for creativity and expression (Duffy *et al.*, 2019; Poell *et al.*, 2021). They are not just. As noted earlier in this section, monetisation of content for those whose sole mode of creative production is on and through platforms is very rare, but possible for a few (Duffy, 2018). Both my own professional experience, and my two case studies, suggest that for communicating the value of a live event through a platform, the economic conversion, the ticket sale, is very rarely achieved through this route. The Fringe case study participant in particular notes this disconnection between the audiences that attend festival performances and those that engage with the festival on social media.

Both organisations I spoke to during case study research told me that instead of focusing on sales, their strategy was to build online and platform-specific audiences' awareness. This was designed to create an organisational brand through focusing on interactions with users (Edinburgh Science) and nudging users towards known data points on their customer journey map (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society). For Edinburgh Science, communications of value and values to audiences could be segmented and targeted to certain groups of customers but, from an economic perspective, outwith funders and stakeholders, these segments were all part also of a broader 'audience' for the festival to whom most digital communications were addressed. For the Fringe, communications of value and values happen through more registers and segments, which are described in more detail in Chapter 2 in the section that explains the rationale for my choice of case studies. There are audiences, as with Edinburgh Science, but also festival participants, to whom the Fringe Society offers services to support with producing and marketing their event or performance. The extent to which these services are valuable for participants and performers is questionable but not measurable in this research due to the largely organisational perspective of my case study. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society participant told me that they provided a digital 'dashboard' for

participants, through which they could track online engagement through the Fringe website, and ticket sales through the Fringe box office. However, given what my findings have so far shown about the complexities and gaps in skills and resources to evaluate digital and platform metrics, it is not hard to imagine that the Fringe could be making inaccurate assumptions about participant literacies with these services and thus these systems could be providing less support than they think. It could also be argued that in recreating a system of platform-style metrics for participants, the Fringe is quietly, or accidentally, drawing a conceptual link between commercial digital platforms and the festival itself as a commercial platform. This comparison alludes to the power imbalances, restricted metrics and perceptions of openness and creativity of platforms, accompanied by an environment of opacity and control that is highlighted by the platform studies literature included here (Helmond, 2015; Duffy, 2018; Duffy *et al.*, 2019; Bishop, 2020; Poell *et al.*, 2021).

The Fringe Society's core value proposition of providing an open access, non-curated festival is explored throughout this thesis because it offers a lens into the complex act of communicating organisational value and values, and then to the process of negotiating and redrawing them for and with its stakeholders. Open access as a principle, and the ways in which it can both democratise and reinforce existing structural and social inequalities of access, was tackled head on by artist and researcher Rosie Priest, speaking at *Future Culture Edinburgh* about their idea of how the Fringe might be supported by a steering board. In my interviews with the Fringe, the participant told me the organisation could not and would not act on every criticism or discussion point. The Fringe Society does absorb and become a focal point in a lot of these, proved by my own *Future Culture Edinburgh* event and by online and press discussions at that time and ongoing, some of which are footnoted in this thesis. The participant was well versed in responses to common challenges raised about concerns such as over-tourism, short term lets, cost of participation and many others. I note here that most of the qualitative narrative about communications put forward in this thesis is gathered from an organisational point of view. Audience opinions and interactions are included in the form of my two Twitter datasets which, unlike my semi-structured conversations with communications teams, are authored within platform conventions

and very likely produced with an agenda that does not directly relate to my question about how value is communicated. This, along with the reductive nature of platform metrics, means that these case studies cannot claim to have captured a full picture of audience perceptions of the value and values of these organisations. Open access at the Fringe, perhaps, operates in a similar manner to digital platforms, with the principle both held up as a value at the organisation's core, and employed as a tool to distance the Society from discussion and criticism where appropriate, because the principle prevents them from stepping in.

### Exploring the immediate and ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on communications of value and values

In my 2020 interviews with Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, both organisations reflected on the ways in which the value of digital work and communications had been recalibrated and foregrounded in their pandemic responses. Edinburgh Science directly expressed a positive and engaged response from online audiences its digital programme, as well as noting increased awareness of the nature and value of the work of digital communications across the organisation. The Fringe Society, my Twitter findings show, produced fewer tweets in 2020 than in other years, but the pattern of their campaign on the platform was similar, suggesting – as was also reported in my interviews – that the work and value of that marketing and communications campaign could be seen as being more embedded in organisational level work than that of Edinburgh Science. That said, the Fringe participant noted in our interviews that the scope of what constituted digital marketing and communications did change in 2020 because of the online-only programme. The production, presentation, and promotion of the Fringe's new and previously untested Crowdfunder campaign and online events, I was told, brought new challenges for the Marketing and Communications team, and for the organisation more broadly.

In 2020, digital work was no longer an add-on to the 'real' work of producing live events. The extent to which this represents a more permanent shift of the value of digital

communications, however, remains to be seen. Some of the initial expectation of substantive changes in the value of digital and hybrid programming in 2020 (Bradbury *et al.*, 2021), has not entirely been borne out in further research (Noehrer *et al.*, 2021; Walmsley *et al.*, 2022). Research commissioned by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC)<sup>125</sup> and Bristol-based UKRI-funded project MyWorld<sup>126</sup> entitled *The Networked Shift: A Creative Industries Foresight Study* (Coldicutt *et al.*, 2023) used Bill Sharpe's Three Horizons Model (2019)<sup>127</sup> to explore futures for the UK's creative industries. The report notes that post-pandemic recovery – social, cultural, economic – is still in progress, making decision-making about digital programmes, and finding appropriate data on which to base these decisions – more difficult. In addition, as noted for the GLAM sector by Noehrer *et al.* (2021) the historic audience data on which many of these decisions about programming might rest is largely from pre-pandemic, in-person audiences (Noehrer *et al.*, 2021). Instead of dramatic transformation, Coldicutt *et al.* (2023) predict, as per the report title, a 'Networked Shift' across the UK's creative industries, which would see the growth of new digital approaches through many and varied connections, often informal, to give rise to a "digital-by-default networked set of practices" (Coldicutt *et al.*, 2023, p. 32).

While broad patterns of cultural access in the UK were not hugely transformed during the COVID-19 pandemic – those who attended pre-pandemic were most likely to engage online (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022) – some artists did attempt to recreate the particular conventions of liveness at the Edinburgh festivals in presenting their work online in 2020 (Elsden *et al.*, 2022; Piccio *et al.*, 2022). In March 2020, my Twitter data collection was underway, and I found myself in a unique position to be able to capture communications around the cancellation of the Edinburgh Science Festival and the 'pivot' to an online programme shortly after. While it is easy to be critical of the language used and the sometimes inaccessibility of online event classifications, Edinburgh Science reacted and recalibrated its 2020 programme with incredible speed and agility. Of course, audiences who wished to continue to take part in cultural events and

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<sup>125</sup> <https://www.pec.ac.uk> [Accessed 1 June 2023]

<sup>126</sup> <https://www.myworld-creates.com/> [Accessed 1 June 2023]

<sup>127</sup> <https://www.h3uni.org/tutorial/three-horizons/> [Accessed 1 June 2023]

activities during successive lockdowns had no choice but to do so online, but it does not necessarily follow that the value of digital communications for each of my case study organisations is mapped in direct proportion to the extent of their audiences' consumption. That said, Edinburgh Science – which had already been shown by my early case study interviews from the perspective of the Marketing and Communications team to not always value communications through digital technologies – explicitly stated that awareness of the skills, resources and value of digital communications had increased during the 2020 online programme. In this context, the impact of the pandemic on ways in which both those who work in organisations and audiences are able to acquire cultural capital according to Bourdieu's three forms – embodied, objectified and institutionalised (Bourdieu, 1986) – is likely to continue to be a disruptive force now that live programming, which both my 2020 case study organisations were hoping would return, has once again become the dominant mode of presentation.

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, interviewed in summer 2020, demonstrated, as you would expect, the extent to which we had all settled into, and become more familiar with, COVID-19 restrictions and their impacts on our lives and culture. The interviewee was also very clear that aligning with participants and audiences around shared values was central to the 2020 online programme's core value proposition. This was reflected in part through the provision of a crowdfunding platform on the Fringe website, the goal of which was raising money for the Society, but also enabled artists and producers to crowdfund for their own work. As outlined above, notions of cultural capital were in flux at this time. My case study interviews imply that Edinburgh's cultural and festivals sector was focused on the return of live events but also had a broader awareness of some of the developments in digital communications and programmes that had taken place. More difficult negotiations around the challenges of monetising digital programmes, and the economies of live festival programmes could, in the still reactive landscape of 2020, be put temporarily aside.

At the time of writing however, Edinburgh's festivals and cultural organisations are still operating in an economically challenging landscape. The tricky negotiations between



social and cultural values of digital performances and events, set against their high price tag and resource requirements, mean that online and hybrid programmes can no longer be prioritised. The increased awareness of the value of digital communications is perhaps on pause, rather than completely discounted, but for now a return to live events and digital communications mainly used for marketing seems to be the case for cultural organisations in Edinburgh and elsewhere. As such, the longer-term impact of COVID-19 on the communication of value and values by these two festivals, and Edinburgh's festivals and cultural sector more widely, is still developing, mediated by wider social, political, and economic challenges that impact cultural policy and practice. Any suggestion of lasting change in online and digital provision has been overtaken recently by mainly economic concerns and complexities, and the lasting impact of the primary in-person focus and accompanying slowing down of digital programmes cannot yet be known.

### The role of research in addressing challenges and inequities in Edinburgh's cultural sector

In Chapter 1, changemaking in the cultural sector is framed as being influenced by structures, attitudes and appetites for "organisational discomfort" (Glow *et al.*, 2021, p. 139) within organisations, and this is in line with my suggestion – based on comparisons between interviews with Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society – that the value of communications internally, across organisational roles and teams, has a direct impact on the cohesion and clarity of external communications of value and values. The organisation that values communications work (Fringe) reports better connections across its teams than that which does not value this work (Edinburgh Science). The research I conducted on Twitter and on the case study organisations' websites is somewhat problematic in this regard because it does not capture the organisational structures, attitudes and approaches that contribute to its communications strategy. However, this research uses interviews to attempt to provide this context, albeit – apart from one later interview with Edinburgh Science which

included a member of their programming team – only with members of the respective organisations’ communications teams and not with other representatives.

This thesis examines and explores how research – and practice-led and participatory action research particularly – can work towards an understanding and communication of the complex networks of social, political, economic, and cultural factors that play out in Edinburgh’s year-round cultural ecosystem. Importantly, what factors and values can organisations influence, and what are the broader intersecting social, economic, and political challenges and risks they are negotiating in their approaches to communicating value and values. Moreover, how does the landscape of cultural policy and policymaking influence and maybe even absorb, some of those risks. That is not to say, however, that challenges not directly of their making cannot be addressed by these organisations. In fact, the idea mentioned above, of festivals as platforms for connecting and sharing of ideas and values, could put them “at the heart of values-driven ideological project” (Hadley, 2021, p. 8) of changemaking in the city’s cultural sector towards creative justice (Banks, 2017), and as a result generate influence over other interconnecting social, economic, and political systems. The reflexive, practice-led approaches used in this research and documented in this thesis support an argument for continued co-created research, both with and initiated by academics, as well as cultural sector-led practitioner research. This thesis aimed to show the ways in which nuanced understandings of cultural policy and creative work can be developed through practice-based approaches to cultural policy and arts management studies. In addition, it seeks to expand the concept of ‘practice’ in creative research beyond the ‘end product’ of cultural artefacts, events, and other outputs towards a framework that more equitably supports all aspects of the work of cultural and creative practitioners, including communications, and their complex and intersecting practices that are central to cultural production and consumption.

The opportunities and challenges of the principles of open access to culture are presented in detail here with relevance to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society but can also be associated with a more general principle of openness attributed to cultural value. In designing and programming *Future Culture Edinburgh*, one of our key concerns

was whether the language of value and values was, like vision and mission statements on websites, becoming hollow and tokenistic, and reproducing existing unequal structures. Morvern Cunningham and I worked from the central idea that challenges and inequalities in the sector exist, that there would be ways in which they could be addressed and tackled, and that this would be best achieved by opening up access to conversations to more diverse audiences and cultural professionals about Edinburgh's cultural sector and prioritising those voices that have previously less heard than those in leadership and policymaking positions. We aimed to look past the idea, mentioned in my interview with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, that we rely on 'the way things have always been done'. Using an action research approach (Stringer, 1996) and collaborative design research as a means of "seeking new ways of connecting people to shared and individual futures" (Whitham *et al.*, 2019, p. 3), we tried to focus on generating active approaches to changemaking, including a non-explicit alignment with participatory futuring and speculative design (Kozubaev *et al.*, 2020; Lindley and Green, 2022). Subsequent research, including my own work with Creative Informatics, in this space has built further on speculative approaches for the cultural and festivals sector (Elsden *et al.*, 2022). The exploratory, problem solving and speculative research design that an action research framework offered us allowed us to put forward a central principle of openness in our programming; to explore multiple forms of value and values and lenses through which to consider them; and to explore ways in which Edinburgh's cultural sector could collaborate towards preferable futures across multiple platforms and live-digital formats. The underpinning structure of *Future Culture Edinburgh*, in many ways similar to the open access values of the Fringe Society, was open, democratic, and hopefully also novel and radical, in part because it was delivered during the pandemic and with COVID-19 event restrictions in place.

## Exploring a values-led cultural sector for Edinburgh

As mentioned above, discussions about value and values in Edinburgh's cultural sector feel like they are happening more frequently than when this research, and particularly *Future Culture Edinburgh*, was initiated. Throughout this thesis I have questioned the

terms cultural organisations use to describe the work they do and how these terms evolve. As such I acknowledge that a values-led cultural sector as I imagined it in September 2021 has also evolved and developed to a point where it feels difficult to imagine at the time of writing. In imagining futures for the sector, it now feels as though that practice has the potential to overshadow and divert attention away from the immediate challenges of the present that threaten ideas of creative justice for the sector today. Not only that, the languages and terminologies of other associated terms and ideas – the creative industries, co-creation, digital and data-driven innovation – are also in a constant state of flux. This is particularly visible as we continue to move forwards from the pandemic and in the context of rapid technological developments and hype around AI; a continually challenging landscape for cultural funding; and the continuing politicised negotiations around notions of the creative and cultural industries as drivers of economic growth (O'Connor, 2024). As awareness of broad social, economic, political, and environmental challenges has also continued to grow and evolve, it can feel as if we have normalised a state of crisis to the extent where the values we hold can feel both out of reach and more vital to cling on to than ever.

However, *Future Culture Edinburgh* still feels like it captured for the city what the Centre for Cultural Value has termed the 'pivot-to-purpose' (Walmsley *et al.*, 2022) that took place in the UK's cultural sector through the COVID-19 pandemic. Activities explored contemporary notions of cultural value and values, and the ways these had been challenged by the pandemic, as well as principles of changemaking towards preferable futures for the city's cultural sector. Participants generously shared their ideas through a series of activities which demonstrated commitment to changemaking and an appetite for collaboration that makes community a value (O'Connor and Shaw, 2014) through which collective action might drive structures of cultural value in Edinburgh, and the power imbalances they maintain, towards more equitable, diverse, sustainable, and accessible ways of producing and consuming culture. Framed as I envisaged at the time, this would be a values-led sector, one with a clear set of value propositions at its centre, maintained by principles including openness and collaboration, reciprocity, responsibility, and accountability. Openness in this context might refer to an explicitly stated commitment to the exploration of values, and the making of space for these

values to be discussed and evolve through mechanisms such as participatory policymaking that goes beyond rhetoric (Lechelt and Cunningham, 2020). It speaks again to my earlier point that a more connected approach to communications in the sector can have an impact on its sense of its own value. Extending this connectivity to a broad commitment to openness and creative justice (Banks, 2017) would make space for change and active changemaking at both radical and incremental levels. By making connections through the sector over digital platforms and channels, across internal and external communications, around a constellation of forms of value, a values-led sector might be established, and then adapted and maintained. Through participatory and practice-led research into cultural policy in both its design and its delivery, co-produced with cultural practitioners, equitable frameworks for the study of the diversity, access, and sustainability of cultural work and outputs might be more consistently evaluated.

Perhaps if a pandemic has taught us anything it has shown us that ‘the way things have always been done’ cannot be a default position for equitable and sustainable cultural policy, or for creative justice (Banks, 2017). Moreover, this research seeks adds weight to the argument that there is a case for developing collaborative and co-produced research methodologies with the cultural sector, and for participatory approaches in policymaking and practice in the cultural sector itself. These methodologies – like some of the examples discussed above – would support examination of and challenges to the ‘good city’ (O’Connor and Shaw, 2014) imaginary that has underpinned social, cultural, and economic value and values and created and maintained justifications for that ‘business as usual’ position (Hadley, 2021). Research has shown that government-funded culture is still consumed by a minority of the population in the UK, and that those that access it are also in possession of social and political capital which is favourable to possessing the means and experiences that encourage cultural consumption (Taylor, 2016; Brook *et al.*, 2018; Brook *et al.*, 2020). COVID-19 showed us how to examine our lives at multiple scales, from our immediate locality to the global impact of a pandemic. For example, in Edinburgh’s cultural landscape and ecosystem, this ranged from hyperlocal cultural responses captured by the *Art in and Out of Lockdown Report* (Jones *et al.*, 2020), and activities and discussions at *Future Culture Edinburgh* about how to retain the city’s internationalism and ambition in programmes

and audiences alongside a respectful approach to people for whom the city is a year-round place and home. In addition, *Future Culture Edinburgh*'s focus on a values-led sector on collaboration and new approaches to leadership but not for leadership feels important. This would include revisiting the role of digital technologies and communications in cultural programmes, examining the city's cultural life in a year-round context, and acknowledging the tangible and intangible cultural codes through which the sector operates in order to interrogate shared values in a way that does not feel hollow and overshadowed by tokenistic statements and communications.

Responses to speakers suggesting new rules for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe at *Future Culture Edinburgh* showed the centrality of this festival in Edinburgh's cultural landscape. This position – reputational and physical – at the centre of the city's cultural offer can and should be questioned and examined, and it is for the whole of the city's cultural sector to engage in an open access discussion about some of the issues raised that reoccur in August year-on-year, both around the Fringe and the proliferation of other festivals that take place at the same time. The idea presented here of the 'Edinburgh Imaginary' is proposed as a lens for this discussion and future research that can frame some of the well-known stories that repeat year-on-year about the challenges of August festivals in the context of the bigger, critical socio-political picture of creative cities, classes and industries. It is easy to be flippant about accounts of the 'doing' of Edinburgh and dismiss these perceptions of the city as being the preserve of those artists and audiences who visit each August but are disconnected from the place for the rest of the year. However, this research argues that the Edinburgh Imaginary has a year-round impact on the cultural value and values of the city's cultural sector that can disproportionately devalue the city's year-round cultural life through a scale and experience of otherness that renders Edinburgh 'placeless' (Lynch and Quinn, 2022). If Edinburgh's cultural value is to be re-examined and recalibrated to address challenges of equity, access, diversity and sustainability, and work towards a just landscape for the city, the relationship between these values and the city's economic power as a cultural destination, will also require re-examination.

# Conclusion

## Introduction

The overarching finding from this research is that the study of the cultural work in communications offers a unique framework for the study of cultural value and values. Through multiple disciplinary perspectives – Cultural Policy and Arts Management Studies, Marketing and Communications, Platform Studies, Practice and Design Research – the study of the work of communications, and the people and practices that undertake it, demonstrates the active practice of enacting and reframing cultural value through cultural values that cultural organisations and workers undertake to connect with their audiences.

This conclusion makes the case for further study of the work of communications through the lens of creative justice (Banks, 2017) and of its role in supporting the distribution of cultural policy in practice, as well as cultural objects. The ‘creative city’ of Edinburgh is framed here at the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’ which, my findings show, acts as a tool for the critique of the practices and impacts of more than two decades of cultural and creative industries policies, communications and promotion that are shown in the literature review to have embedded and reproduced creative *injustice* (Banks, 2017).

## Contribution to knowledge

This research is a practice-led contribution to understandings of how ideas of cultural value and values are acquired, mediated, negotiated, and communicated by cultural workforces to their audiences. It focuses on the work of communications as a unique, and not well-researched, way of seeing and knowing cultural work more broadly. In positioning the practitioner-researcher (Barrett, 2007; Scott, 2016; Nelson, 2022), role at the centre of that work – studying others’ communication practice through my own – this thesis explores the dimensions of delivering culture and reflecting on communications work as cultural policy in action. As such, the work contributes to cultural policy studies and arts management studies, as well as to participatory design

research through its focus on reflexive, co-produced and action research methodologies.

Edinburgh, famous for its festivals, is explored in a contemporary context through its recent history as a creative city. This construct of the city is termed here the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’ and this framework contributes to a body of research that seeks to critique cultural policies enacted through the development of economic and industrial-led cases for cultural value and examine them alongside research that calls for a re-examining of cultural value and valuation (Banks, 2017; Whitham *et al.*, 2019; Brook *et al.*, 2020; Oman, 2021). The thesis shows how this concept can illustrate the ongoing tensions between economic framings of culture, the instruments of cultural policy, and the day-to-day practice of cultural work, and the ways in which centuries of negotiation and renegotiation of ideas of cultural value have informed the complexity of contested notions of cultural value and values. It makes a case for Edinburgh as a unique example of how these tensions rise and fall in an annual cycle of festivals that are at the core of the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’. However, this framing could also be applicable to other cities and regions, in the UK and more broadly, in facilitating the critical study of their own negotiations of cultural policies and cultural value and values.

The centrality of the work of communications and digital communications in this research acts as an interdisciplinary framing of both cultural policy and platform studies. It takes a practice-led and participatory approach to the study of working with digital platforms, data and technologies in cultural sector settings that is not currently extensively studied and explores the power asymmetries in cultural production and consumption that producing and promoting cultural events online can illuminate. The thesis also makes an original case for further exploration of the idea of cultural events as platforms, in which festivals and events are both manifestations of cultural value and values, and instrumental in promoting and reshaping them to address known inequalities off access to cultural jobs and cultural events and activities.



## Communications and cultural value

As illustrated in Figure 1 in the literature review, this research frames cultural value and values as a constellation (Normann and Ramírez, 1993; Speed and Maxwell, 2015) where value and values interoperate and recalibrate through their communication in cultural production and consumption. This framework links the study of cultural value and values to notions of experiential value (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014; Banks, 2017) and creative justice (Banks, 2017), which addresses the potential of the study of communications work to support active research and practice towards addressing inequalities in current modes of understanding cultural value, cultural industries and places, and cultural workforces and ideas of equity and creative justice (Banks, 2017).

This thesis includes a critique of early twenty-first century framings of creative and cultural industries, classes and cities and the ways in which these ideas have reinforced and even prioritised and exacerbated inequalities in the cultural sector. But, as noted in the literature review, the widespread Western European and Global North adoption of these strategies for cities (Bennett, 2020) is also evidence of this research's finding that the work of communications is central to navigating and negotiating practices of cultural value and values, within the cultural sector but also for cultural policymaking. Cultural communications workers then, for creative cities and places, act as intermediaries in the creative economy that promote and augment what Peck (2005) calls the "fast policy market" (Peck, 2005, p.767), also mediated by 'consultants' (Bennett, 2020). That assemblage focuses on the perceived value (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014) of culture and the creative industries which largely overlooks concepts of intrinsic cultural value and social value and valuation practices that look beyond a simple rationale for economic regeneration, prosperity and growth.

Cultural communications workers – as demonstrated by my two organisational case studies – are also navigating a landscape of internal and external structures and economies. The relationships and tensions between digital platforms, festivals and live cultural events and their workforces is shown by this thesis to offer insight into

contemporary perceptions of cultural value, and the value and values of the cultural sector. Both case study organisations' communications teams showed high awareness of the language of platforms and their value to cultural events. But my interviews also document awareness of the precarity associated with investing in the work of using platforms when their commercial priorities and black boxed algorithms are ever changing. This opacity renders them potentially at odds with perceptions of intrinsic cultural value and values that operate, somewhat at least, outside a neoliberal capitalist logic of economic growth. Cultural organisations, for platforms, are just users and, as the case studies here show, are at the mercy of a system that on the one hand suggests platform data can somehow unlock the value and values of digital platforms to increase ticket sales to audiences, but on the other does not offer these insights openly. So, platform-based logics of the creator economy throw up interesting comparisons between ideas of success and aspirational labour for those who create content on and for digital and social media platforms (Poell *et al.*, 2021), and success for creative and cultural work in an in-person space that is mediated by and distributed through these same platforms.

These tensions overlap – (not) getting paid to do what you love (Duffy, 2018) applies to both online content creation and to the known challenges of working conditions in the live events and cultural sector more broadly (Banks, 2017). The case studies, and particularly the interviews, I conducted offer unique glimpses into the work of communications in these organisations, both internally through relations with others in the organisation, and externally in the communications produced. Participants shared their understandings of the need for authenticity, instinct, and flexibility in their practice, and the extent to which this is often self-led and self-directed, even though communications workers act as the first point of contact for, and voice of, an organisation in speaking to and with its audiences. The Edinburgh Science case study interviews in particular also suggest that those who produce and distribute communications often have little top-down organisational power. However, the nature of communications work on and through platforms confers, from an organisational perspective, responsibility for the content and tone of voice of an entire organisation in the production of messages for these platforms. There exists, therefore, the potential for

these cultural workers to use their unrestricted access to platforms of cultural communication to directly challenge structural inequalities and ‘the way things have always been’ in their organisational culture. This finding positions communications as an area of cultural work that is well placed to actively support ideas of creative justice (Banks, 2017), both in the ways in which its practice challenges top-down and unequal perceptions of cultural value, and in its capacity to broadcast and communicate ideas of an equitable cultural sector in both production and consumption. Platform studies is also a framework through which to investigate the idea of a festival or cultural experience as a platform (Mair and Smith, 2021). Platforms in this argument become places where citizens and the cultural sector can share, collaborate, and recalibrate value constellations and framings of cultural value and values. As Morvern Cunningham and I attempted to do with *Future Culture Edinburgh*, these experiences can platform and sometimes amplify voices that are heard less frequently than others, or whose contributions can be delegitimised by structures that resist change and changemaking, but this requires sensitivity to the potential to reproduce cultural policy discourse that may reinforce inequalities (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023).

There are some limitations to the study of communications as cultural objects, particularly at a textual level. As the social media and computational research conducted through this project shows, it is relatively easy for textual analysis to draw out terms and terminologies that support, or do not support, notions of cultural value and values and count them. My work has undertaken research that involves filtering and quantifying text-based datasets according to these terms, at the same time as studying the mode of production of these texts. As such, the data-driven practice of this thesis starts to draw out findings about inequalities, power, and rhetoric about communications of value and values from both within and outside cultural organisations. Singling out value and values to keyword and phrase terminologies (Williams, 1983; Moran, 2021) is shown to be reductive, but the contextualising work of my case studies and this thesis start to show areas where these statements can be seen as little more than empty rhetoric (Lechelt and Cunningham, 2020) and where they offer insights into the conditions of their production and unspoken communications of cultural value and values.

This research finds a link between participants' reported feelings about the value of communications, including communications as cultural work within an organisation, and the content and presentation of the communications these participants produce on behalf of the organisations they represent. The comparison in Chapter 3 between my interviews with Edinburgh Science and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society show that a sense of the perceived internal value of work, in this case communications but this could also feasibly extend into all cultural work, projects into the presentation of an organisation in its external engagement. The Fringe Society's perception of the value of communications work in their organisation was more positive than that suggested by Edinburgh Science. Here this external presentation was delivered to a researcher (me). My practitioner experience and lens will have supported both my own and my interviewees' sense of connection with each other and with the topic, but the analysis of the content, tone and confidence of each organisations' communications produced on Twitter also supports a link between internal and external value and values in communications work.

The aim of this thesis is not to suggest that studying communications, particularly those produced in a time of unexpected and unpredictable challenge as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic, presents a full and transparent picture of an organisation's internal and external perceptions of cultural value, or of its own value and values. What this research does assert, however, is that exploring external representations and mediations of communications can offer significant insight into unpublished notions of value in the cultural sector and how these are played out in both cultural production and consumption. It does this through multiple lenses and perspectives: the influence of digital communications practices on producing, promoting, and consuming live events; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cultural work, cultural

programmes and perceptions of cultural value and values; and concepts of the value of in-person cultural places and destinations – in this case Edinburgh – and how these both challenge and support value and values in the city’s cultural sector. The framing of the Edinburgh Imaginary, suggested by this research and explored below could, from a communications perspective, explore further some of the successful (in terms of its reach and adoption) work of creative cities. Creating a critical framework through which to analyse evidence for this success would support the development of an active practice for promoting and enacting creative justice, with the Edinburgh Imaginary as a framework or network through which to connect communications and cultural workers – in festivals and live events, and in the sector more broadly – to advance the practice-led action research methodologies that this research has explored.

## Creative Justice

This thesis explores framing cultural communications work through the lens of creative justice (Banks, 2017), considering both the value of working in the cultural sector, and the “social effects” (Banks, 2017, p.41) of that work. The findings presented here support Banks’ hypothesis that “through such an approach, we might come to know cultural work better – and so do it justice” (Banks, 2017, p.41), through the setting out of its complexities.

Through reflexively working and developing practice with cultural sector practitioners – first specifically with communications workers, and then with professionals in the city’s cultural sector more broadly – this research shows a gap between the practices of producing, promoting, and making a living through cultural work in Edinburgh, and perceptions of this work’s value. Throughout this thesis, I have referred to Banks’ (2017) work on creative justice – and its opposite, creative injustice – as a means of asserting the synergy I find with these ideas. They allow for flexibility and evolution of notions of cultural value and values and their definitions in cultural policy and practice that

incorporate both intrinsic and instrumental ideas through a call for justice for cultural objects and cultural work.

Banks' previous work on the moral economy social values in cultural production (2006) and the politics of cultural work (2007) are evident in the idea of creative justice which, for my research, similarly seeks to critique but also balance multiple framings of cultural value and values. Creative justice is posited as a way of incorporating rather than avoiding economic arguments about culture and its value, while also reasserting previous work that explored and exposed the challenges of cultural and creative work and its industrialisation.

The focus on cultural work and creative justice is particularly relevant given the practice-led nature of my research and as explored above, this thesis documents creative injustice and power imbalances at multiple registers: in organisations, in cities and in the platform and digital relationships that are specific to the work of communications. Creative justice allows for the formulation of communications work as cultural production and the outputs it produces, both physically and online, as cultural objects. Banks' notion of the paying of 'objective respect' (Banks, 2017) to both aspects of production and consumption supports the finding in this thesis that the work of communications is central to culture and its value, rather than peripheral or as the last step in the transition from production to consumption. In addition, communications is embedded not only within cultural sector outputs and practices, but in the enactment and promotion of cultural policies and policymaking, as demonstrated by late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century instrumentalization of cultural policy and creative cities.

That creative justice strives for parity of participation (Banks, 2017) aligns with the practice-led research presented here, and especially with the design, programming and delivery of the *Future Culture Edinburgh* symposium in 2021 that prioritised ways to create an open and equitable space for discussions and imaginings of change in the city's cultural sector. The notion of reduction of harms (Banks, 2017) through acknowledging the challenges and inequalities embedded in access to and the practice

of cultural work, aligns both with the content of the *Future Culture Edinburgh* programme and with the timing of the empirical research presented here that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, the impacts of which are still being felt and understood in research and in cultural practice.

## The Edinburgh Imaginary

Inspired by the section of Chapter 1 that explores cultural and creative industries, intermediaries and imaginaries, the ‘Edinburgh Imaginary’ seeks to make visible the tensions between place-making and place-branding (Durrer *et al.*, 2023) and notions of intrinsic, extrinsic and instrumental cultural value and values in Edinburgh that are evident from the findings presented in this thesis and supported by my aligned research practice. Supported by findings from this research, it has developed as a clear example of the tensions between cultural policy as practice (Edinburgh as a Festival City), and cultural policy in practice (what the city’s year-round cultural workforces and audiences actually do), particularly through the annual opportunity to interrogate cultural imaginaries and intermediaries (O’Connor, 2015) that the Edinburgh festivals bring about.

This thesis began with an anecdotal illustration of the idea of ‘doing’ Edinburgh in August but, as the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping Project’s work with the city’s festivals showed, this imagined version of Edinburgh is only part of its cultural ecosystem, and can support a sense of “othering” of communities which is further reinforced by the festivals themselves separating out their core offer from their programming with and for Edinburgh communities (Jones and Currie, 2022). However, as the same research also showed, this does not mean that the Festival City place-branding Edinburgh imaginary was rejected by the city’s communities. In fact, many participants in those workshops appreciated and celebrated this part of Edinburgh’s identity while advocating for a more active role for communities in it (Jones and Currie, 2022). The Edinburgh Imaginary then becomes a framework for research practice in academic and cultural sector settings through which to understand the interrelation

between cultural destination imaginaries and the experiences of communities that are more diverse than Florida's narrow, exclusive and gentrifying creative class (2002). The framework supports the extending of critique of cultural policy ideas and practices to all citizens who wish to participate, rather than allowing consultants and toolkits (Bennett, 2020) or a "transnational epistemic community" that constitutes a "not quite recognised field of expertise" (O'Connor *et al.*, 2020, p.4) to perform cultural policy on the city at arm's length with little concern for how those policies are absorbed, understood and enacted (Bennett, 2020).

The *Future Culture Edinburgh* symposium, influenced by my research that led up to it and took place alongside it, was key to the development of the concept of the Edinburgh Imaginary. As noted already, the event was itself an exercise in communicating cultural value and values, and in doing this in a manner which supported principles of creative justice (Banks, 2017) through actively structuring equitable access to the event. The symposium was designed to examine the city's year-round cultural ecosystem and infrastructure while acknowledging the centrality of the city's summer festivals. However, the focus of the discussions at the event quickly turned to the examination of the structures of festivals themselves. Reinforcing the findings from the Culture and Communities Mapping Project, this is further evidence of the tensions between the practice imagining and valuing an equitable year-round cultural life for the city and reconciling that with the economic imperative of the cultural destination framing of summer festivals which celebrates the doubling of the city's population in August<sup>128</sup>. The Edinburgh Imaginary could also be a discursive research space where arguments for and against industrial and economic framings of cultural and creative industries could meet notions of creative justice for cultural objects and cultural work (Banks, 2017).

Edinburgh is a productive starting point for this framing because of its unique set of cultural circumstances that are also translatable into other cities, certainly in the

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<sup>128</sup> This claim features in many Edinburgh festivals visitor guides online (both pre and post-pandemic), but also in blogs posted to the Festivals Edinburgh website, including this from 2018 <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/dans-festival-city/50-tips-for-5-festivals-plan-an-amazing-edinburgh-festivals-visit> [Accessed 21 June 2023]



Global North. The city's year-round cultural life and ecosystem incorporates both place-making and place-branding (Durrer *et al.*, 2023) and pits them against each other on a relentless annual cycle. Each year, geographies of year-round cultural assets and cultural participation are punctuated with large-scale festivals, especially during August. In this ecosystem, cultural organisations and policymakers are, each year, required to make a case for and widely communicate cultural value and values that balance the competing forces of culture and creative industries as commercial enterprise with the narrative of cultural participation. This dialogue acts both as a means of signifying the value and value of culture to citizens, and, as my research with the Edinburgh Culture and Communities Mapping project shows, the value of citizens to the city, signifying that the tensions of the Edinburgh Imaginary are difficult to balance.

Durrer *et al.* (2023) question “whether it is even possible to have non-local cultural policy” (Durrer *et al.*, 2023, p. 5). The global uptake of creative cities notions (Peck, 2005; Bennett, 2020; O’Connor *et al.*, 2020) suggests that it is, but this research suggests that this is currently operating at the expense of, or in competition with, policies that are more grounded in cultural value and values of a place; place being a term used to capture and geographically locate the complexities of cultural value and values drawn by this thesis and encapsulated by experiential value (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014) and creative justice (Banks, 2017). I see the Edinburgh Imaginary as a framework for further practice and research through which to identify what is tangible, active and valuable in the design and practice of cultural policy and programming that can support creative justice. It can at once bring together a story of cultural cities and creative places that supports a narrow view of cultural value and values, leans heavily on the way things have always been, and promotes an economic and tourism driven ‘Festival City’<sup>129</sup> cultural agenda (Pratt and Hutton, 2013); with those making the case for a more diverse framing of culture and cultural value that is not always made with a national or international framework of what is economically valuable in mind.

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<sup>129</sup> <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/about> [Accessed 29 March 2024]

From the perspective of communications *about* the Edinburgh Imaginary, the fact that Edinburgh has such an easily conjurable version of itself as the Festival City that comes to the mind even of those who have never visited, suggests that this city's cultural and creative sectors and industries – and any critical discourse about cultural value and values that can be had there – have the potential to be impactful at local, regional, national and international levels. The aim is not entirely or necessarily to problematise or diminish the imaginary part of The Edinburgh Imaginary, but to see it for what it is, critique it, understand the value and values of its existence and work within those to improve equity, diversity, access and sustainability towards creative justice (Banks, 2017). It comes back to the notion of who decides what culture is, who gets to do it, and which bits of what gets done are valued. The June 2023 announcement of increased economic impact numbers for festivals in the Festivals Edinburgh network (see footnote 130 below), which have been accompanied by statements from the network that the figures are a justification for increased funding because the bulk of the impact goes to accommodation providers and hospitality, are a perfect example of the tension between economic and cultural value and values the 'Edinburgh Imaginary' represents. This example exposes the challenges of measuring the 'Edinburgh Imaginary' through quantitative means – the 2015 and 2022 figures are not directly comparable because 2022 includes spending by Edinburgh residents, whereas 2015 figures did not, as means of accounting for a drop in international visitors<sup>130</sup>. These clarifications or anomalies also show the importance of communications of value and values around the 'Edinburgh Imaginary' that do not completely ignore or set aside forms of value but seek to balance them sensitively, with care, and with qualitative context.

That the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society has been part of this research has also been instrumental in the formation of the concept of the Edinburgh Imaginary. Because of the non-curated, 'open access' nature of its programming, the Fringe can be seen as having been in part curated by 'Edinburgh' – or a version of Edinburgh that includes both the place and the cultural destination imaginary – whose geography, residents, visitors, and

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<sup>130</sup> For the most recent report of the economic impact of the Festival City, which states an increase in Edinburgh from £280m in 2015 to £407m in 2022, and in Scotland from £313m in 2015 to £367m in 2022 see [https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/assets/000/005/534/Edinburgh\\_Festivals\\_Impact\\_Study\\_digital\\_original.pdf?1687855168](https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/assets/000/005/534/Edinburgh_Festivals_Impact_Study_digital_original.pdf?1687855168) page 3 [Accessed 2 July 2023]

experience economies support its existence each August and year-round. But, as the findings from *Future Culture Edinburgh* show, open access can also act as a double-edged sword, which can be used to expose inequalities and creative injustice (Banks, 2017), but also to justify a position where the organisation that represents those principles uses them as a reason not to actively pursue change. Not only that, because of the Fringe's non-curated and self-funded model of production – it adds a new marketplace to the city for three weeks only, with many audiences, performers, producers, cultural spaces, and revenue then disappearing until the following year – it is particularly easy to see the Fringe as imagined because of its non-permanent integration into the city, and to perceive barriers to access that are beyond known and evidenced social, economic, cultural, and geographical barriers (Jones and Currie, 2022).

Like the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society's 'open access' principles, and like the programming principles for *Future Culture Edinburgh*, the language of cultural value and values is complex, negotiated and informed by social, political and economic histories, capital and contexts. The formulation of the Edinburgh Imaginary, and the suggestion that this framing becomes a conceptual space for further research into equitable and just policies and practices, is envisaged both as a hopeful and values-led lens and a constructive framework through which to continue the discursive and reflexive study of cultural value and values this research has explored.

Through the Edinburgh Imaginary framing, the structures the city's cultural sector creates and sustains can be interrogated through practice in research, cultural production, and policymaking contexts. It is envisaged as an interoperable tool or lens through which a reflexive comparison between being in the city as a 'place' and the city as an 'idea'. It supports the potential to develop a more just creative city – Edinburgh but other cities too – through the study of the work and cultural objects of communications.

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# **Cultural Value in Edinburgh: how the city’s cultural sector communicates its value and values**

Vikki Jones

Edinburgh College of Art

## **Appendices**

|                                                                                                                  |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Appendix 1 .....                                                                                                 | 2   |
| Appendix 1a: transcript from Edinburgh Science interview #1 .....                                                | 2   |
| Appendix 1b: transcript from Edinburgh Science interview #2 .....                                                | 34  |
| Appendix 1c: transcript from Edinburgh Science interview #3.....                                                 | 66  |
| Appendix 1d: transcript from Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society interview #1 .....                                | 87  |
| Appendix 1e: transcript from Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society interview #2 .....                                | 117 |
| Appendix 2.....                                                                                                  | 149 |
| Appendix 2a: Participant Information Sheet – Zoom participants .....                                             | 149 |
| Appendix 2b: Participant Information Sheet – in-person participants .....                                        | 154 |
| Appendix 2c: Consent Form – Zoom participants.....                                                               | 161 |
| Appendix 2d: Consent Form – in-person participants .....                                                         | 163 |
| Appendix 2e: Future Culture Edinburgh Data Management Plan .....                                                 | 165 |
| Appendix 2f: Off-campus research checklist for COVID-19.....                                                     | 170 |
| Appendix 2g: Edinburgh College of Art Ethics Review Committee Opinion.....                                       | 175 |
| Appendix 3.....                                                                                                  | 177 |
| Appendix 3a: Future Culture Edinburgh ‘keep, lose, and change’ activity, recorded on Miro .....                  | 177 |
| Appendix 3b: Rob Hopkins activity from Future Culture Edinburgh, recorded on Miro .....                          | 178 |
| Appendix 3c: Imagining collective action activity from Future Culture Edinburgh, recorded and coded on Miro..... | 179 |

# Appendix 1

## Appendix 1a: transcript from Edinburgh Science interview #1

### Edinburgh Science transcription #1

Interview date: 9 October 2019

Duration: 46'42"

#### Interviewer:

**Right, so in the context of your social media and your social media marketing at Edinburgh Science, what would you say you use it for?**

001:

Erm, so, in my opinion, we use our social media as a direct point of communication with our audiences to give as close to live and up to date updates on what we're currently doing and anything coming up. And, I guess, kind of, it's to kind of supplement the personality of the organisation. Er, yeah to kind of make it more rounded, I think...

002:

Yeah, I think it's certainly like to amplify our voice; you know, like there's the people who attend the festival, like in person, and there is definitely like an online audience. So, it kind of, you know, gives us the opportunity to talk to more people.

001:

Yeah.

003:

And I think it maintains a continuous brand awareness, erm, and just a presence. Because I think unless you actually necessarily need to engage with the nitty gritty of 'when's this event on?' or 'has something changed?' you know, just sort of seeing it there keeps that awareness like, floating on top of mind.



**Interviewer:**

**And, so, in the context of what you do... well, I guess the first question is what other marketing do you do, other than social media, as a sort of day-to-day profile-raising activity?**

001:

Probably just a lot more traditional stuff, I think. Well, it feels weird to say that because I guess social media is now becoming, well, is already I guess part of traditional media. But, erm, yeah just kind of listing[s] work, advertising both digitally and in print, erm, yeah, just branding. I don't know why I'm struggling now...

**Interviewer:**

**That's ok! It's interesting... My next question's going to be, sort of, how much time would you say... this is probably more for you 001... how much time would you say you spend on digital things – social media and also potentially things like the website – how much of your time, roughly as a percentage, would you say that takes up?**

001:

For work?

**Interviewer:**

**Yes.**

[Laughter]

001:

Erm, yeah, it's probably at least two hours a day...

**Interviewer:**

**OK**

001:

Between, because there's kind of the maintenance side of things which, for social media, and the website's different obviously, maintenance on the website is more about kind of making sure things are up to date. Whereas maintenance, in my eyes, for social media is more about actually just making sure that you're on top of what's happening and what's going on because social media is that opportunity for us to chime in on real-time events in the world. Erm, so between that and then the content creation side, at this time of year, kind of, out with specific campaign period, yeah, it's about two hours a day.

**Interviewer:**

**OK, and in the campaign? [i.e. festival campaign] A lot more?**

001:

Yeah, it depends because obviously 004 and I try and split it so that it's not so much one person... Erm, I'd say it probably doubles to four, if not goes up to maybe five. Erm, but again, part of that, as someone that, like, works a lot with social media for my job, I tend to look at it out with work hours as well. So actually, some of that maintenance side of things, which, yeah, is looking for stuff to engage with and making sure that I'm seeing what's being said to us, about us, about people like us. I tend to do a lot of that in my own time as well.

**Interviewer:**

**And would you say? Would you maybe say then that there's not a clear delineation between what you do in work time and what you do as, kind of, part of your everyday use?**

001:

Yeah, and I think that is just specific to the social media stuff because it feels more natural that if I'm on those sites and I'm checking for me anyway, it kind of just, I naturally will check work accounts at the same time.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah. And how do you feel about that? Are you ok with it?**

001:

At this time of year, totally fine. I think it always just depends... It changes during campaign because it's... there's more pressure associated with it.

002:

Uh huh. What you're responding to, I guess...

001:

Yeah, so, I mean, I can see someone has tweeted us at maybe 7 o'clock at night tonight, and I will see it and maybe respond, but sometimes I'll just think, well, it's probably fine just to go back tomorrow. Whereas during campaign time, it is kind of that idea of kind of, because social media is a 24-hour thing, unless we clearly kind of set a line of 'well actually we're going to have our own kind of like social hours' whereby we are only active on those channels between certain hours. If we don't necessarily have anything like that in place, then I'm, yeah, I'm more likely to take that work home.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, ok. So, in the context then, so obviously you guys as a comms team set a real value on social media. Erm, and I'm using the word 'value' to mean the value of the kind of content you produce, but also the value of actually the amount of time, which seems potentially to be quite a lot, so the value of the amount of time you spend on it. How do you think that is kind of understood, erm, valued by the organisation as a whole?**

001:

Erm...

[Laughter]

001:

In my experience, I, I wouldn't say it's necessarily understood...

**Interviewer:**

**Ok.**

001:

Erm, but I don't think that's like a... it's not necessarily a negative thing to me. I just think that, I think sometimes I have felt like some people in the organisation might feel like social media has more power to achieve their goals than it actually does. So, whether that's 'oh, we've got this last-minute event, sell tickets'...

002:

Yeah.

001:

... 'Put it out on the internet' or...

002:

'This is an easy win'

001:

'We've not had many job applications, put it out on the internet.' It's like, it's not like a go to fix, or a quick fix in that way. And that's maybe where I've felt that other people don't necessarily understand that side of things. But, certainly not at this organisation have I felt like anyone's been like negative about it.

003:

I, I think fundamentally, creating content for social media is completely undervalued by almost every single user. Erm, because the culture of social media is to produce content for free, which actually benefits the platform holder: Twitter, Instagram... So, to create content for work, every employee who is a social media user themselves does

not put any value on that content because they put no value on their own content. Erm, on the flip side, I've moved away from using social media in my private time because I don't get paid for it.

**Interviewer:**

**No! Yes! It's interesting, so...**

002:

I think, erm, just to add... So I think there's like a kind of senior level who, you know like kind of, older generation, perhaps people within the organisation or associated with the organisation who are not on social media themselves, and I think they find it hard to understand. They've heard about social media and they think we should be doing more on it. And that is kind of constantly the instruction, but yet they don't understand what we do do, they don't understand what best practice is. You know, like they don't understand the environment.

001:

So they don't, they typically are unable to actually even give direction on what they mean, when they say...

002:

Yes [laughter]

001:

... do something, do more. More of what aspect?

002:

'Write a strategy'... what they mean is 'write something that I will understand'. You know, like, explain this to me. Whereas, you know, I think in the past we've created strategies that we thought would work, or, you know, would be effective. [Laughter] I mean, I'm obviously talking about the board [laughter] and other senior staff. But yeah, like, erm,

you know, we've produced multiple multiple strategies and actually, you know, for them it's as basic as do you have more followers than the book festival, which, you know...

001:

Yes, and trying to explain that can be particularly difficult, in terms of, especially, and I'm, I hope that, you know, I've been able to explain that a little better, in kind of recent conversations that I've had...

002:

Yeah

001:

... and just that I'm able to say that 'well actually I used to work for that comms team and I worked on that account.' You know, you can even bring it back to the very bare bones that it was the same voice used on both platforms, there's just a difference between one is much bigger, and that's because it's been more active in that way for longer and has an audience that engages more on that platform with what they're putting out.

002:

They have a larger audience base.

001:

Audience, yeah.

**Interviewer:**

**Ok, thanks. Can I come back to something you said 003 about the idea of value to you and value to the platform. Erm, because, there's sort of, obviously there's value in the work that you do and there's an economic value. There's an economic value to you because you get paid and of course any data that you share on a social media platform has an economic value to that platform, as you say. So would you say then that you would approach, and you can answer this as a person or on behalf**

**of the organisation or a combination of the two, would you say that you are using the platform almost as a network to build an audience and to reach new people, or are you saying that it's more of a broadcasting tool, whereby you're not necessarily engaging with people unless they're customers who come to you directly. You're more talking about broadcasting your own content?**

001:

Erm, we have done a lot more of broadcasting our content than we have done interactions. Part of that is that we've found that our audience do just go very quiet out with campaign. Erm, they can be very involved and very active once they've got something to say to us...

002:

Once they're interested in something that we are offering...

001:

Yeah, and that is something that we've built into, kind of, the new version of the digital strategy.

[Laughter]

001:

Erm, whereby we are trying to make that shift towards, you know, perhaps accepting that our audience is that little bit smaller, but actually really talking with them and really engaging with them online so that even if that audience doesn't grow, we're not losing an audience by just funnelling out what can pretty quickly become boring information, certainly if they feel like they've seen it before.

So, yeah, to answer your question, we do a bit of both. Certainly, trying to move more towards interactions now. Erm yeah, because that's where we sort of decided that the value is.

003:

Yeah.

002:

Where we can expand, our audience.

001:

That's been supported a lot by the way that various platforms have been developed, especially in the last year. So, there's obviously a demand for it, so it's erm, it feels more natural that we follow the trend in that way.

**Interviewer:**

**Uh huh.**

001:

Because there's a reason, there's a reason those changes are happening.

003:

So, do you think people are more interested in having a conversation with us now than they used to be?

001:

Probably not because we're not having those conversations yet, but it's been proven in the past that brands that have personality and brands that do heavily engage are more likely to be seen further and seen wider and as a result their audiences grow...

002:

I don't think people are consuming it as information tools anymore, it's more commentary...

001:

Yeah...



003:

On science?

002:

Well, like, in view that... Well, just thinking about my own personal usage, I wouldn't follow someone who just; like I wouldn't follow a brand or an outlet that just put out generic messages. You know, it's actually all about, like, the opinion and discussion and debate and commentary. I think that probably has been a shift. It used to be about, like, broadcasters or media or brands, like, putting out their messages, and you know, you'd engage with that message whereas now it's more, personal, it's got personality to it.

**Interviewer:**

**And do... I'm assuming that, I don't know why I'm assuming this, I shouldn't assume this! Do you feel like those approaches are specific to a platform or would you say that that's a more general shift towards interactions? Like would you be more likely to do that on Twitter and less likely to do it on Facebook, for example?**

001:

Erm, yeah, so, certainly something we tried to explore last year was that, er, using different platforms for different reasons. So we did trial run Twitter being the more conversational platform, where actually we would be engaging with user content primarily and then followed with our information about our events, and then Facebook would be the kind of more informational, which came from, erm, basically discussing, you know if, if you're going to an event... it was based off our own personal experiences with, if I was going to an event and it was heavily raining and I wanted to make sure this event was still happening, I would probably check Facebook as that kind of information source. But, having said that, we didn't find that that worked, erm, we found that actually our engagement on Facebook did go down a little bit because we were leading with, sort of, more text heavy longer posts. Erm, and actually so, with Facebook as well, that is something that we'd be moving back towards as more conversational. Erm, sharing other content as well that's not necessarily ours but is sparking conversation.

Some of the better posts that we had from this year were sharing articles and asking questions and following up. And obviously there's always some sort of tie-back to what we're trying to achieve but, erm, we've certainly moved away from like 'well why would we post that if it doesn't have anything about us'. We're more open to doing that than I think we have been in the past.

**Interviewer:**

**Ok. And do you think that kind of post has a greater degree of labour attached to it in terms of finding that article, the piece of content to share, working out that strategy that then enables you to tie it back in?**

001:

Yeah, I think it involves, erm, having your ear closer to floor in terms of what's going on in the world, what's going on in the world of science, what's going on in terms of all of our big name speakers; making sure that if they are featured, if there's something, erm, about that. And that all kind of ties into, I guess, what I would consider like my personal research phases and like how I try and make sure that I'm in the know about changes in platforms, trends within the industry, all that sort of stuff. So, to me that kind of all fits in on a daily nugget of 'let me find out what's happening today'. Erm, yeah. Yeah, erm, yeah, I think it does, it takes more work.

**Interviewer:**

**Ok, and do you think that, well, you would say that there is, you could then attach a value in terms of the amount of engagement you get to that post? So you could correlate the two between 'yes, that took me a bit more time to produce, but I got X amount more'...**

001:

It's much more rewarding. It's much more rewarding to see, to have those interactions come back. Erm, because it feels like that will lead to a conversion more than 'here's the event, here's the time and date it's on, here's the link to buy tickets'.

**Interviewer:**

**Uh huh.**

001:

Erm, I think it would also, I think it just also represents our brand better to have more conversation associated. We're not... We are obviously trying to sell tickets but it's nice to take a step back from that and say 'well actually no, we're also trying to educate and erm have our audience be socially conscious, erm, about various different things going on.'

**Interviewer:**

**You mentioned a little bit about research and algorithms and stuff. How do you feel about the way that algorithms on social media platforms work to make your work more difficult, easier, more challenging, confusing? Any of those things, or all of the above!**

001:

Erm, I think it's, I think it really can be confusing. Erm, just because things are kind of constantly changing. Erm, even sort of smaller changes, it's not always clear why the platform is making them. I think sometimes there's transparency issues with that. Erm, yeah, and it can be frustrating to spend a lot of time developing a plan for how we'll conduct ourselves on a certain platform, only to hear that actually you're no longer being rewarded for the time and effort put into a particular format. Like, obviously video's had its big heyday on Facebook, but they're scaling back on that again, erm, they're not getting the prominence on feeds anymore and it's, that can be really frustrating. Erm, if we've invested a huge amount of time in making fun, short, snappy videos that will work well on that platform. Erm, yeah, it just, it's, yeah, frustrating and a bit confusing at times.

**Interviewer:**

**Uh huh. And you mentioned transparency. So if you're not getting that information from the platform itself, where are you getting it from?**

001:

I personally follow, I'm a part of few different kind of social media and digital industry groups on Facebook. I listen to a couple of podcasts a couple of times a week, and follow a lot of people in the industry on, like, Twitter and Instagram and stuff, so I get a lot of it through that.

**Interviewer:**

**Through social media. Ironically!**

[Laughter]

001:

I know!

003:

I think algorithms are inherently not transparent though. You can sometimes feel like they're working against you, but realistically they're meant to be sort of churning away to expose content, you know, to prolong dwell times, you know, on a social media platform. So I know some people just want the chronological feed of the days of yore, but I think sometimes that's nostalgic as well.

002:

[Laughs] Yeah, you think the platforms are right.

003:

Well, yeah, kind of, sometimes their motivation isn't necessarily clear. Erm, which I think is the entire problem with social media and some of these privacy concerns. In fact, every problem with social media is from a lack of transparency, but you can't kind of keep everyone happy either. I do think they're trying their best.

001:

Yeah, it is interesting as well. Sometimes, and the things that spring to mind as well is when they do, like, big style changes in terms of the actual look and feel and usability of the site. it is the sort of thing that always always for the first week I hate it, and like I'm real mad about it, but then actually about a week after that you forget and it is more useful. Erm...

002:

And I bet if someone came along and was like 'Here's Twitter from two years ago, do you want to use it?' you'd be like 'Ugh!'...

001:

Yeah "It's so hard to use!"

[Laughter]

002:

'Where's all the things?!'

001:

Yeah. It's actually like, more than, the side of that that's most annoying is when they roll out changes that are fairly large, whether it's algorithm or look and feel, and it's still glitching and it just doesn't work for you. Like I still have trouble with, erm, publishing on Facebook, the erm, the creative studio or whatever it's called now, erm, just doesn't work for me. Every time I go in it just glitches and I've emailed for help and I'm getting nothing, but it just means that I have to use the old system, which is still thankfully active through, like, publishing tools, but because that's not how they want me to be using the site, it's just I now have to go through like four or five extra clicks to achieve the same result that I used to be able to in, like, two.

**Interviewer:**

**I was interested in something you said 001 about the idea of social good and education and the kind of broader... And I'm interested in the idea of kind of the**

**algorithms – because, as we’ve already said there’s an economic interest for... the algorithm is designed to maximise advertising revenue, potentially. So how do you think, do you think it’s more difficult to communicate those, kind of, more aesthetic ideas and goals via social media than it is to say, sell a ticket? Or do you think it’s the same?**

001:

Sorry, I’m confused!

**Interviewer:**

**So, the idea that if we’re saying educating children and you’re saying that in a tweet, would you feel that that would get more, less or the same reach and engagement than something that said ‘we’ve got an event running with these cool speakers, please come.’**

001:

It depends. If you’re coming at it from the angle of ‘we educate children’, so for us that could shape many a different tweet. Erm, if that is a ‘hey we do Generation Science!’ [Edinburgh Science primary school programme] and then versus a ticket tweet they will actually probably do about the same because it’s still at its core about us, it’s not offering any conversation. It’s not actually offering the customer or the user any opportunity to actually interact, other than clicking on the link and buying a ticket and booking the show or whatever that may be.

003:

So the metrics are different because...

001:

Yeah...

003:

With one, it will be like 'who liked it? who responded?', with the other it's 'who's clicked through? who's made a purchase?'

001:

Yeah. But if we, and what we have done and been quite successful on, is when we shape it so that it's framed around something else whereby the fact that we educate children is actually almost the secondary point of the tweet. We're more likely to get engagements on that. Erm, but that's one of things that I think we've been trying to do a lot more of is actually just directly ask for responses. So, putting out more of the 'What do you think of this?' and actually trying to spur that conversation, rather than being vague about it. But yeah, you'll always get exceptions to that in that you'll have a big-name speaker or, you know, we got like zero applications for our youth consultation group until the Prince, what is it? Prince of Wales Trust or something like that, what's that... The trust that he does that's for kids! They retweeted us and then we'd gone from three applications to like 14 overnight. So, there's always exceptions of who else sees your content and who else can punt that out, but, for the most part I'd say...

**Interviewer:**

**Ok. So thinking about engagement then, erm, what kind of strategies to you currently use to measure how successful your digital campaigns and digital marketing are?**

001:

So, we just use a range of online analytics tools. Erm, Google Analytics, we'll use the within platform analytics as well. So obviously Twitter, Facebook and Instagram all have their own, Instagram's is an issue, but I believe they're working on it. Erm, and then yeah, it's kind of measured on a campaign by campaign basis so we'll look at the range of dates, whether it be from launch to last day of events, or day after last day of events to encompass that period and then we'll just do a comparison in that way. Erm...

002:

But I guess, so, our digital strategy has been focused more on engagement rather than reach so that's been... that's the strategy. So we measure against, we measure engagement rather than focusing on like the big numbers. And then there's also whether we achieve the ticket sales, whether we achieve the kind of same...

**Interviewer:**

**Conversions as a target?**

002:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Ok, and. Are you looking at... so you're looking at numbers of engagements or are you looking at... have you got any strategies for kind of saying well 'a click is an engagement', 'a comment is a secondary level of engagement'...?

[chuckle]

001:

Erm, we've not gone that deep into it. Err...

002:

I think we just take engagements as like how the...

001:

Yeah, we very much take it at kind of face value...

[Laughter]

...which doesn't sound great.

**Interviewer:**



**No!**

001:

Yeah, yeah, so, it'll be that kind of face value of engagements which, depending on which platform obviously, they are measuring it in different ways.

**Interviewer:**

**And how transparent do you feel that process is in terms of the analytics that you get from Facebook, or from... You mentioned Instagram being quite 'light' is my understanding of it?**

001:

Yeah, I, I think it's fine actually. I think the only thing that, that comes out of that that could be frustrating is just when you have those, kind of, exceptions to the rule whereby you have something do really well but it's not necessarily clear why. Erm, especially if you can't track that it's been shared by any particular account or that, erm, it's been mentioned anywhere or anything like that so that can be a bit kind of frustrating. It'd be nice to maybe see a bit of further breakdown of that, but actually if we're talking about a post only platform that does, well, probably not Instagram. But if you're talking about a post that does really well and is shared quite widely, but you're trying to kind of track down the catalyst for that, it can be quite hard. Because you're just kind of scrolling through a list of names.

002:

I guess we haven't, yeah we haven't really... I guess, the kind of level of analytics we get sort of suits our purposes. You know, so for like kind of big numbers we need or, you know... I guess we haven't taken a 'deep dive' which, yeah, should probably be something...

001:

Well it is something that we, again, it's like kind of been built into the new strategy whereby we are going to be more active with analytics on a regular basis because we

know that, we know that by referencing that more regularly it can inform and help us to actually put out better content and reach the right people. Erm, but it is just a case of, you just have to use it more to get the benefits out of it. So that's certainly something that we plan to do for the coming campaign for... I think we almost have it down for weekly, like check-ins with analytics, me and 004. I can't remember off the top of my head but it's something that hopefully the more we use it, the easier it will be. Specifically Google Analytics which is, it just never feels as straightforward as some of the other ones.

**Interviewer:**

**So, what do you currently use your analytics for then? So if you say you've got reach and an output... Where would that go? Would it go in a funding report? Would it go...**

002:

Yeah, it goes in like our, I guess, funding reports, annual reviews. You know, if we reported to the board. Like I say, you know, it's very surface level. You know, engagements of two million, billion...

[Laughter]

**Interviewer:**

**"20 gazillion people saw this post!" Yeah, ok. And so would a goal then potentially be to try and use that more regular check-in with analytics as a sort of, as an audience development strategy in itself?**

001:

Yeah. Yeah, I think while we're still trying to get a better understanding of what sort of content we want to be putting out, erm, using that more regularly will just give us a nice touchstone to be able to say 'well actually this is working, or this isn't working'. Erm, and just have much quicker actions on that rather than doing a whole campaign one way then looking and saying 'oh, we were down this year, or we were up this year,' and trying to kind of do that analysis after the fact.

**Interviewer:**

**And do you feel like that sort of year-on-year comparison is valid, or do you feel it's a little bit, kind of, arbitrary?**

002:

I think it's; I mean, people want it. I think I find it a little bit arbitrary because I think there's so many shifting things. Like, you know, so, in social media there can be so many things that change year on year. Like audience behaviour even, you know like the way that people... like Facebook, like people's use, the way people use Facebook has changed dramatically in the last like five years. Erm, and how people are interacting and things, so yeah, I always think, you know like kind of setting these goals, like you know like putting in you KPIs and being like 'right, like, increase our followers by like twenty per cent'... yeah. I think that's all quite meaningless. But, you do have to set some kind of targets so I guess we struggle to know what the, how to set a meaningful target, you know. And like, this year, so, our reach was down, but our engagements were higher, you know. But that kind of came under quite a lot of scrutiny from people who don't understand the platforms, you know, who actually, the big reach number was important to them. But that's not our strategy. So yeah, we've just been trying to explain that. So yeah, I don't find year-on-year comparisons very helpful, in a nutshell!

[Laughter]

**Interviewer:**

**So, you said something really interesting there 002 which I, which is about user behaviour. And, do you, have you noticed – either in your general, sort of, personal use or in organisational use – do you feel like user behaviour has changed quite significantly in the past few years?**

002:

Yes, definitely.

003:

Absolutely.

002:

Absolutely.

**Interviewer:**

**In what way?**

002:

And I think it's kind of constantly evolving as well so that's why... But you think even like, you know, like eight years ago when you were setting targets for like Twitter and things it would have been about, like, 'we'll grow our follower base by, like, twenty per cent'. And, I think, but people aren't, I think, as trigger happy about like just following loads of people these days. I think it's got; you know, you've got to kind of put out quality content that people want to engage with, you know. Engage with them and then that's how you're going to gain that so people aren't just like 'OK, like like like like, follow follow follow' any more. Erm, I think people have gotten a bit more choosy. It's become such an integral part of most people's marketing mix. Like, whether it's brands, or whether it's even like individuals who are using, like, building themselves a public profile. That's become such a big part of it that people, I guess their output has increased as well so, you know, like you don't just, you kind of want to engage with the things that you're interested in. It's not just a case of... because there's so much content coming out these days.

001:

Mmm. Yeah, I think I would say pretty much the exact same on that front. Erm, it's almost like especially, especially on Facebook I find it's the, the novelty has kind of gone with interacting with everything that's on your feed because you don't need to interact with it to get, I guess, the satisfaction of having viewed that content or read that post or whatever. Erm, so it really is a case of, you get people who are only really liking the big statements. And then has impacted what businesses are doing on that platform

because it's about 'well, let's limit what we're putting out, and let's only put out big things and let's only put out these big statements. Or let's put out things that are truly funny which is totally different to how Twitter is now being used, which is, actually it's kind of reverted back to what it originally was, it's more of that stream of consciousness again. Erm, and, you know, that's the platform where business are being rewarded for having personality and for...

002:

Yeah.

001:

... and for taking risks.

**Interviewer:**

**That's interesting that you think that Twitter's gone back, because originally it started off as a sort of like, almost like a micro blog, didn't it? So it was, 'this is what I'm doing right now', erm, and then it's come almost full circle.**

001:

Yeah, I think there was, there was certainly like a good five years, six years in between where people felt... you know. And it's the same, Instagram's gone through it as well and it's kind of in that period now where people are very wary of not posting too much, whereas, and Twitter went through that but has gone back again to actually it is now what it started off, of 'let me, kind of, tweet my morning'; 'let me everything that I'm doing today'.

**Interviewer:**

**'Here's what I had for lunch'...**

001:

Yeah, and they've, they've noticed that which is why threads became a thing and, you know, that's been heavily used. So, erm...

003:

This is partially why these algorithms develop as well, you know, if you feel like 'I'm just going to upload three photographs now' the algorithm will actually spread that out through someone's timeline...

002:

It does, yeah...

003:

Because, you know, chronological has those inherent problems. Erm, and I think with any change of algorithm, or even interface, erm, you notice new trends emerge such as the, err, Instagram trend where people were trying to make their feed look more interesting, rather than the value being in an individual post...

002:

Oh yeah, they're making their tiles...

001:

Aesthetic...

003:

Yep, tilings, you know. Rows of three, rows of nine, all that kind of thing. They've also introduced multiple pictures per post, so you've got thematic groupings. Erm, and so all of those changes therefore change the way people interact and, you know, like I said, I think people don't like 'liking' as much, so really the interesting analytic would be dwell time. I don't even know if that's available... to us, like how long does the person leave the page sitting while they're looking, you know? Because they don't interact necessarily, so...

**Interviewer:**

**Do you think it would be available to Instagram [data on post dwell time]? But not available to you guys?**

003:

Absolutely! They know exactly how long you looked at something that you didn't dare like!

**Interviewer:**

**How do you feel about that?**

002:

[Laughter]

003:

How do I feel about that?

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah**

003:

Erm...

**Interviewer:**

**Would it change your use if you could see that they were recording the amount of time you spent?**

003:

No because I don't need to see, it's because I suspect.

002:

[Laughter]

003:

Erm...

**Interviewer:**

**But that's interesting...**

003:

And, but it doesn't matter. Like we all know the privacy concerns, erm, on these platforms. You probably have a question about that later in this...

002:

[Laughter]

**Interviewer:**

**I might save that one for next time, but yes, there is a question. Well, there is a question about it. So I'm interested in the way... So, first of all, let me come back to one of the questions that I was going to ask today which is, in terms of, erm, your whole total audience, what percentage of those people would you say are on social media?**

001:

In general, not necessarily on it and engaged with us on social media?

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, just roughly.**

001:

Like, 94% I would say. But that's based on the fact that I think a lot of our audience is older, and I think would certainly not be across all of the current top platforms, but would certainly be on Facebook.

**Interviewer:**



**Use at least one?**

002:

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

**OK.**

001:

I don't think it's a full 100%.

**Interviewer:**

**I mean, we might be able to find out, we might not, but I think it's interesting to actually think about well how... Again, I guess, the percentage of people who are actually on social media but not necessarily engaged with Edinburgh Science, there's a sort of, there might be an interesting sort of analytic there in terms of conversions. Erm, and the other thing was, how do you feel about the relationship between social media platforms and the Internet as a whole? In the sense that, do you feel that social media has kind of overtaken what you would do on your website? Do you think it's for a completely different audience or what's the relationship between...?**

002:

Between our website and our social media?

**Interviewer:**

**Your website or the Internet in general. Erm, and social media platforms.**

001:

Yeah, I think social media is taking over the majority of the, like, the Internet's use. In terms of like that's where people are, that's why people are online, but in terms of its relation to our website I believe that our website has in the past had more of a role

whereas now I believe that the website is the place where, you know, our customers are obviously buying their tickets or they're booking stuff. But actually I don't think that's necessarily where they're getting their information.

002:

Yeah.

001:

Erm, I think the website is just somewhere that we direct to in order to complete that transaction.

002:

Social media's the jumping off point to go to. I, erm, that's probably how I use the Internet these days I think, but, erm... about eighty per cent of my usage probably comes via social media, rather than a straight search or a straight use.

003:

Or, you know, your first click of the day, or something like that.

002:

Yeah.

003:

I think websites that have that kind of engagement are blog-style websites. Erm, you know, or websites that have new content every day and they'll certainly push up their new articles on Facebook. Erm, and you know, we know that X amount of people get their news through Facebook. The sort of unfiltered Internet is a bit of a thing of the past. So, I think if we want those daily engagements then, yes, Facebook or other forms of social media are the only way. And our website hasn't been like that for a very long time. It's been about ten years. Before we used to have the question of the day which lingered around for a month.

[Laughter]

003:

But that was pre the social media boom.

002:

Yep.

003:

When we tried to have that kind of, you know..

002:

Actually on your site...

003:

... little bit of changing bloggy stuff on the website. But no, it's now just a portal for...

002:

It's hilarious. You think actually now, yeah, you used to kind of build these websites that you'd expect people to go to directly. You'd never do that these days.

001:

It's a holding site for...

002:

Yeah, and that is, you know, part of why we are looking to redevelop our website. And part of the reason of that is, you know, we're investing so much in social media and actually the platform we are then taking people to is not fit for purpose. So...

001:

Because that will actually, yeah, that's it exactly. Of like, if we're viewing it in that sense of someone sees something on social media and goes 'oh yeah, OK fine, I'll buy a ticket

to that event,' but then they're coming through to the website and it's not that quick, easy process that it would have been for them to find that original post...

002:

It's not, it doesn't work on their mobile phone...

001:

... then they're just going to be like 'oh, actually, no'. It gives them too much time to change their mind. Erm, so yeah, because, and that's one of the ways that social media has been amazing but also so annoying in that people are now so, erm...

003:

We need integrated box office on social media.

001:

Yep. Yeah, well there are ways but erm, they do, they fully expect streamlined, easy processes online because of what they've come to expect on social media platforms, so...

002:

Yeah.

003:

And the big sales platforms, as well.

002:

Yeah.

001:

And the big sales platforms, yeah.

002:

Yeah, and you see that in like customer complaints, like how irate people are at like the cheek of you having a website that like... [laughter]

001:

'you're a science festival!'... 'I know!'

002:

... they might have had a little bit of trouble with. Like the kind of entitlement in that, they're like 'how dare you, it's clearly just an oversight on your part' as opposed to it being like a kind of...

003:

Coding is science...

[Laughter]

... you should have the best website in the world.

002:

Honestly, if I had a...

001:

We literally had one that was like that.

002:

... a pound for every time I'd had that... Like 'as a science festival...' I mean, I'd probably have like five pounds, but still! It would be significant...

[Laughter]

**Interviewer:**

**Well, that was really interesting. We've been chatting now for about 45 minutes, so I'll let you guys get on with your day. But that was really useful. Is there anything you want to ask me about next steps? I can switch the tape off before we do that. Can I just confirm actually what channels you guys are currently using in terms of social, plus your website?**

001:

Yeah, so Twitter, Facebook, Instagram as the core, erm, we do have others.

003:

YouTube

001:

Well, we have others that we have accounts on but we're not that active on.

002:

We're quite active on LinkedIn.

001:

Oh yeah, sorry, LinkedIn, that is true.

002:

LinkedIn has become increasingly important.

001:

Where I've decided that I'm exclusively speaking to team development.

002:

Oh yeah. we're speaking to Development.

001:

But yeah, YouTube, we're trying to increase that. Erm...

**Interviewer:**

**Vimeo? Snapchat?**

001:

Erm, no. But we have started to look at Pinterest again specifically for the education side of things. Erm, yeah. I mean, again, I think we do have a Vimeo account, but we just, we're not active on it. I can...

**Interviewer:**

**No no no, it's fine. I can look it up. It's so I can have it on file how you guys said it.**

003:

I think maybe this is something that we didn't quite cover, but that kind of content, the sort of active, video content that you would put on Snapchat, or TikTok. Those 15 second bites of, you know, motion, are not really within our remit. Erm, they take an exceptional amount of time and labour, compared to, you know, conversing about a topical topic, or retweeting something and then adding our own two cents. But those kinds of things, for that 15 seconds, it would, and the value of that is easier to calculate because it would take me a day. You know, it's worth hundreds of pounds just to do that. And again, you know, most content creators on those platforms will do it for free for their own personal brand.

## **Appendix 1b: transcript from Edinburgh Science interview #2**

### **Edinburgh Science transcription #2**

Interview date: 11 November 2019

Duration: 44:02

**Interviewer:**

**I just want to record a little interview part this time. It won't take as long as last time. Just to, kind of, follow up on the stuff we spoke about last time and ask a few more questions around that. It looks like loads on my scribbles, but some of them are kind of, compounded together.**

**So, I guess, 004, have you guys chatted about what we spoke about last time? Do you want me to, kind of...**

**004:**

**Very briefly, but a bit of overview would be great.**

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah. Ok, so, we kind of, we spoke quite generally about the ways you guys use social media in your marketing; a little bit about, kind of, how you feel that fits with what else happens; how you feel digital is perceived by other people in the organisation; and what you actually use it for.**

**Erm, and then, a little bit about the strategies that you guys are putting in place and developing to make the most, whatever the 'most' means, of your social media. A little bit about how that fits in terms of the website and other digital channels more generally. Erm, and then we spoke for a while about the algorithms and the shifting nature of those. The ways that user behaviours might be changing or have changed over time. The way that platforms have changed over time.**



**Erm, and I'm also interested in, kind of, how the labour that goes in to actually making digital content, how you see that kind of within your role in the organisation, but also about how you balance that with your personal use.**

**We might not touch on all of that again today. Have I missed anything? Did you guys have any other..? No, ok.**

**I guess first of all then, what I wanted to ask, erm, you three, was, was there anything particular that you took away from the conversation we had last time that you thought was interesting? Something you'd like to explore further? Erm, that you thought we maybe didn't expand on that you'd like to talk about more? The answer could be no. That's absolutely fine!**

[Laughter]

002:

I'm trying to cast my mind back actually. I'm sure there were some things that, kind of, occurred to me during the chat but I can't really remember so maybe they'll come up again as we chat...

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, ok. That's absolutely fine. So, I've just... First of all I'll go through some of the things I've pulled out having gone back through the transcript in detail. So we talked, erm, about the idea of... So, your digital strategy is moving away from just say "more people, more people, more people. We've got this amount of followers." And you're looking more into interactions. And I just wondered, erm... You said something 001 which I underlined, which was that you found that strategy rewarding for you, in a sense. And I just wondered if you could expand on that a little bit, in the sense of what's the value in an interaction particularly?**

001:

Erm, so I think, yeah, I think what I meant by that was actually on both sides that I find it more rewarding as someone that uses social media and I prefer when there's a personality associated with a brand when you're having a conversation online. And then from the, kind of, from the brand's side of it I think it feels like a more lasting connection with the audience. It feels like you're more likely to get something out of them; whether that's tickets, or good feedback, or just nice images from their time at the event. Erm, and I think I'd probably say that because, especially the way that things are going around the platforms themselves are moving away from "more people, more people, more people", making that harder. You know, Instagram is the example of testing hiding likes and all of that sort of things. They are trying to gear us towards interactions because I think they also see that there's more value in it in terms of, like I said, what you can get out of it. But also it's actually more fun to create content that sparks conversation or that is responding to an existing conversation, at least for me. It's more fun.

**Interviewer:**

**And do you guys agree with that?**

004:

Yeah. I think it's actually a rewarding thing to know someone's read it!

002:

[laughs]

004:

And done something – read it enough that they actually want to write something back.

001:

Yeah, because it can be a little bit like screaming into a barrel.

002:

I think it's... That was, I think, a good point that you get more out of the customer the more engaged... whether they buy a ticket is obviously one of our main objectives. But, yeah, you might get an image, or some feedback. Yeah, we want people to say nice things because that kind of promotes us. Yeah, that interaction goes both ways.

**Interviewer:**

**Ok. And we touched on it a little bit last time but that kind of leads me on a little bit... We spoke about the idea of, kind of, levels of engagement. So, for me certainly I feel like a click or a like is sort of quite a throwaway piece of engagement? So actually, then, are there potentially levels which would be measurable whereby we could say that this person has commented, this person has liked, and almost trying to segment an audience that way? I just wondered what you guys thought about that as an idea and how it might work?**

003:

A list of likers?

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, so you've got your likers, your commenters, your sharers...**

002:

But I think commenters are commenters in wider life. You know like, so, I probably wouldn't, because of my personality, comment on many things that brands put out. Does that make sense? So, I think actually that becomes personality-driven rather than content-driven.

**Interviewer:**

**But then isn't that interesting potentially from a profiling point of view, actually, should you be... Because to me there's an idea that...**

002:

Yeah, should we be targeting the commenters...

**Interviewer:**

**Uh huh.**

001:

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

**So there's an idea that the move towards interactions, if you wanted to be a bit dystopian about it, you could say well, that's because the more you reveal through those text interactions, the more actually you're giving a fuller picture of your profile as a person and your interests out with that channel, that platform, that particular thing that you're commenting on. So, there would be maybe an opportunity to use that for your purposes as well. In the sense that if you've got that segment, how do you make them chat about something?**

001:

Yeah. I've always thought that it's just a shame that, because of privacy [chuckles], you can't really follow a post's shares properly. Obviously, you can look at what's been shared to a degree, but obviously there will always be people that have private profiles and are sharing them to that group but are also sometimes pulling it into Messenger and things like that. And it would have been nice to, kind of like, look at that side of things because maybe that's where our audience are not necessarily commenting directly on our content, but they're maybe taking it into their own circle and they're discussing it there. Erm, I'm just, that's one of the things I've always been interested in. Like, if we could have got a snapshot of that to see 1. If that's actually happening but 2. Is that, are people still positively engaging with us but they're just doing it a lot more privately than, you know, your Joe Bloggs who'll just comment with their friends names so that they see it and that's it.

**Interviewer:**

**And what does your instinct tell you? Do you think that's happening or do you think it's just...**

001:

I think a part of me thinks it is happening for the Science Festival, specifically with the family content. Erm, because we know it pops up on random blogs...

002:

Yeah.

001:

... and forums. For all we know there's a million other mummy groups and family parent groups that are sharing the content and there's a full discussion about it, and potentially other people's experiences, that we are not seeing and don't have access to because you can never really join every single one of those groups. Erm, especially, you know, as someone that's not a mother!

[Laughter]

001:

So yeah. I think a part of me thinks it is happening. Erm...

002:

I think people are probably a lot more honest in those kinds of circles as well, so it probably would be, kind of, richer data.

001:

Yeah.

002:

But yeah, I don't know how you'd get to it.

**Interviewer:**

**Ok. So, I guess, we touched on it last time and I said I would save it for this time, it was a little bit of, which we're leading on to quite nicely from this... Erm, I mean, obviously there's kind of real – we spoke about this and 003 particularly I think you said something – we all know there are privacy challenges with using social media and it's been rumbling along for a few years. I think obviously in the last eighteen months it's got a lot more, kind of, general traction in the press. What do you think the impact is, erm, for you as a small organisation with a relatively speaking small audience? I say that respectfully in the sense that your audience is smaller they might be easier to get to know... What do you think?**

**Well, first of all, what do you think the impact of the changes that the platforms have made have had on you? And then, what do you think, part two of that question, what do you think the impact has been on the behaviour of your audiences online?**

**001:**

Erm, I would say it kind of touches on, sort of, one of the things that we talked about last time about people being a lot more passive openly on the platforms. So, it's the, you know, it's the, we talked a little bit about people don't always like things now because they've seen it and that's been their engagement. Erm, and so, I would say that, like, because of the changes in platform – and especially, like, Facebook as an example of putting a real priority on groups and content like that at the moment – it does make it a little bit harder for us to, kind of, get to know the audience on a page because I think people are not engaging with pages as much, just as a kind of across the board thing. Erm, and part of that might be to do with overall trust of the platform and the fact that pages represent businesses and it's probably less connected to their general likes and dislikes on an everyday basis. Erm, so on that level I think it's harder, but then, obviously, as we've discussed, the nice thing about our smaller audience is that we should be able to get a better snapshot of who they are to better drive that content towards them. Erm, but then that kind of just does... not shut out growth all together, but it will really slow things down. Erm, that was my initial thought for that question...

003:

It's really interesting. I think it's difficult for this conversation not to head into the future of social media in general because we were just talking about how the algorithms and experiments that these companies that run social media... How much they're trying to push interaction and, you know, like you said, they're trying to get you to give something away. And I think it's very easy to imagine that there is some kind of ulterior motive to that because the moment you give something away to another company you just feel like you're being profiled constantly. But, you know, you do have those kind of free flowing forums like Mumsnet, where obviously everyone's got a lot to say, erm, and there are a lot of, you know, interactions, and some of the platforms that younger people are using it's a constant flow of interaction. So, I think it's, it's this audience that sits somewhere in the middle, like the early adopters, who have moved past the fad or who now just look. You know, even though the looks are being monitored, as an engagement, it's really hard for us to tell how much looking there is. Erm, you know, it means that these social media things have stopped being about image and have become about a cult of personality. And so, now, we're trying to have a personality ourselves and trying to have an interaction with a personality and, you're right, maybe that does put the wallflower, or the private person, out of the conversation completely.

**Interviewer:**

**And do you think that matters?**

003:

I guess social media is about engaging with its users. So, no?

001:

I think with the wallflower though. If they're going to buy... if we're talking slowly about conversion to ticket sales, the wallflower will buy the ticket anyway. If they want to, they'll do it and I think that's a really interesting conversation that's come out the last, kind of, few years about no longer trying to appeal to everyone, erm, online, and have it be more bespoke and that's when you're seeing brands, like, just fully adopting the sassy personality or the rude personality. And they're going for it because they know

that actually, “it’s alright if we lose these customers, because realistically, if they want our product, they’ll still come and get it and they know where we are.”

002:

Uh huh.

001:

“Whereas, these customers love what we’re doing. They think it’s funny, or engaging, or smart, or whatever it is.” And as a result, kind of every one’s a winner. Erm, because I don’t think anyone’s sitting at home necessarily pining for their favourite brand to interact with them. Erm, with the exception of the like, ‘500 retweets for nuggets’ sort of chat online. Erm, but even that in itself is all about self-interest, it’s all about elevating their own personality so that they can themselves become a brand and actually the roles are then reversed.

004:

Sorry, can you repeat the question?!

**Interviewer:**

**So, the idea of... What is the impact of a greater general awareness of, erm, data profiling, the ethics of how your data can be used online, privacy concerns...?**

**What’s the general impact of that for the Science Festival, or Edinburgh Science, sorry, as an organisation? And, what’s the impact for the way that your users behave? Sort of the same.**

002:

I know it’s funny, isn’t it? Because I guess, like, we always, you know, we’re still tracking and reporting on engagement and things like that. Whereas, I sort of know myself that I tend to pick up my information more passively, so I don’t know how you would track that. You know like social media sells a great deal to me, kind of via, like, Instagram or Twitter, like that’s kind of how I find out about things. But I’m not necessarily a



commenter, or a click through. You know, like, so, yeah, does that just have to be part of your strategy that you accept that...

001:

And that's where it kind of comes in about the, like, "let's just get it out as far and wide as we can..."

002:

Yeah.

001:

"... so that we've got more chances of being seen."

002:

Yeah...

001:

But then in order for that to appeal you've got to be more generic again so it's...

**Interviewer:**

**And I guess potentially the algorithm would know that's what you've done and dampen...**

001:

You'd get penalised for it.

**Interviewer:**

**... your content because you've clearly done something that's so broad, maybe.**

004:

I guess it's interesting because you, kind of, you know, you do want to tailor it. But then if you're focusing on just the numbers, you know, you may not come up on someone's search as a number, despite the fact that you have seen it...

002:

Yeah, converted.

004:

...and converted for it. And so, there's a focus on numbers in terms of the selling, but then, yeah, it goes back, if you also focus on those that don't interact at all, you can't see. How do you justify spend in that environment when you can't see it? For lack of a better term.

002:

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

**So, what would the solution be potentially, do you think? Maybe there isn't a solution but how would you change your behaviours to potentially account for some of that lurking, for want of a better word, or passive viewing of your content? Can you think of a way that you might...? I mean, I can't think of one, that's why I'm asking!**

002:

[Laughs] It's very hard to convince your board that that's a good spend.

**Interviewer:**

**Exactly.**

003:

And we can't get any analytics for, like, dwell time or cursor hover time now?

001:

Not on social media platforms, no. On our website, yes, we can, yeah.

003:

Yeah, they are logged guns [???], I suppose. But at the same time...

001:

Because that information, as we said last time, that exists, they have it. But that's information that they obviously deem quite important to how they are constantly changing and evolving their own algorithms. And I think, given... and I do kind of side with them on the side of, like, giving that out to your businesses who operate on those platforms, I actually think it gives away too much power to the individual use.

003:

But at the same time if businesses feel like they're screaming into a void, for want of a better expression, at what point will they stop using those platforms to...

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah.**

003:

You know, if we can't identify our audience on a platform with anything but, sort of, our feelings, then, you know...

002:

[Laughs]

003:

How do we know that we're reaching our audience? And if these platforms are going to continue, erm, you know, there's got to be some kind of carrot for people that are trying to make a living.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah. It's something I think about a lot. And the issue of trust actually, how would you... What's the relationship of trust in a social media platform versus trust in you as an organisation? And potentially is the one eroding the other? In the sense that is the lack of trust in Facebook or Twitter actually causing you to be less effective in your marketing? I know that's quite extreme, but that kind of idea that what could... what's the alternative? Is it that you take your content somewhere else?**

001:

Well, it's interesting, 'cause actually I don't think that we are, our audience on Facebook, I don't think that they were personally affected by the scandal, or anything that happened around Facebook, but because Facebook was and because a lot of their audience was and a lot of their users was, were! They have adapted the platform in response to that. So, actually, although, we still would have been fine with a kind of heavy page lead and video lead, they've had to evolve because of other responses from other users. Erm, which is understandable, but I don't think, erm, I don't think that that will even really last with the people who are frustrated by it because there really wasn't any huge solid evidence other than a drop in users. But then there's still their daily uplift of new users so I don't really think it's had a lasting effect, which is a shame, but, erm, I wouldn't say that we suffer from any trust in platform issues with our audience.

002:

It's interesting, I think users are more, on Facebook particularly, I think people are going more into these groups now. And, like, being quite open within these groups. Like, for some reason they feel like that's more of a trusted...

001:

Is more protected, yeah.

002:

It's not really. So, one of the ones I'm in on Facebook, the Edinburgh Gossip Girls, there's like 12,000 people there and some people treat it like they're just talking to a group of mates. Yeah, like they seem to really feel like... and because you have to apply to go into this group everybody seems to feel like it's some sort of like, safe space. You're like "there's 12,000 people here! Like, that's not a safe space!" [Laughs] But, you know, people are sharing more of themselves than they probably would on their own page, but their own page probably wouldn't get that much amplification, it's really strange.

004:

Do you think it's almost like the notion that then they know there's 12,000 people and they're like "oh, I'll share this and it'll seem like it's really nice, and close knit, but I know that 12,000 people are likely to share it whereas on my page alone I've got the 300 friends and that's it." Like, I wonder if it's the larger audience as well that's attractive.

002:

Yeah, I don't know, I don't think they...

003:

I think it's not the size of the audience, but it is what members of that group, what it says about their personality. If, you know, Facebook originally took the role of kind of like an internet forum with your friends but now there's this sort of back to anonymous, chat to people you don't really know, just you know them from their handle.

002:

But within a circle.

003:

Within a smaller group, erm, so, I think what you [002] are getting at is that we have realised, finally, that all of these social media platforms have particular audiences, which is great for marketing, because we can now target our ads. But it's also becoming fractured, and so it means that, like, doing those kinds of catch-all posts, just on

Facebook generally, might not be the best approach. Like it might be a good idea to somehow infiltrate these groups and...

002:

Yeah, well that's the... I think the groups are more trusted. You know, so if I was to post about, under my own name, within the group, that would be, you know, people would respond to that better than they would, erm, Edinburgh Science's page. Like, people have really moved away.

003:

Yeah.

001:

But also a lot of those groups are becoming wary of that now.

002:

[Laughs]

001:

They're becoming wary of the infiltrators and, you know.

002:

Well yeah, you'd have to be...

001:

That's where you're, a lot of these groups now come with some pretty strict posting rules and things like that, that, you know, I think we even had a conversation about the festival. You were, there was a moment when you were like "should I put it on Edinburgh Gossip Girls, or should I..?"

002:

[Laughs] Yeah.

001:

“... not because then they’ll know that I was associated with them.” And it’s about...

002:

Yeah. Well, we had a complaint and I responded...

001:

It’s sucking your anonymity away from you.

002:

I had to respond under my own name to, like, complaints, because we can’t respond as the page.

003:

Yep.

**Interviewer:**

**How do you feel about that? Because that’s always something that I’ve been really interested in. It’s like that personal connection between your personal profile and your organisational profile I find really fascinating...**

002:

I know. Weirdly, like, I think in that group it helped because, you know, like, my profile picture’s like me with my kids and, you know, so maybe like... “Hey guys, I’m sorry that you had a bad time at CAC...” and, what was the complaint?

001:

And you’d been in the group for a while...

002:

Yeah.

001:

It was about adults not having enough to do for the price of the ticket.

002:

Yeah, yeah. It was about tickets. You know, so I think kind of opening up and being like “Hey, you can email me...” you know, so then like that sort of personal thing, you know, like, people were quite positive about that. I got emails from people who, ooh are probably lurkers, and who were like “Hey, I saw this thread and I just wanted to comment.” You know, they were actually nice ones and said nice things. But yeah, that’s an uncomfortable way that lines are moving that, yeah, to respond, someone has to do it personally. Yeah, I kind of opened myself out to that.

003:

Well, you have this kind of conflict between privacy worries and the great transparent utopia which these social media platforms were originally pitched as. Erm, you know, it wasn’t until we realised that we were encouraged to be transparent, except that the people that were encouraging us to be transparent were taking our data and putting it in an opaque silo, So, you know, like, I was all for the idea of transparency. I think it’s an incredibly transcendent idea, but we’ve kind of seen that the moment you have that you have misuse and a lack of transparency from, you know, the elites or whoever providing the service. But, you know, what you’re seeing in this example is, like, when you’re not anonymous, when you’re actually a personality and you have a name, and you are being transparent, people respond far better...

002:

Yeah.

003:

... than sort of, erm, when it’s anonymous. So, in some ways, like, the utopia is real, but there’s that dystopia side as well which everyone, like, super-prescient of, constantly.



001:

But even, just what you've just said, kind of brings it back full circle to your question about, like, people's trust in us and how if we start leading more with interactions, which in a sense just means leading with our personality, or the personality that we choose for the brand, it's that whole idea of people respond better to personality. And they respond better to know that there's an 002 behind the screen and that just because she's behind the page now it doesn't mean that there's any less, kind of, transparency from our end about if it's an issue, trying to fix it, or if it's promotional. We're doing it because we genuinely think that it would be of interest to the people that follow us and want to engage with us.

**Interviewer:**

**Ok.**

002:

But it's interesting that people feel so comfortable in these groups, 'cause, like I say, like, you know, your three hundred Facebook friends, posting on Facebook would reach fewer people than, kind of, chatting away on these groups. People seem to be a lot more comfortable because it's a 'private' group.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah. I mean, it's like, I read something about how posting on a random blog on the open internet will likely get fewer impressions than posting on Facebook in terms of the amount of people that will see it.**

002:

Yeah

**Interviewer:**

**That's actually likely to be fewer than if you put something on your private Facebook feed for your friends.**

002:

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

**And that's a really, like, that's a strange, sort of, idea. But then, well, there's a lot of literature about, well, privacy just doesn't exist anymore. And if we all just accept that, then we would be much happier with our lot. But...**

002:

If we all stopped getting so upset about it?

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah! If we just stop worrying about it then potentially everything would be... everything would be fine. But it's an interesting kind of flip to the dystopian idea of user data... It's interesting to consider that from an audience perspective, I think.**

**Erm, so coming back a little bit... We spoke about, and I actually think the idea of kind of, almost... it sounds awful but, kind of profiling the 'lurkers' is quite an interesting one in the sense of... And I know you can't necessarily justify that from a kind of resource point of view but potentially from a research point of view, for something that I'm doing, that's an interesting idea. To say "well, what do we know about X portion of the people who are engaging? What can the platforms tell us?" But could we, could we think about the people who are buying the tickets through an alternative means? And actually, not necessarily even working with them to try and bring them on to social media platforms; I don't even know if you think that's what it's about? But actually just, kind of, contextualising...**

002:

I guess having a better understanding of who those people are, and where they're getting their information from. Well, yeah. Just because they're getting their information from social media, they might not be interacting or commenting, but it doesn't mean there's not value. So, yeah I guess some research and profiling of those kinds of users

would be interesting and useful for then creating your plans going forwards I guess. And kind of understanding... because, yeah, everything is based on the metrics and the numbers and the...

**Interviewer:**

**But potentially, I guess, and tell me if you think I'm wrong, but that takes you...**

**Well, it does two things: it takes some of your marketing, kind of, out of the idea of the social media echo chamber whereby your constantly funnelling people towards the same thing, or they are constantly funnelling themselves, audiences are constantly funnelling themselves to the same thing; and it also... I can't remember what the second thing was! It'll come to me!**

**So, what do you guys think about that idea?**

002:

Uh huh, I think that's interesting.

001:

Yep.

**Interviewer:**

**So how would we do that?**

004:

Google Analytics I think you could probably use for partial, of it, because I think they've got functions where you can see what someone has looked at. It all comes down to cookies and everything like that but based on what they've seen and how they've gone through various websites to get to your site. I think you can do up to three pages, or something like that, I can't remember the exact thing but I think Google Analytics has something along those lines that you could look at from a numbers point of view. Otherwise, I don't really know how else you could do it.

**Interviewer:**

I've come up with the second thing! I'm just going to say it before I forget! Erm, so, it's the idea of contextualising social media in a wider, sort of, marketing strategy. I think one of the things that came out from the last time we spoke, and it was really interesting hearing about, like, the way that you guys feel that work is perceived on a wider organisational level. And I think there's a, there's an argument that says "well, that's just the life course of social media." So, like we all said "Yay, this is a great transparent resource", and then now, sort of fifteen years down the line we're thinking "well how, actually, no that's not quite how this is working." Erm, but I certainly feel, and have felt, that there's still that sense of newness within these platforms and that almost the platforms themselves might perpetuate that. That they're constantly giving you something new so you use it more because it's new and it's got this, kind of, promise of great things it can do for you. And so, I guess for me, part of my research is about saying, almost acknowledging the limitations. The limitations of the channel, the limitations of actually the information you can get from the channel and thinking about, kind of, critical ways you can work with that as part of it; but also how that fits into a broader, kind of, framework of what you do to get audiences to come to your events and 'engage' with you.

002:

I'm just, I don't even know but it just occurred to me while you were talking there... I think it's interesting so, the social media platforms are obviously all constantly evolving and doing new things, but I think around the time everything, all, lots of other brands and sites we use are beginning to behave like social media platforms. You know, like, they're all kind of emulating that. Even we've just moved to Sharepoint and that's like being on Facebook, do you know what I mean? [Laughs] Sometimes...

**Interviewer:**

**That's really interesting.**

002:

You know, like, because it's the same thing: you have a profile; it shows you who else is online; it shows you who's working. So yeah, I think we're becoming more and more surrounded by it even though everything is evolving and changing. But I guess that's why it feels new, because there's still more.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, that's really interesting because I think we touched on last time there's an argument... The idea that you can log on to a website with Facebook, and actually, what that is doing is drawing all the content that you put into that particular website, which you could access separately, to Facebook separately. But that funnels that, all of that interaction through Facebook, which is an interesting idea. So yeah, potentially these kinds of sites that are operating in an organisational way are emulating that – the reward of being the person who last edited the document, or whatever it is. That sort of metric.**

[Laughter]

002:

Whose worked on the most documents!

**Interviewer:**

**Which version of the digital strategy is the most recent! Erm, ok, I don't have any more questions. Oh, I did have one more question actually. Another thing that I'm, sort of, looking at is about , erm, the idea of temporality and how, kind of, the impact of feeling like something is happening in 'real time' on digital media which I forgot to speak about last time. Erm, but we did talk a little bit about chronological feeds and how people like chronological feeds. It was something you said 003 I think if I remember rightly.**

002:

Or they think they do...

[Laughter]

**Interviewer:**

**Or they think they do. So, can we just expand on that a little bit more?**

003:

What do we want, now? A chronological feed!

002:

Until...

[Laughter]

003:

When do we want it? Here!

[Laughter]

**Interviewer:**

**Yes, exactly!**

003:

You want the punchline at the end?!

**Interviewer:**

**Why do you think that people want chronological feeds?**

003:

I think it's just an illusion though.

**Interviewer:**

**[Laughing] Well, time is just an illusion!**

002:

[Laughing] Well I was going to say. Why, well do you want a chronological feed 003, personally?

**Interviewer:**

**I'm looking at you 003 because you mentioned it last time.**

002:

Because you're the old man 003 of the internet!

003:

I see, I see a lot of users making noise about the latest algorithm change, which is apparently hiding their posts from, I guess, potential customers a lot of the time. Erm, and I see this from a lot of small, single person artists and creators who are not only producing content but are trying to have a small business, which... And for them these social media platforms are essentially their lifeblood. There's no other way to build an audience. And so, I see a lot of them making posts and trying to tell you magic spells you can do to, like, "click the bell and then..."

002:

Oh, I hate those boring posts.

003:

"... go into the settings and then undo this and then, if you'd do it for me friends that would be really appreciated."

002:

[Laughs]

003:

It, it's just...

002:

It just always makes me think they don't know how to use the internet. It actually puts me off a brand when they start that. [Laughs]

003:

It does. You know, but, at the same time, for all the faith that I, kind of, usually attribute to an algorithm, there are lots of times that after not seeing the kind of content that I want, six months or a year after it was originally created it finally will start coming up in my "oh hey, you might like this..." And I kind of look at it and go, "Why didn't you tell me about this earlier?! You're off course algorithm, I thought you knew me better."

002:

[Laughs]

004:

I also like a chronological thing, actually.

001:

Really?

004:

Because...

001:

Woah, wait, woah!

[Laughter]

004:

The argument for that is because when, erm, I don't really... I'm a lurker on Facebook, I don't post, I haven't posted on my own personal one for a while. Erm, but like, I'm



involved in a group called the Meadows Share and there, you know, people will just post things they want to get rid of or want to do, or whatever. And if I'm going through and see one that's from, you know, two weeks ago, that's come up because it's had all the comments, it's like "well, I wanted that, I could have commented." And then, yeah, so I go through them in a chronological order.

002:

Do you comment within that group 004?

004:

No!

002:

Ah! I was just going to be, like, do you trust the Meadows Share group?!

004:

I have twice on things that I've wanted, but because it was too late, I couldn't get it! Because it had already gone!

Interviewer:

Well yeah, I guess that kind of marketplace idea has... there's an element of chronology being useful. What do you think 001?

001:

I'd say tough titties to that! Honestly! I mean, I think like...

[Laughter]

002:

That's going to be great on the transcript!

001:

I think the reason why they moved away from chronological timelines, specifically on Instagram and Twitter, came down to the fact that people are now looking at the same app; they're now going on to that website multiple times a day. And it's about the fact that it was getting to a point where actually, and I remember it on Twitter especially, it's like "I've seen this, I've seen this, I've seen this" and you're scrolling for ages. And actually, so obviously it was done in response to the demand of constant content that people wanted and the more that people started looking at those websites. But then also I think that it's, especially like, obviously they're not perfected yet, but there are ways of... There's some really smart things that they're already doing in terms of, Instagram as an example, you know, you'll go through your feed once, if someone's got multiple images on one of their things the next time you go through you'll just see the next one along of that thing. Because Instagram's saying "well actually you didn't go through these, so here it is again and it's the next one, it might be of more interest." It's technically new content. And, like, I do sympathise with, you know, artists that feel like their content is not being seen anymore, and I do sympathise with, like, feeling like you've missed out on something. But then my response to that would be that actually, almost that you need to change the way that you interact with that group, and you would need to change the way that you use that platform in terms of like..."

002:

Go on more...

003:

You have to train the algorithm...

001:

Go on more. If you, if you're using a website or using a group that you feel like there's been a couple of occasions when you've liked something but you don't always know that you're going to want it before you see it, then for me I would almost encourage you to change your habit with that.

003:

Stop lurking!

002:

[Laughs]

003:

That's the problem.

001:

Stop lurking!

003:

You created this!

004:

But do you think that people actually will? Like, for me it's annoying, I'm not going to change my behaviour based on that because I don't care enough about it. Like, that's really annoying that the platform's done that.

003:

Welcome to being old!

[Laughter]

001:

Oh, come on!

004:

Oh god! I'm only just past 25!

001:

But to me, this just sounds like you're, you're moaning because you didn't see something!

[Laughter]

It's not Facebook's fault! Like, in my opinion it's not Facebook's fault that you didn't see something until two weeks later because you weren't on the website at the time it went up. Yeah.

[Laughter]

Interviewer:

Yep. But it's interesting to think that you could be penalised for being a lurker. I mean, just the language is weird to start with!

002:

I know, I think we need a more positive word than lurker.

**Interviewer:**

**We do need a better, yeah, if we're going to go down this line...**

004:

Wallflower.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah that's, yeah. But then that kind of has like a fifties' kind of disco attachment to it.**

004:

It does, doesn't it? Yeah.

002:

No, it's like you're left out. I don't feel like I'm left out, I'm choosing to... [Laughs] I quite like being a lurker. I'm not liking, I'm not a wallflower.

**Interviewer:**

**I'm, I think this has legs actually because, I mean yeah, certainly there's a bit of academic literature about, people call it 'media resistance'. So, the idea that there is, there are, a lot of people who employ these behaviours but of course, as we've said already, they're really difficult to measure because there's no, kind of... You're not, you're not going to put your lurking behaviours on Facebook, are you? Because that defeats the object. But there are also degrees of that. So there are people who've deactivated their Facebook accounts; there are people who've left Facebook; there are people who now, yeah, just... So actually, thinking about that as a group of users, who are still your audiences, I think is really... But yes, we will need to...**

003:

That's how I left Facebook. I started lurking and then I just got this kind of growing feeling of unease and, you know, without that kind of dopamine hit of getting likes on content you put up, you know, I just... It... Being a lurker was starting to actively make me feel bad because I wasn't part of that, you know, dopamine rush. You know, the, pulling the lever on the slot machine. And I found that after a while that kind of behaviour, which sometimes I changed, I started posting again for a while and I'm like "oh, actually, I do feel better about this." But then...

**Interviewer:**

So, what 001 was saying, that actually if you behave in a different way you will feel differently about it.

003:

The product rewards you. But then I kind of decided that I didn't want to do either of those things, and so I pulled back from the platform. But yeah, it is very interesting that you realise... I just felt manipulated, I guess. But, you know, I'm old.

002:

[Laughs]

004:

No, I mean I...

002:

Yeah. The thing that completely changed, because I... Facebook probably was getting really boring. The thing that's completely changed my Facebook experience has been the rise of the groups.

003:

Gossip girls.

002:

Well, like, just the rise of the groups. You know, so like, I'm in a few groups.

001:

That's how I spend my time.

002:

That actually just, that actually it's almost a bit like richer Twitter, do you know what I mean? But local. So you're kind of getting...

003:

Yeah, I used to be part of a forum in the nineties. The video game forum it was. And I've got, like, lifelong friends, some of whom I've never met in real life from that group. And so, it dissolved as Facebook came in and it replaced it. But now those, sort of, interest groups have re-emerged on Facebook. So I understand the appeal of being part of that kind of community. Erm.

004:

Even just the chat though that, like, 001 and I just had makes me think that they'll eventually almost weed out the people that are the lurkers, for lack of a better term. Because I'm not getting any positive reward from my interaction with Facebook because of my behaviour, and I don't want to change it to fit with Facebook, because I'm old and stubborn. Erm, and so I'm wondering at what point it will just start to weed out those people, so you'll only get those people that just want to engage with it and you'll get back to the "ok, we can get the clicks from everyone because there's no lurkers left."

Interviewer:

Yeah.

002:

Like you either have to engage or get off the platform.

Interviewer:

Potentially. Because I guess that is the thing, isn't it? Facebook's like the sort of 'connect more, share more'... that strategy has had to change and that's going to have a knock-on effect on user behaviours also.

Ends.

## **Appendix 1c: transcript from Edinburgh Science interview #3**

### **Edinburgh Science transcription #3**

Interview date: 10 April 2020

Duration: 37:50

NOTE: Recorded on Skype. Participants 005 and 002 present but 002 without sound.  
Chat function transcript included below.

#### **Interviewer:**

**So, the way that I've done this previously with the Comms team, and I'll do the same. Erm... I've kind of, I've got questions, but I don't... I've not been sticking to them religiously I've kind of just been kind of letting the conversation flow and adding things in. Erm, but the broad kind of questions that I'll be talking about is the same kind of ideas that are in the information statements. So, talking about the programme itself a little bit, just as an introduction; erm, the idea of digital labour and how that's maybe changed, or ways that you're maybe thinking about it in the context of the digital festival...**

005:

Can I just ask, what exactly you mean by digital labour?

#### **Interviewer:**

**So, digital labour I am defining as the work that is done to produce digital content or marketing. So, digital labour would include the work that happens behind the scenes to make a piece of digital content, as well as the production of the content itself. Digital labour can also include things like operations. So, it's not just about marketing, it's about the way that an organisation used digital technologies.**

005:

Ok, great.



**Interviewer:**

**Does that make sense?**

005:

Yeah, yeah, no that's fine, thank you.

**Interviewer:**

**Cool, ok. So, I guess as a kind of, as an introduction – we talked about this a little bit before – but could you talk about... I mean, obviously we're all aware of current global events, but how did, erm, the programme come about and come about so quickly, erm, following the cancellation of the physical festival and how have you kind of put it together?**

005:

So, yes, obviously we had a little bit of funding in place, erm, through the Expo fund – the Scottish Government's Expo Fund – to look at how the organisation can better use digital tools, techniques and approaches across our operations and how we might upskill staff in the process of doing that. Erm, but the main focus of that had been around creating a digital immersive experience and commissioning new digital artworks as the big chunks of that project; with a smaller bit that was going to look at what we called our 'Challenge Two', which was how did we basically increase the reach and impact of our events through digital technology?

So, we intended, we planned to take one aspect of the festival – the 'all fired up' strand – and produce a small amount of digital content that would accompany the live festival. Erm, now, obviously when we cancelled on the 17<sup>th</sup> March, erm, we did a rapid about-turn and made the decision to scale up that aspect of the project because the other two need to be parked until next year. Erm, so we basically threw almost the entire organisation at considering what a scaled-up version of that would be.

Now, I guess the main point of difference between the original plan was; the original plan was to do two things: one was to increase the reach of our content. So, it was to

create certain aspects of content that would be relevant to and accessible to audiences that didn't attend live events. And the other bit was to look at how we could deepen the learning experience for people attending the live events. So, the original intention for that was what might we do in the run-up and/or the follow-up to an event that would create the more in-depth experience.

Erm, obviously in the current climate that second bit was put to one side and the focus really was on what could we get up online that would be relevant, not just for people that would potentially attend the live festival but also for a much wider audience.

So, I spent the... I think we cancelled on a Tuesday; we spent a couple of days getting all that messaging out; erm, and then I locked myself in a room for the weekend and came up with a kind of plan for what we are now calling 'Elements of #EdSciFest'. Now, obviously we were quite lucky with our theme for this year being 'Elementary' that it was a really easy shift into... You'd have thought we'd have done it deliberately!

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, I mean, it's amazing really! (laughs)**

005:

Yeah, so we've had quite a lot of love for the title.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, definitely.**

005:

It's like, "That's a genius title!" and like "Well, I wouldn't say genius; it was serendipitous..."

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, totally, yeah.**

005:

We thought, what we wanted to do was... Erm, so, one of the considerations for me was how do we maintain some aspect of a festival feel?

**Interviewer:**

**Uh huh.**

005:

We're not primarily a digital content producer or distributor, so what can we do that works with what we have, what we know and what we're good at? So we very much wanted to keep the theme of the festival, the series and the strands that we've created around Earth, Air, Fire and Water; we wanted to build on the fact that we'd had six weeks of a MarComms campaign that had been using these themes, topics and terminology. So, we wanted to really build on that rather than try and do something that was very disconnected.

**Interviewer:**

**Mm.**

005:

Erm, so, once we'd kind of agreed that that was the structure we wanted to take, then we needed to look at how and what sort of content we were in a position to either generate ourselves or to get other people to generate on our behalf or to share with us.

**Interviewer:**

**Yep.**

005:

Erm, so I guess the first thing there was go out to all of our partners, supporters, speakers and explain to them obviously that we'd cancelled but that rather than sort of crawling into a corner and licking our wounds we were going to desperately throw our

efforts into seeing what we could act as a kind of curator of from that network of partners, and indeed from the wider web.

So, I guess we took a kind of concentric circle approach to this. So, it was like ‘what can we do that’s... what have got that’s in our own archives?’ Not just from the festival but from our wider offering, so looking at our education work and at the worldwide work. So, ‘what have we got there already that is ours and we can just repurpose and put up?’ And ‘what might we create from scratch?’ Erm, and, we can talk a little bit more... I’ll come back to that because that’s proven to be the hardest bit.

**Interviewer:**

**Well, yeah, it would be good to hear more about that. But it sounds like you guys were in a... in a reasonably good place, or situated to – people are using the word ‘pivot’ a lot – to kind of pivot what you already had and your approaches... Would you agree with that?**

005:

Yes, yeah. Absolutely, yeah. I think because we’d said we wanted to do this on a small scale, we’d already had some of the conversations around platforms, difficulties, skillsets, logistical constraints. So, some of those had already been looked at and discussed when we were talking about the pilot. Erm, so yeah, I think that put us in a reasonably good position to be able to say ‘OK, how can we take what we know, take what we’ve got, gather the rest and pivot rapidly to do something a bit different?’

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, no. That’s, erm, that’s brilliant. So, in terms of... Shall we talk a little bit about the content that you made from scratch now then? What were the challenges, what did you feel that you needed to learn or do differently? What skills you think you already had? Yeah, what were the, sort of, approaches you took?**

005:

So, I think the main issue, one of the main issues, for us is that we're predominantly, particularly around family content, a hands-on festival. So, we work very much around interactivity, erm, the value of face-to-face science communication – that interaction that we have through our trained communicators and in-house team – with audiences. So, originally, we had hoped that we might be able to get our hands-on kit and props from the warehouse or from the office and that we could then get the team working in their own homes to do some of that. But when the, we only had a couple of days of thinking that that might be viable before the lockdown tightened up.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah.**

005:

And it turns out that all of our stuff is in the warehouse and not in an accessible format because it was three weeks pre-festival. It would have involved multiple people having to go down to the warehouse and drag it all out. So, that hasn't proved possible...

**Interviewer:**

**Uh huh.**

005:

... to the extent that we wanted. Erm, all that we've really done in that vein is the two 'Earth Live' lessons that will be going live at 12 today and 12 tomorrow.

**Interview:**

**Yeah, I saw those.**

005:

So, that will be two members of the creative team who have taken a CAC [City Art Centre] workshop idea, 'Wild Vets' and 'The Secret Life of Coral', but basically worked up a version of them that they can do at home with very few props. Although XXX is

wearing a full wetsuit and snorkel in the bath talking about microplastics. I've been watching the rehearsals.

**Interviewer:**

**Great!**

005:

Erm, so, we've managed to do those... So, in terms of creating new video content, erm, that is really the only couple of brand-new things that we've been able to do. Erm, I guess the rest of the generation of content, erm, which is not necessarily brand-new or bespoke is we had quite a large audio archive...

**Interviewer:**

**Uh huh.**

005:

So, we set the production team the task of trawling through that and figuring out what was usable by way of the quality of the recording. Erm, turns out not a lot of it!

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah?**

005:

Also, a bit of a problem with... We didn't have permissions for all of it. So, I think we'd had a system in place a few years back where we'd been quite good at going through all of those records and tagging them and getting permissions and so... Yeah, the truth of the story is we ran out of time and resource the past few years so we hadn't managed to keep that up.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah.**

005:

So, there wasn't as much in those audio records as we would have liked. That said, there was enough for us to cherry pick the decent ones, get them top and tailed and get that content uploaded as well. Err, and I guess the other content generation was more 'blog-like'...

**Interviewer:**

**Uh huh.**

005:

So, we allocated one of our series of Earth, Air, Fire, Water to different members of the creative team and said to them 'pick a couple of topics within this that you're interested in, write some blog-type posts and then also curate a selection of wider web resources related to it under the topics of book, film etc. etc.' that could form part of that offering. So, it's been a combination I guess of text-based, audio and a small amount of new video.

Erm, if we throw that out to stuff that was not done entirely by us but that involved our partners then we can add into that... Erm, we reach out to a lot of the speakers and said 'will you create a '60-second science' little video and some links and things that we can create a content unit for?' Erm, so yeah, just taking a slight step back... We started calling all of these events, because of the way the website is organised, and then we moved, we realised that that could be a bit confusing, so we've been referring to them as 'content units'...

**Interviewer:**

**OK.**

005:

... and those content units could be anything from a blog post, to an audio download, to a downloadable resource, to a whatever... But tend to be a grouping of relevant content under a topic or a theme. So, that response from speakers was good. We've had quite a

lot of people do the short '60-second science', particularly the authors and the people who had books to tout. And I think we're... obviously there's a benefit to them...

**Interviewer:**

**Mm.**

005:

... from starting to get the word out. Erm, we've had a selection of speakers who were willing to do a slightly longer sort-of pre-record and supply that to us. So, anything from a sort-of five to ten-minute, erm, kind of version of the 60-second, 60-minute or hour-and-a-half-long event that they would have done. Then a small number of live events, which have been running, basically at one o'clock this week. It was going swimmingly until Marcus Chown yesterday failed to use Facebook and spent an hour delivering it what he thought was live, but wasn't...

**Interviewer:**

**Oh no!**

005:

... and ignoring the Comms team's calls.

**Interviewer:**

**Oh dear! So that kind of brings me on very neatly to one of the other questions I had. And 002 I don't know if you can still hear me... You could maybe type some responses to this?! Yeah, it was about, kind of, whether you were experimenting with new platforms or, erm, platforms for delivery... Because, you're doing a lot of this on Facebook Live, is that right?**

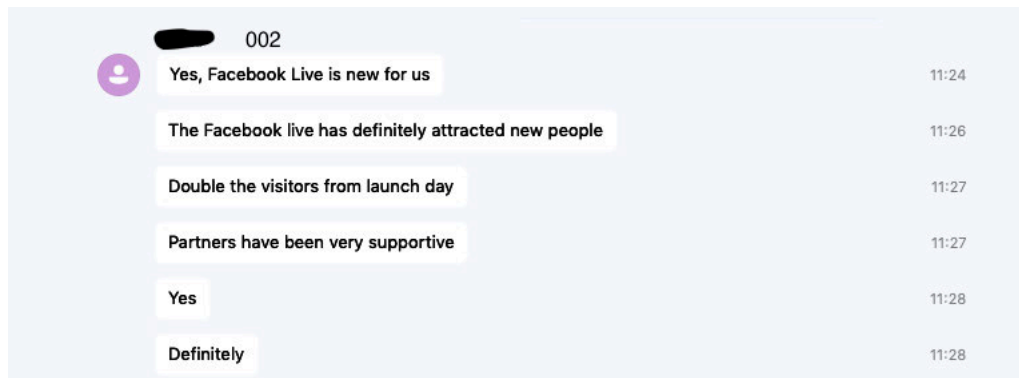
005:

Yep.

**Interviewer:**



**And have you guys used that much before?**



005:

Nope (laughs.) So, we've learnt a lot! So Facebook Live is new and that's all been 002 and the MarComms team and 001 basically liaising with the speakers and figuring that out. Erm, the other platform that we'll be using for the Earth Live lessons is YouTube Live. Erm, but that's been set up by a third party, XXX who works for the BBC Wildlife Unit and XXX just contacted them on Twitter. They were talking about people who wanted to do a 'takeover', erm, and so they've had everyone from Steve Backshaw to the CBeebies science people do others. And then we've agreed to do these two events. So that's their YouTube channel basically.

**Interviewer:**

**OK.**

005:

But I've been working all week with the team. They've been doing practise runs on YouTube Live so that we could practise the chat function and they could check all the technical aspects of it. And then, fingers crossed, they've just got to link in at 12 o'clock today.

**Interviewer:**

**We'll be sure to sign off before then so we can switch it on and see if it works. Erm, and so, in terms of promoting it then, do you feel that you're potentially reaching**

**new, or wider, or different audiences? Potentially through these collaborations or just because the nature of the way that people are looking for content online is different in a lockdown situation?**

005:

So, 002's probably got loads to say on this but...

**Interviewer:**

**'002 is typing...'**!

005:

...I'll let her type in the background, but, erm, I think from my perspective, erm, we are... Obviously, we know that we can reach our existing audiences reasonable well, but one of the things that's been central to this thinking from the beginning was, erm, we know that there's no point in us generating a tonne of content if we're just the tree in the forest that falls and no one hears it.

**Interviewer:**

**Uh huh.**

005:

Erm, so the promotional aspect has been, obviously, sort of working hand-in-hand with the content generation. And we're certainly looking at, erm, as 002 said in her little note there, Facebook Live I think definitely a new audience. I think in terms of just stats to the... We don't know yet if they're unique visitors, but certainly I think we had more, erm, hits on the website on Saturday [which would have been the first day of the face-to-face festival] when we went live with this programme than we had for brochure launch, for example. Err, and I think that's still higher than they would ordinarily be. But I think the partner activity and getting the word out through our partner network is really important. I think if we'd have just done this all ourselves then we wouldn't have been quite as able to harness the power of our partnerships to try and get the word out.

**Interviewer:**

**Mm.**

005:

So, the Museum have got us front-and-centre in their newsletter this week, for example. The University of Edinburgh has put up a new page and all of their mailouts have got us, kind of, front-and-centre.

**Interviewer:**

**Cool, that's interesting. So, do you think in some ways potentially this situation is a bit of a leveller? In terms of who's working with who and people's openness to new partnerships, new content, new ways of working?**

005:

002 said yes and I would agree. Erm, yeah. And I think one of the big things for me has been, I joked on a call to the senior management team this week that we seem to have got much more love from our partners and supporters for having cancelled a festival than we ever get if we run one live!

**Interviewer:**

**[Laughs]**

005:

Erm, I think so many others that have had to cancel have just done nothing. And I think the fact that we've tried to do something, erm, has meant a lot to partners and to supporters. So, we haven't talked much about the sponsors. Erm, the sponsorship team have been partly the bane of our life in some respects! [Laughs] Erm, because of the demands around sponsor profile and visibility. But we are hopeful that the fact that we've made these efforts will mean that the majority of them won't require us to return their sponsorship.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah. Which is a massive consideration...**

005:

Yeah. And in general, the, that's looking very good. There's a few that are basically in the naughty corner, just being like 'yeah, fine, give me my money back'. Erm, but, in large part, I think the fact that they've seen us pivot, reach out to them, provide an alternative way for them to get some of their content out; erm, has been very much appreciated and valued.

**Interviewer:**

**Cool. Ok, and I guess... Sort of thinking off the top of my head, for you guys then, in terms of evaluating what you've one, you'll be in a good place because you'll have some content that you can kind of look and reflect upon, erm, from this year. And I guess think about how that might flip into when you return to programming face-to-face, what might stay.**

**So, I guess one of my questions, and this is obviously really speculative, and I'll probably, if we get a chance to speak again maybe in a couple of months' time maybe ask you this question again and you might have a different answer. Erm, but, well, first of all, do you feel like the kind of data literacy of the organisation, the data and digital literacy, has kind of pivoted in the same way that the content has?**

005:

Erm, yeah. I think we've... It's been a really steep learning curve, but I think we've learned a tonne of stuff. Erm, what works, what doesn't work, where the pinch points are, erm... So, when we're talking about... I mean, one of the aims of the original pilot was to try and upskill our team internally and we talked a lot about what we needed for that. Do we have the right equipment to film, sort of, capture audio or video? Do we have the right software? Editing? Have we got enough people in the organisation that have got the skills to do that? Erm, are there enough people that know how to work the backend of the website? Erm, is our website fit for purpose? Erm, all of those things. And, I mean, one of the reasons why the website... The approach around these content

units is very much driven by the fact that we had to work with what we had. There was a six-day turnaround on minor web corrections from the developer perspective.

**Interviewer:**

**Mm.**

005:

Our favourite! So very much the MarComms team basically suggested that, working with what we had, this would be the way to go. So, in terms of how events are presented, or these content units are presented, and how things are grouped; it was very much driven by some of the practicalities of what we could change ourselves versus what would require a big rework that would require developer input that we just didn't have.

Erm, and I think what we've learned along the way is that, yeah, we probably need to upskill more of the organisation in most of those things, just so that the burden's not sitting quite so much with a small number of people, largely the MarComms team.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, that's really interesting. And so, what then, I mean, that would be a legacy... In terms of the types of content you're making, obviously you're in very early stages, but just as a kind of... your intuitive sense. What do you think might stick in terms of some of this that you're doing now, and what is more of a reaction to, kind of, current circumstances?**

005:

I think the, I think the ability, the use of our, sort of... So what we did... The teacher resources for GS [Generation Science, Primary School education programme], for example... and some the stuff that had been used for Abu Dhabi [Abu Dhabi Science Festival, programmed by Edinburgh Science] that was, in effect a print resource that we could repurpose for it to not be quite as 'teacher-y' and to be more focused at a public

audience. I think that is probably one of the more valuable things that we've managed to get up.

**Interviewer:**

**Uh huh.**

005:

Erm, I think the live events, with speakers... Erm, I've always been very resistant to the idea of replacing live events with, err, with a webcast because we're in the business of live events. But I think having started to go down this route and looking at some of the wider web examples that are getting a really large traction, then I think that it is something that we would be more interesting in running alongside some aspects.

So, one of the things that is a consideration for us as a science festival, and... is about decarbonisation, and how are we reducing the carbon impact of what we do? So, quite often we would sort of come up against 'oh, rather than fly this person in from somewhere, should we just do something online with them?' And we've been quite resistant to that, but I think we would probably look at, look at that through a slightly different lens now.

**Interviewer:**

**Mm.**

005:

The other thing for me, erm, I'm really hoping that these Earth Live lessons go well. Erm, because I think partnership with somebody that's got an existing platform and viewer base, to do more of that in the future, might work really well from a promotion, profile perspective.

And, like I say, that's what we're really good at, but we could only do a small amount of it because of the practical constraints. But if we're back in the office, back with access to the warehouse, it would be doing what we do well. We're not TedX, we're not the BBC

and we've never wanted to compete with those sorts of organisations. Erm, we would like to partner with them and actually we've spent ages trying to get hold of and get in touch with BBC Learning, and they've not been interested in the past. And now they've been knocking on the door, erm, wanting to include our kids' lab activities within some roundups of family-friendly, do-at-home science that they're doing. So, it's put us in a good position there, I think, by way of sort of these media partnership opportunities.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, no, that's interesting. So, yeah, I guess that... Again, you would be... You would be looking to kind of continue and build on those partnerships and maybe blend that content a little bit more in the future?**

005:

Yeah. I think... the terminology I've used already so, sort of, XXX and I... XXX emailed me on Wednesday and said, 'I've found this grant opportunity.' Innovate UK have made £50m available for people doing things online or digitally in response to the Covid crisis; not necessarily topic-wise, because we are steering away from delivering Covid-19 content, we think there's plenty out there. But this grant opportunity has come up, so we are going to try and rapidly turn around a bid for this – you can apply for up to £50,000 – so we are going to apply for the money to evaluate this digital project...

**Interviewer:**

**Oh, interesting!**

005:

... and look at what our learnings are, what we take from it, and start to form a plan for what... I'm calling it a 'digital companion piece' to the festival for 2021 would be. I think our intention had always been 'let's do this tiny pilot, let's look at what works and then let's look at how we build on that for future years.' And we've just got a lot more data to play with now. We've got a lot more proof of concept; we've sort of looked at where the, as I say, the glitches, where the sticking points are. So, if we get this money – we will

evaluate it anyway – but if we get the money, we're in a position to do it in a more substantial way.

002 and I spoke yesterday about, erm, how we can... We put aside a small budget for this and how we can split that to, around promotion and evaluation over the next couple of months. And then, so when we get back in the... So, that will be done largely around analytics and things for now, but I think when we're back in the office a bit further down the line, then we'll get into the surveying of the experiences of all of these speakers, partners and people that have been a part of it.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, that's kind of... Yeah, you've sort of just answered the question I'm going to ask but I suppose it's probably more of a 002 question, but I guess, what do you think has maybe changed in your approaches? Or, not what's changed but how have you been approaching the marketing of a new type of thing? Also, the timescales at which you've done it, do you feel like it's very reactive or do you think you've been able to kind of think about audiences in slightly new ways because they're all online?**

005:

002's frantically typing away! [laughs] It's a shame we can't lip read!

**Interviewer:**

**Some wild gestures!**

005:

I think, I will comment: the timeline has been ridiculous.

**Interviewer:**

**Yep.**

005:



Erm, I mean, I logged my timesheets recently and I did like a 98-hour week and an 84-hour week and [laughs] ... There was a 70-something one that was a lazy week [laughs]. But, erm, I've probably been busier than I would ever have been ordinarily, but I guess, as 002's saying there...

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, I guess it's that... I get the sense from what you're saying that it's as much about, erm, a kind of reconfiguration of thinking about what's possible as it is about reconfiguring the way that you're working... Would you agree with that?**

005:

Yes, I think. Although, I'm just trying to think that through a bit more... the... So, yeah, I don't think, other than having to learn a few new skills I don't think it's vastly different. But maybe it just feels like there are more people out there willing to listen or interested in what we've got to say than there would ordinarily be. Does that make sense?

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah, absolutely. And I guess the other kind of part, like you were saying about putting in really long weeks... And I think some of the things that we've kind of thought about and talked about, that I've talked about prior to this with the Comms team was around the idea that there can sometimes be a view that digital is a 'quick fix'; that it's 'oh well we'll stick it on social media and people will buy a ticket'. That kind of thing. Do you think that, potentially, this experience across the organisation has changed that view of digital labour a little bit?**

005:

Erm, I think there has been a definite change in the appreciation of how much work is required to, kind of, do it. Erm, so if we're talking about from on high, I think probably XXX has often seen it as this can be, yeah, that we should be doing this just on top of everything else and, yeah, why aren't we doing more and it's kind of easy... And, the reality of our world is that we don't have any slack time or slack resource, so we would

either pulling... We've only been able to do this because we weren't putting on a live festival.

One of the things I've already said to XXX is 'don't expect that we can do this scale of project AND an equally scaled live festival without there being a resource implication and us needing to have more time, money and resource allocated to it.' Because we ordinarily would have spent the last 2-3 weeks prepping, preparing, training and delivering live and we've only been able to do this because that time's freed up.

And I think we will, we'd asked everyone, from a very practical perspective, we will be looking at, from a timesheet perspective, how much time this has taken. XXX's very quick estimation is that it's about, it's been 15 people full-time for two weeks. We're talking 30 'people weeks', we're talking half an FTE, minimum.

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah.**

005:

On top of what we would do ordinarily to make this happen.

**Interviewer:**

**To pull this off. Yeah, and I guess that's an interesting... It's an interesting proof of concept in terms of being able to deliver something like this in the future... That you'll have potentially a lot more of a true sense of how you might be able to produce these kinds of things again.**

005:

Oh yeah, I most definitely feel that we've learnt so much the last few weeks. And it wouldn't have been, if we'd had a choice, it wouldn't have been the way that we'd have chosen to go about it in terms of the timescale and the constraints that we've faced. But I think in terms of doing, as I say, this 'companion piece' – and I'm very carefully not calling it an online festival – ...

**Interviewer:**

**No...**

005:

... because I think that, in terms of managing expectations that we are, we are a live events organisation. But this concept of increasing the life and reach of our events through digital channels has always been of interest to us by way of the philosophical basis of what we do; by way of connecting as many people as possible with science. But also, from a more practical and fiscal perspective, erm, one of the struggles that we face as a live event is from supporters and sponsors who want legacy...

**Interviewer:**

**Yeah.**

005:

... erm, so, we've talked a lot in the past about what we could do by way of digital legacy; making available teacher notes, things to do at home, add-on activities etc. Erm, and I think having gone through this that will absolutely be a bigger part of what we look to do because I think it will help us practically and financially, as well as from the philosophical standpoint.

**Interviewer:**

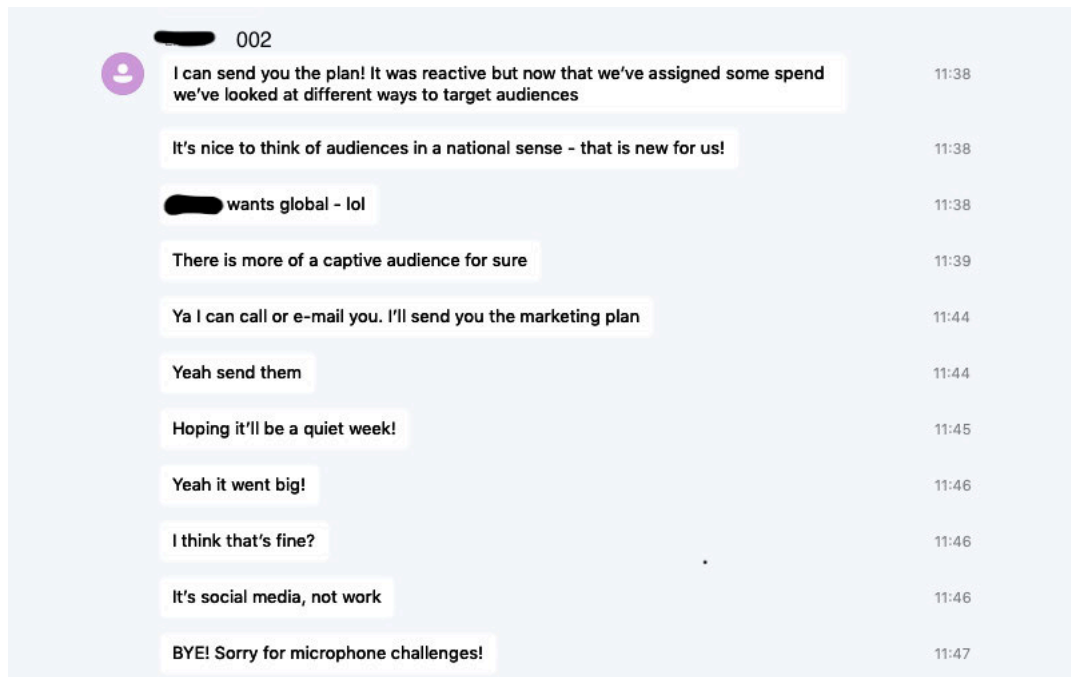
**Oh, that's great. Thank you so much. I don't have anything more to ask, is there anything that you wanted to add?**

005:

Not from my perspective, erm, 002 might. If 002 has got anything else she can maybe email through.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, perfect. I mean, I can, if it's useful I can email typed out versions of the questions I was going to ask – or the questions I asked but in a slightly more structured format – and if you have, you can respond that way if you want? I can send them to you and 001...



A screenshot of a chat interface with a light blue background. At the top left, a purple circular profile icon is next to the contact name "002". The chat history consists of several text messages in white bubbles, each followed by a timestamp on the right. The messages are as follows:

- 11:38: "I can send you the plan! It was reactive but now that we've assigned some spend we've looked at different ways to target audiences"
- 11:38: "It's nice to think of audiences in a national sense - that is new for us!"
- 11:38: "wants global - lol"
- 11:39: "There is more of a captive audience for sure"
- 11:44: "Ya I can call or e-mail you. I'll send you the marketing plan"
- 11:44: "Yeah send them"
- 11:45: "Hoping it'll be a quiet week!"
- 11:46: "Yeah it went big!"
- 11:46: "I think that's fine?"
- 11:46: "It's social media, not work"
- 11:47: "BYE! Sorry for microphone challenges!"

## **Appendix 1d: transcript from Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society**

### **interview #1**

#### **Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society**

Interview #1

Tuesday 11 August 2020

Duration 54'12"

00:00:01.589 --> 00:00:14.910

VJ: There we go. And that should be us recording in zoom as well and good. Okay. And you've, you know a little bit about my research already. Is it useful for me to introduce a little bit again, or should we just launch into it?

00:00:15.269 --> 00:00:17.970

Fringe: Yeah, that'd be great. Just, just very quickly. But yeah, that'd be useful.

00:00:18.029 --> 00:00:28.530

VJ: Yeah, sure. So, so my research came out of my own work, professional work in arts marketing and which I did for 10 years and

00:00:28.920 --> 00:00:39.090

VJ: And I'm interested in the value of digital content and communications as part of a wider kind of offering of the arts and creative industries.

00:00:39.570 --> 00:00:49.860

VJ: And so that's where the project started. And then obviously when COVID came along the, the kind of the role of digital and the value of digital has been thrown up in the air.

00:00:50.250 --> 00:00:59.430

VJ: And it's sort of landing, as we speak, I guess, in terms of how people are people are kind of starting to, to change their approaches and, and adapt to

00:00:59.790 --> 00:01:04.740

VJ: To changes in live events. So now the research is kind of looking at capturing

00:01:05.400 --> 00:01:16.650

VJ: What was happening pre-pandemic and through the pandemic and to kind of look at what might change, what might have happened anyway, and how the value of digital

00:01:17.610 --> 00:01:25.830

VJ: Has changed and will change going forward. So that's, that's kind of what this is all about. And just to start off, and just to kind of

00:01:26.550 --> 00:01:34.980

VJ: If you could just briefly kind of introduce your role within the Fringe and talk about, a little bit about, how you work with digital and how your team works with digital

00:01:35.490 --> 00:01:36.690

Fringe: Yeah, for sure. So

00:01:37.920 --> 00:01:46.080

Fringe: So I'm going to change my name on I can't change my name. That's what, that's what's happening and I am...

00:01:49.050 --> 00:01:49.950

Fringe: You can tell we've only got one account!

00:01:50.250 --> 00:01:55.440

Fringe: Now, yeah. My role is Head of Marketing and Development which broadly covers five

00:01:55.950 --> 00:02:02.430

Fringe: core areas of the of the Fringe Society's work. So, where the charity. Well, it depends, The Fringe, I should have said beforehand.

00:02:02.790 --> 00:02:11.460

Fringe: So that includes hopefully I'll get all of them here, the marketing department, which is essentially really underpinned by that.

00:02:12.060 --> 00:02:19.710

Fringe: Year-round marketing campaign builds to a crescendo around June and then right into, into August and tries to get people to

00:02:20.130 --> 00:02:24.630

Fringe: Engage and buy tickets and go see shows all of that all of that sort of stuff.

00:02:25.410 --> 00:02:32.670

Fringe: We have our communications function which, in addition to obviously handling all the press inquiries and media activity.

00:02:33.090 --> 00:02:45.360

Fringe: Also accredits about 1,000 of the world's media on a normal Fringe cycle. And so, we run a dedicated media office from Fringe Central, which is our participants' hub during August, which is normally in Appleton Tower.

00:02:45.990 --> 00:02:57.060

Fringe: And we also have our Development team who are there to look after all matters fundraising and philanthropy. So, our Fringe Friends membership scheme.

00:02:57.540 --> 00:03:04.950

Fringe: trusts and foundations, legacy prospects, plus a lot of large-scale government funding all of those kinds of things, sit within that remit.

00:03:05.550 --> 00:03:26.490

Fringe: And the fourth area is digital specifically. So that is our website and we sell about 75% of the tickets to the Fringe and our website and app are the de facto choice of about 90% of those transactions. So that's grown significantly over recent years.

00:03:27.870 --> 00:03:36.480

Fringe: Or it for an increasing part of that work is also and where it meets that campaign is on sort of digital special projects of which

00:03:36.870 --> 00:03:51.000

Fringe: We've obviously done a lot this year for, for a digital Fringe, but things like the inspiration machine. I mentioned to you previously, the idea of trying to help people find a show is almost always enabled digitally. Last year, we did a

00:03:52.320 --> 00:04:03.960

Fringe: A little bit of a, we sort of created a web-based app almost as a treasure hunt. So, to try to encourage people to be as disloyal as possible to the venue they always go to

00:04:05.130 --> 00:04:19.290

Fringe: This loyalty card was essentially where people would drop round two different venues and find specific QR codes that they could then add into their phones. So, a lot of work in that space. And then the final one, which is still quite

00:04:21.090 --> 00:04:31.050

Fringe: Not digitised as access is streets events, which is that archetypal visual of the High Street or the Mound during August and we bring in

00:04:31.650 --> 00:04:42.990

Fringe: Around about 50 to 60 people and to help run that space and make sure that artists are well looked after, the audience is a safe that access is maintained all times so that

00:04:43.710 --> 00:04:50.670

Fringe: those with disabilities are properly looked after. All that sounds so quite a broad brief but that's, that's the kind of five major

00:04:51.540 --> 00:05:10.410

VJ: Cool. Okay. Yeah, thank you. And so, thinking fixing a little bit more on what you guys have done this year. And could you kind of give them give me just a very sort of overarching few sentences about what the kind of digital programme that you put forward for 2020 is and what it entails.

00:05:11.310 --> 00:05:14.250

Fringe: Yeah, so the sentence will be a challenge, but I'll do my best.

00:05:16.110 --> 00:05:17.790

Fringe: And I can say I can send you a

00:05:18.000 --> 00:05:19.290

Fringe: Media release that probably

00:05:19.980 --> 00:05:24.270

VJ: Yeah, that would be fantastic.

00:05:25.530 --> 00:05:32.430

Fringe: Is saying essentially what we've done is try broadly to focus on, I guess. Three main pillars.

00:05:33.240 --> 00:05:44.310

Fringe: One is around fundraising and clearly with very little access to any form of income at the minute we have about 30,000 freelancers that you usually come to the Fringe

00:05:44.730 --> 00:05:59.430

Fringe: Most of them have slipped through the cracks in terms of core government funding or furlough payments, all this sort of stuff. So, a big part of our objective is to try and underpin that and support them and lobby and advocate for them and select the big part

00:06:00.630 --> 00:06:13.440

Fringe: Another key aspect is profile, obviously we want to keep the spirit of the Fringe alive even in the year where it's not taking place physically. So, we wanted to try and make sure that there was

00:06:14.130 --> 00:06:31.740

Fringe: There were a series of options for people to get their work out there and to find an audience in some way, shape, or form. Even if financially, it's not an absolute panacea, because we know that that that's still a big challenge. And then, I guess. The third major area, which

00:06:33.060 --> 00:06:45.600

Fringe: Is, kind of connects to the both of the previous ones bits about the business of the Fringe in some way so alongside that media accreditation that I mentioned we usually accredit about 1,600

00:06:46.590 --> 00:07:06.420

Fringe: Members of the arts industry. So, these are buyers and TV producers and radio execs and festival organisers and so on. They come to the Fringe to buy work to co-commission to find talent and all of that could have stopped if we didn't move into the digital



00:07:07.560 --> 00:07:09.990

Fringe: I'll probably start there. If that's okay, but here.

00:07:10.830 --> 00:07:19.170

VJ: We can we can pick up on examples as we go along. But it's just nice to hear kind of what the, what the kind of core of, kind of goal of the, of the output. It's that's

00:07:19.260 --> 00:07:27.120

VJ: That's brilliant. Thank you. And so, kind of starting from ,from the starting point of my thesis then, which is around the idea of

00:07:27.750 --> 00:07:39.540

VJ: The value of digital but also, also digital labour. So the way I kind of define that is the is the work that goes into making, researching, creating, posting

00:07:39.870 --> 00:07:47.280

VJ: All the kind of behind the scenes stuff that makes it a digital piece of content and ,and I think sort of

00:07:47.820 --> 00:07:57.990

VJ: From my own personal experience that sort of, that is a hugely time-consuming resource-hungry activity that isn't always obvious. And so

00:07:58.560 --> 00:08:11.250

VJ: I'm really interested in how that kind of, how that kind of production works. What worked in the Fringe pre-pandemic and, and might be working differently or the same or more now.

00:08:12.750 --> 00:08:21.960

Fringe: Yeah, so I mean I think the honest truth is that over the last, certainly, two, three years, we've made an increasing switch into an almost entirely digital space so

00:08:22.440 --> 00:08:31.530

Fringe: When I arrived, we were still doing if you take the Fringe campaign is the obvious one, which is probably our biggest single expenditure at about £200-250,000 a year.

00:08:32.460 --> 00:08:45.330

Fringe: And that was around about 40% offline 60% online. When I arrived. It's now pretty much 100% digital and

00:08:45.870 --> 00:08:54.630

Fringe: That is supported by all of our social channels of which we have about eight so about 500,000 followers, all of our email bulletins that go out

00:08:55.110 --> 00:09:01.380

Fringe: A number of these special projects and special builds that I've mentioned as well. So, we work with

00:09:02.220 --> 00:09:20.610

Fringe: A dedicated creative agency called Bright Signals in Glasgow and a media buying agency Media Common in Edinburgh and increasingly have been looking at essentially a kind of year-round digital journey of engagement piece. So, as an example.

00:09:21.690 --> 00:09:33.960

Fringe: Last year we did quite a lot of work, just before the Fringe, around key milestones almost or key decision points that were quite good predicates or predictors of future behaviour.

00:09:34.890 --> 00:09:46.530

Fringe: Was downloading the Fringe app, for example, so we, we worked out that there was almost a six to one conversion rate difference between the app, and even the website in terms of people buying tickets

00:09:46.590 --> 00:09:46.980

Fringe: So what I

00:09:47.340 --> 00:09:50.820

Fringe: started doing was to build a digital campaign from scratch. That said,

00:09:51.150 --> 00:10:06.570

Fringe: As social activity would start talking up the app in around May time. So, before we get to launch as a sort of preview, you can explore some of the early shows that are on there and you can be an early adopter. Then we, we created

00:10:07.590 --> 00:10:18.990

Fringe: Essentially through a through a series of targeted Google ads, a follow up message to those people who downloaded the app, the app, the app that said, now's the time to start favouriting because that was a good

00:10:19.410 --> 00:10:21.210

Fringe: Again, predictor of behavior.

00:10:21.960 --> 00:10:29.940

Fringe: All digitally. And then we can start saying, well, actually there's a scarcity in those products. So, you now need to buy your tickets. So

00:10:30.150 --> 00:10:46.080

Fringe: We deliberately didn't go in with a buy messaging in April, we went. We looked at those digital platforms that we're going to make most likely to make most of the difference. And I think that's one of the big reasons we were, I think, was coming like an eight or 9% increase in sales.

00:10:47.190 --> 00:10:58.470

Fringe: But interesting. It was our big objective was what we've called 'one more show not two more feet'. So, we don't want the city to be busier we want the people who come to go and see more work.

00:10:58.770 --> 00:11:09.780

Fringe: Okay, that was the pattern. So, we had I think an increase of about one or 2% in overall audience numbers, but a 10% increase in ticket sales. So, you saw that that rebalancing happen.

00:11:10.230 --> 00:11:10.530

So,

00:11:11.550 --> 00:11:19.890

Fringe: I guess the headline, there is, it's a sort of year-round piece I mean it's, it's almost entirely almost goes from October through to

00:11:20.430 --> 00:11:32.820

Fringe: August, but we're doing a debrief in September. So, it's as good as a 12 month cycle with a support of two major internal working groups who work in an agile format.

00:11:33.720 --> 00:11:42.180

Fringe: Which is our content working group, which has the name suggests, is there to create organic mostly social but also email content that

00:11:42.720 --> 00:11:48.390

Fringe: fills in the gaps between major content pillars that we've got in that campaign structure.

00:11:48.990 --> 00:12:02.610

Fringe: And then we've got the campaign working group who are liaising with Bright Signals around everything from the artwork that we're building for the campaign through to specific outputs that might be social. They might be email based they might be

00:12:03.690 --> 00:12:05.310

Fringe: Billboard based etc etc.

00:12:07.260 --> 00:12:14.310

Fringe: That's what we usually do. This year, to be honest, it's not been all that different, aside from the fact that the output is obviously be

00:12:14.760 --> 00:12:32.580

Fringe: That not in service of a physical festival. But we're still trying to drive in this case engagements with our Fringe on Friday live shows that are taking place every Friday during the Fringe and pick and mix platform for short videos. So same process, but just different output. Yeah.

00:12:32.760 --> 00:12:44.340

VJ: So, does it feel different than would you say promoting, promoting a live event through mostly digital or, or promoting digital on digital?

00:12:45.000 --> 00:12:51.870

Fringe: Yeah, I think it does. I mean, there's some moments where it feels closer than others. So, during the live show we had

00:12:52.440 --> 00:13:04.170

Fringe: Obviously quite an active social presence and that engagement piece was the closest we all got to feeling sort of normal for an August and, but I guess there's an interesting kind of

00:13:05.430 --> 00:13:16.620

Fringe: analogy that I don't know whether it's come up in your research to date, but with a physical festival almost that social conversation is, is heightened by

00:13:17.160 --> 00:13:27.210

Fringe: key moments in time, often when someone comes out of the show and engages either with the artist or with friends of theirs. So, there's a natural rhythm that goes in with

00:13:27.570 --> 00:13:38.160

Fringe: A shared experience a shared moment to conversation that then drives an online discussion and whilst our online activities have sort of enable that.

00:13:38.910 --> 00:13:49.500

Fringe: Because it's always on, you're not quite seeing the same level of ?. I guess the analogy I'd draw is, is almost like the water cooler moment of all broadcast stuff right that

00:13:50.670 --> 00:14:01.920

Fringe: Was the game thrones have released a major update and never everyone talks about it then and there. Versus if it's if it's all online at the same time that that that naturally becomes more diffuse

00:14:02.970 --> 00:14:06.960

Fringe: Harder to, to corral people around moments in time.

00:14:07.740 --> 00:14:17.310

VJ: No that makes absolute sense. And that was one that was kind of one of the points that I've got. I'm interested in exploring kind of as a coming out of this sort of August based project is. Yeah. I think the, the sort of

00:14:18.090 --> 00:14:29.460

VJ: The relationship between time on the clock and digital programming, I think is a really interesting one, as you say, because that kind of the collective experience is slightly altered.

00:14:29.760 --> 00:14:40.380

VJ: Even in, even through a, mediated by a screen in real time as we're doing now. So, I think that's going to be, it's going to be an interesting theme to, to explore kind of coming out of this research.

00:14:41.010 --> 00:14:47.340

Fringe: Sure, yeah, I'd add to that, probably the inevitable value proposition things. Well, you know, the

00:14:48.330 --> 00:14:57.480

Fringe: We I think we've got quite lucky. It was partly by design, but the, the fact we're doing a fundraiser for example is one of our that ticketed element of this

00:14:58.290 --> 00:15:11.490

Fringe: Makes it slightly easier for us to ask for a price. It's still less than a normal fringe ticket, but there is that assumption that a digital proposition will be free, or will be significantly discounted and I

00:15:12.270 --> 00:15:23.670

Fringe: Our artists have really struggled with that. And as I've said many years you know that if we're going to do it. We kind of need to give this away because no one's going to want to pay for it, and those that have tried to get to pay for it, have seen quite

00:15:25.110 --> 00:15:34.530

Fringe: Difficult Conversations and haven't got the numbers that they were looking for. So, it's a mixed picture, but I guess people are quite comfortable with the idea of

00:15:35.220 --> 00:15:50.010

Fringe: You know, like going to the cinema, I sit on the seat. I paid for this physical space, the person in front of me is, is physically there. It's not quite the same as me tuning into Spotify or reading a newspaper online where I don't usually pay, so I don't need to pay here.

00:15:50.250 --> 00:15:55.560

VJ: No, absolutely. I think you're quite right. And I think there's something there's that kind of transactional

00:15:56.070 --> 00:16:05.670

VJ: exchange of value almost that happens that I think will, will again, be really interesting to see to see how that how that kind of develops going forward.

00:16:06.180 --> 00:16:18.000

VJ: And a little bit more on value if that's okay. I guess I'm interested in how sort of, it sounds like you got you guys have got quite a, quite sort of structured approach to working groups across your organization to

00:16:18.810 --> 00:16:28.170

VJ: Make digital. Does that, does that involve beyond the comms team. Is there a sort of, is there a kind of digital buy-in across the organisation? Would you say?

00:16:30.030 --> 00:16:41.280

Fringe: Yeah, there is. I think we, so as part of those working groups, we, because we're and apologies for you because we've been going here a little bit, but

00:16:42.030 --> 00:16:51.750

Fringe: Try we have tried to make those as agile as possible. As a result, we have an open-door policy with members of the rest of the team. So, for example,

00:16:52.560 --> 00:17:02.580

Fringe: A content thread might well be around their accessibility work or I work with communities. So, we'll have the dedicated person that heads up those areas coming to

00:17:02.940 --> 00:17:09.480

Fringe: Maybe one session a month and sharing what their plans are. And then we start plugging in what those look like. And we also have a

00:17:09.870 --> 00:17:19.350

Fringe: creative brief template and they can feed into those conversations in if they can't necessarily be there so we things like audience demographics, what we know about the

00:17:20.580 --> 00:17:26.460

Fringe: How often, they want to be communicated with all those sorts of practical kind of watch. Watch words.

00:17:27.300 --> 00:17:38.670

Fringe: The only reason I hesitate. I guess is that as an organisation we are split across three buildings and therefore it can become quite siloed. And we're working quite hard to break that down.

00:17:39.840 --> 00:17:48.930

Fringe: To make that slightly, slightly more seamless, I guess. But yeah, to give you a bit of a window, the programme team.

00:17:50.190 --> 00:18:01.620

Fringe: Who are sit within our artists' development and participants side of things work with a registration system called Fringeware, which is a proprietary piece of software we've built and you're nodding, you might have used it?

00:18:01.770 --> 00:18:05.790

VJ: Yes, I was. I was an editor on the fringe program. Gosh, about

00:18:08.490 --> 00:18:12.120

VJ: ten years ago I think. I know, remember for sure. Well, yeah.

00:18:13.020 --> 00:18:18.930

Fringe: Does that quite digitally savvy and have to be because, as you're well aware, Fringeware is not the easiest of things to work with.

00:18:20.880 --> 00:18:35.280

Fringe: But that that meshing with Fringeware and ingesting data from edfringe.com but it also talks to Red 61 which is our box office software which is handled by our operations team.

00:18:35.970 --> 00:18:48.300

Fringe: So, you do have this kind of digital nexus almost between the three departments where you've broadly got ownership of part of the jigsaw in each of those departments, so there

00:18:49.140 --> 00:18:55.080

Fringe: There is more. I would say the Fringe itself is more digitally savvy than almost any organisation I've worked with

00:18:55.560 --> 00:19:09.660

Fringe: But it does tend to be quite siloed still because I understand that Fringeware because I'm in participants team, but I don't understand how that then interfaces with the website or how it works to kind of try and draw into a

00:19:10.710 --> 00:19:11.220

Fringe: Bit of a mix.

00:19:12.030 --> 00:19:24.120

VJ: Those first few days, would you say then that kind of digital, digital labour as my definition which is kind of is equally valued if potentially from slightly different perspectives across the organization, then?

00:19:24.930 --> 00:19:32.790

Fringe: Yeah, I think so. I mean, there is a bit of suspicion of it. I think it's fair to say, and in some cases a healthy

00:19:33.960 --> 00:19:39.900

Fringe: Sense of it because I think there's as an organisation, if I could if I could say anything. It's almost that we

00:19:40.200 --> 00:19:55.440

Fringe: We sometimes lurch to digital where we don't, it's not necessarily the right route. And one example, might well be in participant engagement. We've had a really successful series of live webinars that we do as a sort of podcast series called fringe

00:19:55.470 --> 00:20:05.730

Fringe: Cast, which are great, but we've had to make sure we continue doing our one-to-one face-to-face sessions. Because, particularly for some of our older audiences that doesn't

00:20:06.270 --> 00:20:19.500

Fringe: Mesh likewise things like the printed programme is still seen by 75% of our audiences as their number one tool for making decisions. So, what you don't want to do is I think as much as possible. We try and make it a blended

00:20:19.860 --> 00:20:25.950

Fringe: Approach. Obviously, this year we've not been able to do that. But I think certainly for the next four or five years.

00:20:26.430 --> 00:20:41.100

Fringe: Our audience be it the artists or ticket buyers will have the requirement for both. And in the organisation, I think if you get any resistance, it will probably be on the basis of we need to make sure we consider those, that for whom this is still a bit uncomfortable.

00:20:41.340 --> 00:20:50.850

VJ: Yeah, yeah absolutely no that that makes sense and moving on a little bit. So, I'm I think we've actually spoken about this before. And the idea of

00:20:51.630 --> 00:21:04.770

VJ: More specifically around kind of social media platforms, but the idea that kind of the, the platform-led approach and actually the platform kind of proprietary systems that we're working with.

00:21:05.340 --> 00:21:13.530

VJ: And that that infrastructure is almost kind of taken over the way that we work and promote and make

00:21:13.860 --> 00:21:23.940

VJ: digital content and which is potentially problematic also potentially useful in terms of working with algorithms to kind of broadcast your content further

00:21:24.510 --> 00:21:38.880

VJ: And do. Do you feel that for the Fringe, that, that, that idea of platformization is a tool that you work with positively or do you feel that it is a challenge or a barrier to the work that you do?

00:21:40.350 --> 00:21:43.170



Fringe: Yes, it's maybe an unhelpful answer, but I think it's both.

00:21:44.190 --> 00:21:45.900

VJ: So that's what I would, I would say.

00:21:47.670 --> 00:21:55.590

Fringe: In the one sense, I guess you've got an audience that are primed to expect a certain type of content and

00:21:56.040 --> 00:22:06.210

Fringe: Even, even at a basic level of formats that stuff is kicked out in or the way a video structured the length of it, some of the insights that you get back through the platform about what works and what doesn't.

00:22:06.510 --> 00:22:14.940

Fringe: These are all quite useful shorthands that mean that rather than having to try and build that audience from scratch, as entirely new

00:22:16.290 --> 00:22:27.030

Fringe: Kind of, what's the word I'm trying to look for here, people who are kind of going out on a limb, you know, they're almost like out trying, trying things for the first time and we lost that word anyway. You know what I mean.

00:22:27.240 --> 00:22:27.900

VJ: I did, yeah.

00:22:29.520 --> 00:22:45.420

Fringe: You don't have as much of that with platformization, I guess, which is the positive element and that drives down costs and that drives down the amount of kind of test and fail that we need to do, I suppose. On the negative side.

00:22:46.680 --> 00:22:50.760

Fringe: As we've seen, most recently with Tik Tok. For example, which we've explored.

00:22:51.180 --> 00:22:56.820

Fringe: On-going basis, but certainly when Facebook have changed their algorithm or when Twitter have changed their algorithm.

00:22:57.390 --> 00:23:03.060

Fringe: We, we end up with a load of unusual activity that we were not able to engage with. We ended up being

00:23:04.380 --> 00:23:08.490

Fringe: I think I'm fairly disenfranchised by things very specific to us.

00:23:08.880 --> 00:23:24.390

Fringe: For example, like the fact that we are a festival made up of multiple events. And that means that both Google and Facebook really struggled to see us in the way they would see at Glastonbury, for example, which is a festival between this date in this state. We want organizer.

00:23:24.660 --> 00:23:35.970

Fringe: Yeah, and that makes it quite difficult. And it makes. I mean, Google Maps is an absolute nightmare for us in terms of trying to get Fringe venues displayed because they're not year round.

00:23:36.420 --> 00:23:44.370

Fringe: So, there's a number of things that sort of tie our hands behind our back with those platforms and obviously that's before you get to the

00:23:44.730 --> 00:23:53.910

Fringe: Slightly nefarious data usage and you know what's happening to personal data in particular when people engage with our platforms and are we complicit.

00:23:54.480 --> 00:24:07.560

Fringe: In something, especially as a as a platform. It's about freedom of speech are we complicit in the opposite? And I think I think certainly Facebook sits in that in that camp for me. And we've

00:24:08.400 --> 00:24:13.560

Fringe: stopped because it's not performed so well for us and our audience turned away from it but we ourselves have been

00:24:14.040 --> 00:24:28.980

Fringe: quite uncomfortable in things like their, their more aggressive cookie usage in in recent times, and what data they're collecting and how and pragmatic and practical that is versus genuinely creepy and

00:24:30.780 --> 00:24:30.990

VJ: Again,

00:24:31.650 --> 00:24:32.490

Fringe: We've, we've

00:24:32.550 --> 00:24:37.890

Fringe: We've rejected a number of ad formats and tracing on that basis, so

00:24:38.430 --> 00:24:42.240

VJ: That's interesting that you that you've been doing that because my next question, which is

00:24:42.270 --> 00:24:42.600

VJ: Which is

00:24:42.930 --> 00:24:52.320

VJ: I always find a really interesting discussion point is that idea there's a there's a relationship between you and the platform, there's a relationship between your audience and the platform.

00:24:52.620 --> 00:24:56.820

VJ: And between you and your audience and I'm really interested in how that's kind of

00:24:57.180 --> 00:25:11.070

VJ: Mediated and by whom. So, so, yeah, as you say, a perfect example, an algorithm changes and a load of content that you spent money producing is, is not going to be seen by the platforms.

00:25:11.580 --> 00:25:17.070

VJ: Do you, I mean, I think you've just kind of answered, whether you think the platform is transparent and

00:25:17.610 --> 00:25:27.750

VJ: Do you, do you think there is an issue of trust, potentially with, with your audiences and some of these platforms. And how do you kind of take back a little bit control of control of that relationship?

00:25:28.200 --> 00:25:48.900

Fringe: Yeah, I mean, I think there's a couple of points. I mean, no one is, I think, if there is a loss of trust. It's a at a macro level. So, as in I don't trust Facebook, therefore I move on to a different platform, and yet we've seen, ironically, Instagram, in particular, rise as Facebook has fallen.

00:25:50.220 --> 00:26:00.690

Fringe: Not any difference as we know clearly from an audience perspective, it does. And we do. We've always found Twitter to be a bit of a, a bit of a bellwether and

00:26:01.380 --> 00:26:14.610

Fringe: That's remained robust for quite a long time. And I don't see any reason for that to wane. And I think this is maybe what gets to your previous question, which is a battle of that relation relational or relationship piece and so

00:26:16.140 --> 00:26:20.490

Fringe: It's quite a complex one. But if I can break it down into a few component parts.

00:26:20.970 --> 00:26:27.330

Fringe: It used to be the case that artists and artists and venues ran their own social activity and campaigns.

00:26:27.690 --> 00:26:38.310

Fringe: entirely separate to the rest of what we did. The Fringe Society would run a central fringe activity, but it would almost all be in the build-up to August

00:26:38.610 --> 00:26:50.220

Fringe: And would be very branded so it would be campaign led, wouldn't have a hashtag associated with it, really would just be about getting the visuals of the campaign out there. Why...

00:26:51.300 --> 00:26:59.130

Fringe: Those two didn't really talk to each other. Neither did our paid for social or Google and Google AdWords or

00:27:00.180 --> 00:27:04.380

Fringe: Google Display Network ads, none of those would really walk. Walk and talk together.

00:27:04.920 --> 00:27:22.020

Fringe: So, three years ago, we made a kind of conscious decision, and it was in part just because of the way I've run campaigns in the past that everyone in our team to work more closely together, so digital and marketing and PR all came closer, but also that because our budgets quite small.

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Fringe: Actually, what we needed to start doing was to create a campaign led by a central hashtag and by a series of

00:27:29.730 --> 00:27:37.140

Fringe: shared resources that didn't belong to us and didn't belong to the artists and didn't belong to the venues that belong to all of them.

00:27:37.890 --> 00:27:43.020

Fringe: This year it's #MakeYourFringe and we've run that for a couple years. It goes #IntotheUnknown in 2018

00:27:43.740 --> 00:27:54.870

Fringe: But the idea was we tried to share that with artists and venues as early as possible with the argument that we have half a million social followers, but they have content. We don't

00:27:55.380 --> 00:28:04.470

Fringe: So, if we can connect the dots. The, our ability to reach a much larger audience, but then augmented by our paid activity.

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Fringe: Is off the scale. So, to give you an example. The top 10 artists at the Fringe last year had a social reach of something like 50 million just on Twitter.

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Fringe: But whereas we had half a million. So even though we're quite big, we're nothing compared to this enormous space. So, here's an example. I think

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Fringe: He, was it Noel Fielding engaged with a piece of content that we put out that reached three and a half million people in a couple of days.

00:28:35.190 --> 00:28:43.470

Fringe: Suddenly, that has that, that lightning rods capability. And that would never, would have happened in the past, but it would it be

Fringe: Isolated to a narrow audience, rather than trying to get everyone together in this shared experience, which happens organically face-to-face that doesn't happen online. So that answers your question.

00:28:57.060 --> 00:29:01.140

VJ: It does, it does. It's, I guess, the idea is making, making the whole thing more cohesive

00:29:01.440 --> 00:29:12.570

VJ: And potentially I guess that, that approach enables you to find those pieces of content that people are sharing out with your own kind of work and to know that they're there.

00:29:13.050 --> 00:29:15.360

VJ: And then respond, respond accordingly.

00:29:15.660 --> 00:29:23.760

VJ: Which I guess leads me on to one of the, one of the interesting things that we, you mentioned sort of smaller artists and I think that these are kind of often the people who potentially get the

00:29:24.000 --> 00:29:33.570

VJ: roughest deal as far as I've found so far from things like algorithm changes and because that's often there so way of promoting the work that they do.

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VJ: And online. Would you would you argue that those people have a responsibility to change their behaviours in response to platforms or should platforms, be more, be kind to the people that are that are using them.

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Fringe: I guess it slightly depends on the justification and the rationale behind changing the algorithm.

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Fringe: We believe the rhetoric of major providers that the, the algorithm changes are designed to make it more useful to the ultimate consumer

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Fringe: Then it could be argued that, because most of the artists don't have a paid budget behind them.

00:30:14.430 --> 00:30:31.950

Fringe: There's is about authenticity. So, if they've got a good relationship with their existing cohort and audience then algorithm changes should theoretically benefit them right because they're no longer being crowded out by large scale corporates that are dominating the page space in practice.

00:30:33.060 --> 00:30:48.120

Fringe: I'm not convinced that's happened at all in the last five years, certainly there was a little bit of a shift. I guess when Facebook made, they made it sort of, made the shift towards prioritising content from your immediate network as opposed to those beyond it.

00:30:49.230 --> 00:31:01.410

Fringe: But I, I didn't get very much, if any positive feedback from artists that said, ah, we're suddenly getting loads more bookings are we suddenly getting loads more people interested in our work. So yeah, I

00:31:02.430 --> 00:31:13.080

Fringe: I guess the answer to your question is if the algorithm change actually delivers a more one-to-one relationship between artists and fan, then that should benefit.

00:31:13.410 --> 00:31:20.760

Fringe: Yet, it doesn't which almost certainly hasn't in recent times, because the financial imperative is taken.

00:31:22.230 --> 00:31:25.860

Fringe: Naturally dis-incentivising, disenfranchised because they don't have that budget.

00:31:26.640 --> 00:31:32.010

VJ: Yeah, yeah, no, no. That makes, it was, came from. It came from a conversation I had with somebody else and I think

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VJ: It depends. Then again, it's that kind of mediated relationship and it always depends on your own as a sort of digital professional relationship with the platform.

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VJ: As to how you would then go on to advise somebody else to work with that platform. And I think that sort of that kind of filters through, which is an interesting way of thinking about it.

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Fringe: Yeah, and it's worth being aware of Vikki, that we hold four or five sessions as part of Fringe Central each year called 'how to market your show'.

00:32:00.690 --> 00:32:06.600

Fringe: And we're doing the same during the digital Fringe this year as part of Fringe Central and

00:32:07.200 --> 00:32:22.560

Fringe: We do, increasingly that shifted from how to engage with the media, which is still there, but it's very much now switching into how you engage with the collective hashtag. How do you... we've done things. For example, recently, like

00:32:23.730 --> 00:32:37.920

Fringe: What's it called 'quick flyer', which is our Friday free-for-all, where essentially artists are allowed to pitch their shown to audiences and we tell them, it says be here at this time, and you'll be, you'll have shows randomly pitched to you.

00:32:38.760 --> 00:32:50.790

Fringe: Rather than being floods physically go [?] a lot of that advice is sitting in a similar space, but also about be aware that this is how the algorithm works. This is how it doesn't work if you try and spam it, it won't work.

00:32:51.810 --> 00:33:03.150

VJ: Yeah. Yeah, no, that's, that's interesting that that has that has changed. And I guess that's sort of that kind of life course of what we might call traditional marketing approaches towards a more a more kind of

00:33:03.660 --> 00:33:11.010

VJ: Yeah, digital lead, I guess approaches is being borne out in the way that you're kind of working with artists. That's, that's interesting.

00:33:11.700 --> 00:33:29.400

VJ: And thinking the end a little I'm going to move on. To the section around kind of the idea of measuring the value of them of what you guys do digitally. And it sounds like you. You are resourced and spend time working with analytics and platform analytics. Is that, is that right?

00:33:31.350 --> 00:33:36.990

VJ: And would you say... How useful are they would you say, and also what are they, what do they tell you, but what can they not tell you?

00:33:38.790 --> 00:33:51.210

Fringe: Yeah, it's funny. I'm actually doing a press; I'm doing a presentation to the Northern Ireland kind of equivalent of Creative Scotland sorts of Arts Council.

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Fringe: Next week on this exact topic, how you build metrics that matter, in some ways, so they are useful, and I think they're overwhelming to

00:34:04.110 --> 00:34:08.430

Fringe: Large numbers of the project. So, if we go back to the artist point you were making earlier with you. I think

00:34:08.760 --> 00:34:16.680

Fringe: For the, for the average artists, the more the more data that they're given the more overwhelming it can be so we currently give them a

00:34:17.460 --> 00:34:24.690

Fringe: dashboard that shows their ticket sales with what they've... If they've got their own website they'll have all of their analytics, they'll have social analytics, they'll have

00:34:25.380 --> 00:34:31.290

Fringe: Various different feedback that's, that's delivered often digitally from things like the flyer is happening stuff out and so on and so forth.

00:34:31.740 --> 00:34:37.380

Fringe: And the question then becomes, which of these metrics are actually meaningful, of which of them are

00:34:38.160 --> 00:34:52.830

Fringe: You know, just noise that I don't really know where to focus and an example I gave of that which I draw on quite a lot is the difference between your social audience by demography and your ticket buying audience. For example, so

00:34:53.910 --> 00:35:06.660

Fringe: We see it all the time in politics, of course, but that that more reactionary and perhaps more socially aware and culturally liberal audience that sit within social media.

00:35:07.710 --> 00:35:19.950

Fringe: Okay, that's more active that have lots of views on lots of things but are actually pretty much, much more often less predisposed to buy a ticket than someone who is less engaged.

00:35:20.700 --> 00:35:34.290

Fringe: But the risk of the data, saying, well, actually, I've got quite a rich data set of my 10,000 followers on social, it says my audience or X. Yeah. But actually, I look at the audience that are physically in the theatre when I perform



00:35:34.740 --> 00:35:44.010

Fringe: And it's maybe they're 50% of that audience, but they're not 100% and you know where that line where that line comes from. So

00:35:44.550 --> 00:35:52.680

Fringe: That I think the challenge. The other big thing we've done which underpins everything we do is that, and I know I spoke to you about this before, but that journey of engagement.

00:35:53.190 --> 00:36:03.810

Fringe: Piece. So, what we did before we even got to any of the metrics actually was to try and chart out what the ideal customer journey would look like if they went through every single step in the road.

00:36:04.440 --> 00:36:15.720

Fringe: And then try to identify the data gaps that existed within that and looked at existing platforms and what they could tell us. So, I've obviously mentioned earlier the

00:36:16.170 --> 00:36:29.580

Fringe: Things like the insight around app downloads and favourite segments of behaviour and all that sort of thing. We've now got those as goals set up within our analytics, because we know they're statistically significant as opposed to being

00:36:29.970 --> 00:36:37.590

Fringe: Another number. That's something to think about. But another thing to pass in a massive data set.

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Fringe: But I don't know whether it's just because I'm a simple soul, but it's, it's helped a lot to know actually, we've got we've got to get people from here to here.

00:36:47.250 --> 00:36:58.260

Fringe: There are 15 points on that journey with key data points here, here, here. Some things we don't know the answer to. So, we need to invest time in getting data in that space.

00:36:58.261 --> 00:37:13.409

Fringe: There are areas we've got some of the data not all of it. And in others, we know that this is the most statistically significant metric, as opposed to all of these that are over there that are part of the entrepreneur fully

00:37:13.410 --> 00:37:22.320

VJ: Yeah now, no that, that, that makes sense. And I guess. So, I guess that that idea of backing it up. So, what what's, what other approaches and potentially also more kind of

00:37:22.650 --> 00:37:30.240

VJ: Qualitative, excuse me not being able to pronounce that word ever, approaches. Do you, do you use to kind of supplement, supplement that work?

00:37:30.660 --> 00:37:49.650

Fringe: Yeah, so I mean the big one is our end of the Fringe survey. So, every year we do two pieces of major market research. The first one is a full box office analysis where we take the 3 million records there or thereabouts, stick them through, amongst other things, a mosaic so experience mosaic.

00:37:51.060 --> 00:38:08.880

Fringe: And so, we, that gives us an idea in broad terms of the demography that we're engaging with or actually not engaging with in terms of some of that community work. We then, because that's quite a, that's, that's a good robust sample size, but it's obviously quite blunt then,

00:38:09.060 --> 00:38:26.940

Fringe: And append that with an analysis qualitative survey of about 50 questions and every year we get about 15,000 people take that survey. So, it's a good statistically group. We then use the mosaic.

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Fringe: Breakdown to make sure that that's statistically robust, if that makes sense. So, we, we adapt that survey those survey respondents to a representative list, almost like the census would

00:38:39.660 --> 00:38:50.250

Fringe: Yeah. And that gives us combined quite a useful series of metrics, many of which plugged into that journey of engagement that I was talking about earlier.

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Fringe: That helps. We obviously asked for fairly regular feedback through social on a more ad hoc basis and gather those bits and pieces.

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Fringe: And indeed, we do the same in surveys for our participants as artists and venues each year as venue workers. So, we do that every couple of years as well. So, we get a more rounded picture of people's experience and expectations as we go.

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VJ: And what about, what about instinct? Because I think when, certainly this is quite a personal thing. But when I started working with digital channels. There was... nobody really knew what they were doing.

00:39:29.610 --> 00:39:47.670

VJ: And I think there was there was that sense that you could you could instinctively know what would work and what would not work. And I wonder if that still happens or whether there's, it's almost been overtaken by this need to use metrics and analytics.

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Fringe: No, I think you're I think you're 100% so there's a couple of things. I'd say to that one. And the best analogy example I can give is

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Fringe: Last year's most popular tweet I think I'm right in saying was something about our sensory backpacks that we created as part of a community scheme, but it was put out at a really unusual time of day and it was only because X

00:40:12.930 --> 00:40:28.440

Fringe: Social media person at the time was coming out of the show, and had seen, someone using one of the backpacks and chatting to them felt that it might work and stuck it out there at a, at a, at an unusual time and it just flew

00:40:29.970 --> 00:40:41.670

Fringe: Flew and that was just an instinctive. Let's see how this goes. And it may or may not work, and certainly on things like tone of voice and making sure that we have

00:40:42.120 --> 00:40:49.680

Fringe: A sense of what is 'Fringe' and what isn't. I don't think any of that's to do with the algorithm, it's all to do with what we feel is our

00:40:51.540 --> 00:41:05.100

Fringe: Place in the world and what we stand for. And I think that's been quite an important piece of work we've been doing as part of those working groups over the last couple of years is really being clear on what that looks like and making sure that

00:41:06.000 --> 00:41:20.760

Fringe: Without becoming stale and corporate. We are true to that tone of voice, so it's, it's less to me about, we always say, we always use colour spell. Oh, you are or that's a bad example. But you know, it's not a style guide.

00:41:21.660 --> 00:41:26.970

Fringe: For about we are irreverent but we're never seedy.

00:41:28.020 --> 00:41:46.200

Fringe: Are playful, but we're never mocking with this. So, we've got a series of this, but not this that guide us through and then this brings me to my second part of it, which is as part of that kind of agile methodology stuff. I think one of the most influential bits of

00:41:47.550 --> 00:41:50.910

Fringe: Sort of thinking I've read is, is Tim Harford's 'Adapt'.

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Fringe: Have you come across it? So, he's the

00:41:55.050 --> 00:41:58.320

Fringe: He said what he called the undercover economist or the, the something he

00:42:00.090 --> 00:42:03.360

VJ: Yeah I don't I don't know exactly. But yeah, I've heard of that.

00:42:04.020 --> 00:42:18.030

Fringe: But essentially, his whole thesis in there. Is he, he deconstructs the financial crisis and loads of other various things and his, his point is actually less to do with that system having to use failure than actually having to... Many

00:42:19.260 --> 00:42:27.930

Fringe: Good organisations do is fail quickly and learn from that failure but build a system where failure is not critical

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Fringe: Yeah, so that instinct point you made is quitting is massive in that. So, we want to try and encourage our guys to

00:42:36.810 --> 00:42:45.390

Fringe: Try something, it may fall flat on its face, but that's okay because it's not the only thing we're doing, and we'll learn from it and make it better.

00:42:45.720 --> 00:42:56.340

Fringe: And I mean an example I could give that is last year that that venue hopper thing I was talking about, is, it failed. We only got about 1,500 people playing the game.

00:42:57.360 --> 00:43:10.170

Fringe: We struggled to get venues adapting to it and adopting it as part of the mix, but we have used the learnings from that to inform absolutely every part of the digital Fringe activity. We've done this so

00:43:10.710 --> 00:43:24.390

Fringe: It was an investment in failure, but in learning. So, I think, yeah, a long-winded answer to your question, but I think that for me that instinct is maybe more important now than before, but we need to put it in a framework so that it doesn't become

00:43:25.230 --> 00:43:38.940

Fringe: Yeah, it is that we should be more antagonistic or, you know, almost sort of taken Frankie Boyle style approach to our marketing of our audience that's never going to work. He was afraid but

00:43:39.000 --> 00:43:45.540

VJ: Yeah, that's interesting. And I wonder, as you've, you've just made me think of this just now. But the idea that I think there's a

00:43:45.960 --> 00:43:58.350

VJ: Potentially perhaps there's a tendency with an annual festival or event to almost forget to use the learnings from previous years, because you're always on that sort of cycle.

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VJ: Whereas potentially you could argue, or I might argue that that COVID has made you kind of actually stop and think in that slightly longer, longer view. And yeah, you do have the scope to pick up learnings from previous years and use them in new ways. Would you agree with that?

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Fringe: Yeah, I would. Although, what's interesting, because the organisation. One of the things I've really noticed with the Fringe, having come from totally different sectors and very different work patterns is the Fringe is really good as a festival at learning lessons from the previous one.

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Fringe: And so, every year we publish an annual report that's 150 pages long, full of learning points, full of we should do this, this, this better.

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Fringe: But my, my assessment that was a little bit like the kind of Henry Ford is that if I've listened to my audience, I have given them a faster horse.

00:44:50.430 --> 00:45:01.770

Fringe: We spend a lot of time, historically, building the very best version of the Fringe 15 years ago by focusing on something in continuous improvement.

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Fringe: That never really acknowledges category change or systemic change. So, I totally agree with you, COVID, it has been that moment of going all the stuff you used to do all the timeframes all the platforms all the deadlines, everything is up in the air.

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Fringe: You've got to reassess and structure so that as weird as it sounds, the Fringe has been. And I'm not just speaking about our organisation. I mean, the wider fringe

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Fringe: Has probably been quite conservative over the last 15 years because it's, it's always on the treadmill.

00:45:39.390 --> 00:45:51.480

Fringe: So, what it does is it nails down its key timelines and then make sure it always sticks to the same pattern of behaviour. So, when you come in and go yeah but

00:45:52.020 --> 00:46:02.730

Fringe: We when we started doing that everyone bought their tickets via box office or over the phone, now online. So, sorry to give you the examples, but hopefully that helps

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VJ: No, no, they are helpful.

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Fringe: One example of this for me was that when I arrived. We said, absolutely nothing about the Fringe publicly until June, because that was our programme launch and the printed programme was sacrosanct.

00:46:20.220 --> 00:46:34.320

Fringe: So even though we started having on sales where shows would be out there in the public and you can see them on the website. We said nothing at all about those because it was like it was breaking the fourth wall.

00:46:34.530 --> 00:46:35.310

VJ: Your own embargo.

00:46:36.030 --> 00:46:44.910

Fringe: Yeah, we will break down. So, there was this real fear. And I remember it vividly kind of coming in because inevitably you're the new person you kind of say things that

00:46:45.330 --> 00:46:51.780

Fringe: Are anathema. And often you're completely wrong and you get told very quickly that you're and you're right there right or wrong.

00:46:52.500 --> 00:47:02.610

Fringe: But on this one. I was just like that. But hang on a minute, artists are out there trying to sell tickets. Why are we not promoting the fact that those on sales happen?

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Fringe: We can still have a moment when the programme is produced and lo and behold, we've totally switched our attentions now to go earlier. We've expanded into August as well, which never used to happen to try and get people to buy one more ticket, rather than just come once and never again.

00:47:20.280 --> 00:47:23.670

Fringe: All of those were behaviours, based on historic precedent.

00:47:24.810 --> 00:47:31.260

Fringe: And because everyone was stressed and busy and it was always done that way, it just carried on. Yeah.

00:47:31.350 --> 00:47:32.910

VJ: And you don't come back and ask the question.

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VJ: Yeah.

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VJ: No, I think that's, I think that's a really, that's great. And I'm sure. Actually, we could, you could come up with loads more examples of those kinds of behaviours that potentially

00:47:41.910 --> 00:47:51.240

VJ: And I wonder, I wonder, also if there will be learnings from as going, going back to that idea of kind of the elastic nature of time when you're promoting things on, on digital

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VJ: And whether they will be similar kind of learnings going forwards and because I guess I'm conscious of our time. So, I'm going to, I'm going to switch my questions around, and we can

00:48:01.470 --> 00:48:14.280

VJ: Add in some. But I think one that I would really, really like to kind of think about a little bit is that idea of the recalibration of digital and live and how that might look in the future. Because obviously there's

00:48:14.940 --> 00:48:19.710

VJ: There's been a reactive nature to I think everybody who has programmed

00:48:20.340 --> 00:48:34.890

VJ: In different ways over this time but potentially some of this stuff is going to stick, some of it's going to be abandoned, and it would just be really interesting to hear your thoughts on what, what 2021 and beyond might look like in terms of digital and live together.

00:48:35.730 --> 00:48:44.910

Fringe: Yeah, I mean I think the one thing that I've felt quite strongly in the last couple of months. And it's certainly informed, some of the digital activity. We've done

00:48:45.480 --> 00:48:57.930

Fringe: Is that there is not an effective and sustainable financial model for digital only as it sits, and we've seen that with Spotify. We're seeing that with the media industry, and I've been approached by

00:48:59.130 --> 00:49:12.030

Fringe: At least 50 if not 100 different suppliers all saying we can help Fringe artists earn money, all you need to do is get their IP onto our platform and will, will raise X amount, but the more

00:49:13.620 --> 00:49:17.760

Fringe: You're talking about hundreds of thousands of impressions to start making any meaningful.

00:49:18.540 --> 00:49:26.430

Fringe: Income and that's before you get to the major problem, which is that whereas normally a Fringe artist would use the Fringe as their

00:49:26.730 --> 00:49:41.130

Fringe: Investment, actually loss and loss leader to build a show over above, test it on an audience, maybe get critical review, audience review, and then tour that for a full year all around the UK or around the world.

00:49:42.570 --> 00:49:48.900

Fringe: On a digital context, it's so hungry for content right you have to keep feeding it

00:49:50.130 --> 00:49:56.820

Fringe: But I don't think is sustainable and unfortunately is, is only sustainable for those with the biggest pockets.

00:49:58.050 --> 00:50:07.080

Fringe: Add into that the fact that in terms of expectations from an audience, Netflix have created a view that there's a professionalism.

00:50:08.460 --> 00:50:15.810

Fringe: Likewise, things like National Theatre live and all this sort of thing. They are slick and well produced and multi camera.

00:50:16.860 --> 00:50:23.010

Fringe: I think we as a charity are going to be looking increasingly alongside that marketplace thing I mentioned earlier.

00:50:23.850 --> 00:50:27.240

Fringe: And whether we can facilitate some of that recording of content.

00:50:27.660 --> 00:50:36.960

Fringe: And provide a kind of mixed model whereby even if I can't travel physically because of COVID, or because of cost, or environmental concerns.

00:50:37.290 --> 00:50:46.410

Fringe: Maybe my show can have a life digitally. So that might be one way of that digital value being added. So, it's still a physical performance, but then has a life.

00:50:48.000 --> 00:50:56.640

Fringe: But there's also that question of audiences, not being able to come. But, therefore, that might be a time limited almost like a Fringe on Friday.

00:50:57.030 --> 00:51:13.620



Fringe: Structure, we might be able to offer limited access and we might even be able to offer ring fence by IP access to certain geographic location, for instance. So yeah, I mean, long story short, I think there will be a mixed model.

00:51:14.910 --> 00:51:22.290

Fringe: But my worry is that a lot of the digital activity that's taking place this year is either free or fundraising dependent

00:51:23.970 --> 00:51:43.170

Fringe: That's I've not seen someone nail that that value chain that works from the ground up. So, you know, you say what you like about the Fringe, and I'm not claiming for a second that it's equal across the piece. It does have at its core. This idea that I can turn up.

00:51:44.400 --> 00:51:59.190

Fringe: With relatively little investment, particularly on something like Free Fringe, build a bit of an audience organically grow over time, come back and back and back and by the time maybe five years in I've been able to build something quite powerful.

00:52:00.420 --> 00:52:04.560

Fringe: I mean it's early days, but that that that value chain does not exist yet.

00:52:06.270 --> 00:52:08.490

VJ: So, do you think then potentially this

00:52:08.580 --> 00:52:21.660

VJ: The sort of the, the challenge and potentially almost the resource the resources to be able to meet the challenges of monetising and monetising digital or blended programming in some way, do you think that's going to maybe

00:52:22.440 --> 00:52:27.750

VJ: Be the catalyst for people actually just pushing back to a live led to model?

00:52:28.170 --> 00:52:30.690

Fringe: Yeah, I think it's, I think, resource. It's also audience.

00:52:31.980 --> 00:52:32.550

Fringe: Desire, you know, the

00:52:34.110 --> 00:52:39.150

Fringe: Example recently that we have from our community groups actually was that we had a plan to

00:52:39.660 --> 00:52:48.840

Fringe: Do a series of digital drop-ins where we essentially take so their existing meetings that they're having. So, six-time job [?]. For example, having fairly regular catch-ups.

00:52:49.440 --> 00:53:01.020

Fringe: Of their, their group activities we were saying, we can drop an artist in your zoom call and have a little bit of an experience that it's not quite like a Fringe Days Out but is a bit of a replication.

00:53:01.530 --> 00:53:12.900

Fringe: And universally the community rich. Like, that's amazing. That's brilliant. In April, when it came to August, they were going forward. We are fatigued with digital

00:53:13.350 --> 00:53:13.740

VJ: Yeah.

00:53:14.700 --> 00:53:24.450

Fringe: We're actually quite likely to turn up physically and we're seeing a park socially distance. So, I genuinely think especially because we've got so much content.

00:53:25.140 --> 00:53:32.100

Fringe: If you imagine you know we're looking at listing about 200 Fringe shows this year. Imagine it goes up 100 you know

00:53:32.760 --> 00:53:47.310

Fringe: By 10 times or 100 times next year. I think the fatigue will set in. It's already starting to set in this time. So, it's about that all the time, about what audiences want. How is that sustained? How is that captured etc etc.?

00:53:47.730 --> 00:53:55.260

VJ: Yeah, definitely. Definitely all this, I've got, I might if it's alright, but you could if we could, if you would have time to catch up again kind of

00:53:57.210 --> 00:54:00.180

VJ: On this? It's so, it's such an interesting discussion and it's

00:54:00.210 --> 00:54:09.900

VJ: Would be brilliant to catch up, pick up on, on some of this stuff, then I'll, I'll let you go for now

## **Appendix 1e: transcript from Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society**

### **interview #2**

**Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society**

Interview #2

Tuesday 28 August 2020

Duration: 52' 53"

00:00:01.199 --> 00:00:10.380

VJ: Recording. Perfect. Okay, thank you very much. So how is it going, how are you finding all things digital fringe

00:00:11.099 --> 00:00:12.480

Fringe: Looking forward to it. They go there, so

00:00:17.100 --> 00:00:28.050

Fringe: It's been, it's been good with very, very close to breaking the 200,000 barrier for fundraising efforts, which is great and small donations as well. So it's not been

00:00:29.220 --> 00:00:42.930

Fringe: And I think we're hoping in the next few weeks, we might be able to share me out some of those sort of big fringe names to start putting in small substantial amounts, but given its 20 pounds here and 10 pounds there. It's lovely to see fringe friends doing it, but

00:00:43.230 --> 00:00:49.590

VJ: I'm plastic and you think you think that's the bulk of the donations. Is it so people buying tickets today really shows and

00:00:49.950 --> 00:01:01.320

Fringe: That's it, yeah. And just uh just donating to their favorite venues, or their favorite artists and all that sort of thing. So that's been lovely. The live shows have been an endless stress, but the last one is tonight. So that's the main

00:01:02.580 --> 00:01:02.850

VJ: Lead

00:01:03.180 --> 00:01:05.340

Fringe: With you, you know, Courtney act but

00:01:06.030 --> 00:01:08.190

Fringe: Yeah, yeah. So Courtney's hosting that

00:01:08.760 --> 00:01:09.600

VJ: Tonight, isn't there.

00:01:09.840 --> 00:01:17.370

Fringe: Yeah, and she's doing a live tweet along and we just giving her access control of all of our channels and I can't

00:01:17.370 --> 00:01:17.700

Fringe: Make it

00:01:17.940 --> 00:01:19.230

Fringe: any problems at all.

00:01:19.950 --> 00:01:25.410

VJ: No one picked the wrong. I'm sure it will be great. I'm sure it will be, have you had big audiences for that.

00:01:26.100 --> 00:01:38.130

Fringe: Yeah, so I mean in terms of you're talking in the thousands. Rather than that, that multiple, multiple thousands. But yeah, we're looking at the biggest venue in in French filling that out. Let's put it that way.

00:01:39.660 --> 00:01:48.360

VJ: People watching people watching on the night or they because I hadn't realized until I think last week or the week before that you were doing, you could watch until the

00:01:48.750 --> 00:01:49.860

Fringe: Show. Yes, so

00:01:50.430 --> 00:01:59.880

Fringe: We were finding that most people are buying tickets then and there and then tend to stream it at that point. Yeah, funnily enough, your experiences, not

00:02:00.510 --> 00:02:06.150

Fringe: dissimilar to others. We've put a bit more effort behind that whole well you can watch again if you've already got a ticket. And if you have

00:02:07.440 --> 00:02:17.070

Fringe: Not missed out sort of things. So yeah, we are seeing more people starting to ramp up but you're talking hundreds after the event rather thousands that are watching it.

00:02:17.970 --> 00:02:29.040

VJ: Yeah, that's interesting because I guess it sort of one of the things I'm kind of exploring as I start to look kind of what's happening across multiple festivals, is I think we spoke about it last time that idea of kind of the elasticity of time and how

00:02:29.430 --> 00:02:30.870

VJ: Different kinds of festivals or

00:02:30.960 --> 00:02:39.390

VJ: An programmers are approaching that way of that way of kind of catch up services or time limiting obviously potentially has a has a

00:02:39.750 --> 00:02:49.260

VJ: Role as well. So it's some yeah it's so it'll be interesting to make some kind of matrix of all the different ways that people. People have approached that but

00:02:50.610 --> 00:03:02.250

Fringe: I mean, we've we've been looking at similar sort of things, Vicki around, even down to email open rates and the way that people respond to something that is digital only versus other things and

00:03:02.790 --> 00:03:09.990

Fringe: Particularly for an event like ours, as an example, we're probably looking at an open rate between 50 and 60% of an email during fringe itself.

00:03:10.710 --> 00:03:25.500

Fringe: Very high very yeah it's a buying tickets there in the city, they're engaging this year. It's more like 30 35% so you've got you've inevitably got a shrinking and partly down to what people are expecting from

00:03:26.310 --> 00:03:29.850

VJ: Them, I guess the 90% was this sort of standard open rate is still

00:03:29.910 --> 00:03:40.590

Fringe: Is still really good. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. But it's that I think there's just a there's a gap in people's. I mean, this is, this is totally my supposition. I don't have the evidence to support it. But there's a gap between

00:03:41.130 --> 00:03:48.990

Fringe: What they expect from us and what they want versus we're able to give them in this year of all years if you know so

00:03:49.500 --> 00:03:55.950

Fringe: So yeah, we're, we're very happy. I mean, if we benchmark ourselves against you might have come across the shedding Brett product.

00:03:56.670 --> 00:04:10.560

Fringe: We're partnering with as well and looking at the ticket sales for some of their big events blacks have Deborah Francis white and all that sort of thing. They're, they're broadly comparable. I think we're slightly ahead of that. So it's good that we're sort of in the right ballpark.

00:04:10.800 --> 00:04:12.360

VJ: Yeah, that's great. That's great.

00:04:12.870 --> 00:04:13.650

Fringe: Event producer.

00:04:14.400 --> 00:04:17.130

Fringe: I think that's the, that's the overwhelming feeling right now.

00:04:17.700 --> 00:04:30.690

VJ: Yeah, for sure. And yeah, that makes perfect sense actually and despicable one tiny little thing you said that around. You kind of what people what people want and what people what you're able to provide i guess i think

00:04:30.810 --> 00:04:34.680

VJ: Something that I've been thinking about a lot, probably even since we last spoke is that sense that

00:04:34.950 --> 00:04:52.350

VJ: Actually what we said two weeks ago is probably so much as New Dawn and so quickly. Since then, and do you do you feel that audiences as a starting to get more competent and more savvy in terms of what they're looking for from a kind of digital cultural event or product.

00:04:52.860 --> 00:05:00.210

Fringe: I think they are, but I think they're also getting bored of it is my my honest, so I don't know whether I mentioned this to you last time, but

00:05:01.080 --> 00:05:12.450

Fringe: We have. So I was talking to our community engagement and access team last week and we had some quite big plans from about May or June.

00:05:13.020 --> 00:05:19.320

Fringe: To try and drop an artist into their existing sort of zoom tracks and so on so that we

00:05:19.770 --> 00:05:27.810

Fringe: We still did something about fringe days out program, but did it that way. And really interested in the feedback we've had back from those groups is

00:05:28.050 --> 00:05:36.600

Fringe: We want to do it, we'd love the idea, but we don't want to do it now because we're bored of it with board of this sort of digital universe. And we don't really feel like

00:05:37.200 --> 00:05:51.060

Fringe: The zoom type relationship is enough. So I think you're right. There's a sophistication element in there. And I think over the next couple of months. Last year, maybe a bit longer, we'll start seeing

00:05:51.930 --> 00:06:05.040

Fringe: A bit more in that space of how do you genuinely feel connected to this event, rather than almost watching a Netflix show where you can watch it anytime any moment, you know, something that captures that sense of live and

00:06:06.240 --> 00:06:09.690

Fringe: vibrancy or the fear of sitting in the front row. The

00:06:10.830 --> 00:06:18.660

Fringe: Heckling the you know the those bits that just feel, you know, I've been thinking of the last couple of days about things like

00:06:20.070 --> 00:06:26.160

Fringe: Standpoint with tape on his face. If you see him doing his where you sit anywhere in the audience, you're going on God, please don't look at

00:06:27.330 --> 00:06:36.330

Fringe: Me, I'm going to look down on the floor. He's not going to those things that make the fringe certainly and a lot of of performance sort of unique

00:06:36.840 --> 00:06:42.840

Fringe: I was reading similar feedback about even the socially distance events like the SAM fender gigabit in Newcastle.

00:06:43.770 --> 00:06:56.280

Fringe: That feeling of, do you do extrapolates so much that it isn't the event anymore. And people are starting to realize that all this ancillary stuff that we just took for granted. Being cheek by jowl with other people and

00:06:56.310 --> 00:07:07.950

Fringe: Yeah and that shared experience and the conversation and the build up and the standing in a queue and talking about someone that shows a team is really important to the to the fundamental

00:07:08.880 --> 00:07:20.220

VJ: Yeah, I think, I think you're right. And I think you. Yeah, it will be really, really interesting completely aside, but I should I should send you the link to another project I'm working on, which is that you have to be Adam or cultural map.

00:07:20.640 --> 00:07:22.080

Fringe: And yes, yes.

00:07:22.080 --> 00:07:24.210

VJ: I've been. I've been working on a on a

00:07:24.330 --> 00:07:34.770

VJ: Report. I'm still working on a report with them about kind of how communities and programmers are kind of moving out of lockdown. And like recalibrating programming and all of that kind of thing. So I'll

00:07:35.670 --> 00:07:43.770

VJ: Send you I'll send you a link and put you in touch with the project organizer, you can pass it on to your arts engagement people that would be that would be really cool and

00:07:45.030 --> 00:07:50.280

VJ: And. Okay, so I wanted to pick up on one thing from the transcript of our last meeting about

00:07:51.210 --> 00:07:58.950

VJ: Digital audiences versus audiences that are not versus but alongside audiences that you get in a venue. So I think you said that

00:07:59.430 --> 00:08:09.300

VJ: If you walked into your sort of standard fringe show about 50% of the people that you found there would be on social media and about 50% 60% of them wouldn't

00:08:09.780 --> 00:08:19.350

VJ: So I'm guess I'm kind of thinking about how, then, because obviously there will be people that are finding you on social media, but aren't necessarily engaging in those behaviors that

00:08:20.250 --> 00:08:31.770

VJ: That we measure. Do you guys have any strategies to kind of think about who those people might be and how you might reach them without kind of using the traditional metrics and measurements.

00:08:32.250 --> 00:08:37.260

Fringe: Yeah, and I mean I should kind of caveat I guess that 5050 is just a total guests.

00:08:37.290 --> 00:08:38.430

VJ: On Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

00:08:40.050 --> 00:08:40.890

Fringe: Yeah, just just just

00:08:42.660 --> 00:08:53.100

Fringe: That is that is a complete supposition. But yeah, I mean, I suppose, starting with the data we know from looking at social analytics versus our

00:08:53.880 --> 00:09:07.080

Fringe: Audience data that there is there is a discrepancy and maybe a really obvious example of that is with age. So we've got a large amount of our social audience, particularly on Instagram, for example, is the fastest growing



00:09:07.590 --> 00:09:12.360

Fringe: Social Network for us that says you've got a large number of 18 to 24 year olds.

00:09:13.290 --> 00:09:26.850

Fringe: And our overall metrics for audience suggest has been about a 10 to 15% decline in the audience in the last five years. That's part of graphic because there's fewer of them than there were five, six years ago.

00:09:27.420 --> 00:09:34.500

Fringe: But there's also a question in my head that we've done some follow up qualitative market research on about

00:09:35.130 --> 00:09:50.760

Fringe: What are the behaviors that, uh, that that audience taking so are they engaging with us at all, or are they not. And one of the big suppositions we had was, when are they seeking out free or pay what you want shows where they're not showing up as a ticket buyer.

00:09:50.970 --> 00:10:02.550

Fringe: But showing up within the footprint. And so we we had some market research side. Some of the big free fringe venues last year, engaging with people to understand

00:10:02.940 --> 00:10:14.040

Fringe: What it was, they were going and seeing where, where, where, where they're going and doing anything else, so that we can try and deliver them with existing data that we had in where they combine tickets for the things and

00:10:14.670 --> 00:10:26.220

Fringe: has flagged up to some extent, the fact that there's a very specific audience that are only free fringe or only on the outskirts there was part of that relationship.

00:10:27.390 --> 00:10:33.960

Fringe: Which has given us some insight into what we're trying to do. I think this year, as we've moved into a digital space.

00:10:34.200 --> 00:10:45.930

Fringe: That's given us a chance to test something that was definitely within some of the research around engagement with things like Twitch, for example, or Tick tock or imbibing a lot of content through an online.

00:10:46.650 --> 00:11:03.180

Fringe: Format and actually feeling quite detached from a physical event. And I think if you were talking to me a year ago I would have been saying, well, that feels like we've got an audience problem there because how on earth do we take a physical festival out to those people

00:11:03.420 --> 00:11:10.920

Fringe: Maybe next year or so you've got a mixed economy model that allows you to engage that all in

00:11:12.870 --> 00:11:13.890

Fringe: A different way.

00:11:15.180 --> 00:11:23.970

Fringe: But I do also think, and this is not necessarily answering your question, but it reminds me of previous jobs that I've had, say that a resume, for example, really good example here that

00:11:24.660 --> 00:11:30.330

Fringe: A lot of our social audience lived and breathed in a very different ecosystem to anyone who would turn up at physically

00:11:30.630 --> 00:11:42.270

Fringe: At the date they wanted to look at the live webcam and they wanted to sort of read about the species and all that sort of thing. And then here share photos that we've got a video content they didn't want to come and visit

00:11:42.720 --> 00:11:43.290

Um,

00:11:44.520 --> 00:11:53.190

Fringe: The more we try to encourage that type of behavior, the less success seem to have which might have just been a poor audience development strategy, but there is

00:11:53.820 --> 00:12:11.490

Fringe: There is something I. The same thing with the Wildlife Trust. We have our spray webcams very odd thing you know 3 million people in to watch a live webcam of a species you try and encourage them with discount offers or unique behind the scenes looks or VIP type stuff. None of them were

00:12:12.540 --> 00:12:28.260

Fringe: Gaining pick up they wanted their, you know, in my armchair at home, I'm able to control when I watch and how I watch. And that's the community that I've got, you know, I've got friends that I speak to you on my browser. It's a very, I don't know whether I've answered your question tool.

00:12:28.470 --> 00:12:39.930

VJ: Know you have you have. So you you've brought me on to to two things that I really interesting. So the idea of almost media resistance and I'll hold my hands up and say I do this.

00:12:40.170 --> 00:12:49.410

VJ: I'll see something on a social media platform and I will deliberately leave that platform and put that URL into a browser, because it annoys me

00:12:49.710 --> 00:12:57.030

VJ: That if I click on a thing that's going to inform what happens next in my experience, and so

00:12:57.480 --> 00:13:10.140

VJ: I mean that that's a fairly sort of team way of doing it. But there are there are other people who will go to extreme lengths to say, well, actually know I maybe do want to do your thing. But I don't want to do it the way that you're telling me to do it.

00:13:10.620 --> 00:13:11.010

VJ: Yeah.

00:13:11.070 --> 00:13:19.440

VJ: So I guess. How do you I've thought about this quite a lot. Like, how do you classify those kind of stages of behavior.

00:13:20.700 --> 00:13:21.960

VJ: And you won't have an answer, because I

00:13:22.920 --> 00:13:24.240

Fringe: Know, and kind of

00:13:25.350 --> 00:13:35.040

Fringe: I mean, the, the only answer. I really have is on and more aggregate basis, trying to understand where they be on that journey of engagement about a while ago. That's, that's the only way I can

00:13:35.790 --> 00:13:51.810

Fringe: envisage it in as much as if if they don't fit, fit on it, then we've not got the journey. Quite right, but I think they probably do. It's just that they, they have a very particular set of barriers and circumstances that make them quite unique. In a way, it's quite an odd.

00:13:52.830 --> 00:13:56.310

Fringe: I'm going to make another weird analogy here that may not be helpful. I'm so sorry.

00:13:58.170 --> 00:14:03.270

Fringe: But we used to have a similar challenge. Again, I'm going to use the wildlife. Just an example with volunteers.

00:14:04.020 --> 00:14:17.880

Fringe: As much as volunteers sat in this weird offshoot of a journey where we really wanted them to become members and to engage in things like our AGM and shaping the future of the organization.

00:14:18.240 --> 00:14:28.020

Fringe: But their relationship with very self determined and was very much. I'm quite engaged with you. I will support you. But actually, I'm not going to follow.

00:14:28.620 --> 00:14:35.610

Fringe: The rules as you've dictated them as some a normal person would i i'm really informed. I know exactly what you do.

00:14:35.850 --> 00:14:45.030

Fringe: I'm just choosing not to engage with you as a ticket buyer or as a donor was in the US. I'm going to give you my time in these specific areas. And that's it.

00:14:45.870 --> 00:14:58.350

Fringe: Interesting what you were saying about wanting that control over. I'm not going to click on that link and I'm not gonna you almost think that there's the built in resistance to an audience development strategy is sort of hardwired right there.

00:14:58.650 --> 00:14:59.310

Fringe: Yeah, you

00:14:59.460 --> 00:15:01.170

Fringe: Want to give is this

00:15:01.260 --> 00:15:09.060

Fringe: Yeah, there was there was another example. I remember a couple of years ago that really going up W WF Australia and the fact that they had a

00:15:09.510 --> 00:15:16.590

Fringe: Half a million people on social media that would die hard fans, but essentially build that list by putting cute pictures of animals.

00:15:17.400 --> 00:15:25.980

Fringe: So they have this audience over here that have absolutely no interest at all in supporting direct action policy.

00:15:26.220 --> 00:15:39.690

Fringe: Change that they wanted to try and get like behavior change around solar panels and reduce, reuse, recycle all that sort of stuff no interest if you're going to put cute pictures of animals up I'm there and I will air it with everyone.

00:15:40.740 --> 00:15:53.760

Fringe: So I guess if there is a strategy. It's about a trying to work out whether that audience are valuable to what we're trying to do in our charitable objectives and financial

00:15:54.660 --> 00:16:02.550

Fringe: Sort of targets and so on. And if that is the case, how do we meet them halfway to some extent and provide value in

00:16:03.270 --> 00:16:16.920

Fringe: A frame that they're comfortable with and then it'd be an online offering that might be a exclusive content that sits within a social space if they can act essentially as a horrible word influences

00:16:18.240 --> 00:16:27.240

Fringe: People who are perhaps less bound by the rules that they're working to I think that's probably the best the best option. We've got

00:16:28.470 --> 00:16:37.890

VJ: Ya know that that will make sense. I have quite a few similar stories about posting pictures of animals on social media and having like is an interesting one, isn't it, but that seems to. Yeah.

00:16:38.280 --> 00:16:45.690

VJ: Seems to be the thing that gets the gets the metrics, but then you have this pool of an audience that you're not really always quite sure what do you

00:16:45.960 --> 00:16:55.440

Fringe: Possibly and and we used to find it all the time ahead and resume that you you had, we had a specific challenge there about trying to build

00:16:56.820 --> 00:17:06.000

Fringe: A community that would authentically tackle pre existing prejudices that were out there in the in the world about Zoom's and what zoos.

00:17:07.350 --> 00:17:18.330

Fringe: And it was particularly strong around key dates in the calendar around Easter time there were a number of protests that used to take place outside the gates of the zoo and all that.

00:17:19.530 --> 00:17:32.430

Fringe: Yeah, all absolutely fair enough. But a lot of it was based around extrapolating from is a terrible example of what a zoom does and saying, Well, here's a conservation organization doing X, Y Zed, but they're the same.

00:17:33.780 --> 00:17:41.430

Fringe: We could say endlessly. Those two things are not those are, that's a false equivalence, that doesn't work, but it didn't, it didn't make any difference.

00:17:41.700 --> 00:17:58.680

Fringe: How you build an online audience that aren't just oh there's a cute picture of a panda. Wonderful. Let's share it, but actually go behind that there is a conservation story that is x y Zed know that that thread was even harder in some ways and getting people to watch the visit the down

00:17:58.740 --> 00:18:00.270

VJ: Yeah yeah

00:18:01.140 --> 00:18:10.230

Fringe: This is this, this is a this is a value proposition, or a cultural alignment with the organization's values that

00:18:11.790 --> 00:18:23.940

Fringe: Doesn't always sit. It's funny you brought your most engaged fringe fan on social media, that wouldn't necessarily shout from the rooftops about open access and freedom of expression.

00:18:24.900 --> 00:18:31.470

VJ: Yeah, yeah, I know that you've sort of brought me out column is going to ask that with the fridge. I guess you've got you've got that unique proposition of sort of

00:18:32.280 --> 00:18:37.710

VJ: Festival programs obviously come and go and people don't always have a very long memory for

00:18:38.160 --> 00:18:47.730

VJ: Things like that, in my experience, and then you've got yeah that's sort of the journey and the building of year round kind of audience development that we spoke about last time.

00:18:48.120 --> 00:19:02.310

VJ: And I guess that that messaging is probably more similar for the fringe. Would you say. Then say somewhere like the zoo where you're trying to you're trying to tie it to interweave these two threads or do you feel the same. Do you feel it's hard to get that full picture across

00:19:02.610 --> 00:19:08.220

Fringe: Yeah, sure. I think it's this maybe more similar than you think. In as much as

00:19:09.330 --> 00:19:23.400

Fringe: Again, taking that kind of charitable shift. We're trying to take people from a pure entertainment proposition. I enjoyed coming to a show because someone made me laugh. Usually into

00:19:24.840 --> 00:19:36.720

Fringe: This thing without sounding too passive about it this this platform that thing that made me laugh sits in is really important and it does something more than just entertain.

00:19:37.740 --> 00:19:41.490

Fringe: Is something that we need to stand up for in a, in a world where

00:19:42.240 --> 00:19:45.330

Fringe: Politics is a certain way and where you know we're being

00:19:45.390 --> 00:19:52.740

Fringe: We're being opposed and freedom of speech is under threat and all these sorts of things. So we need to stand up for something that we believe in.

00:19:54.120 --> 00:20:02.850

Fringe: And even if that's not a financial thing. It's about values. It's about standing up for it and you think now, when the fringe can't take place.

00:20:03.390 --> 00:20:13.110

Fringe: If the if the only if the only sort of dialogue, there is a shirt. I didn't get to go to to see Jason burn this all all well I'll go and see him next year.

00:20:13.200 --> 00:20:13.830

VJ: Next time,

00:20:14.250 --> 00:20:18.690

Fringe: Do you know what I mean that's that's quite reductive and I think the same is true with

00:20:19.470 --> 00:20:31.470

Fringe: With the zoo and I came from a conservation background. That was my my interest and therefore we never as an organization before I arrived talked in public messaging about anything to do with the conservationist

00:20:32.010 --> 00:20:40.170

Fringe: It was all about. This is a visitor attraction, you're going to have a fun day out the end. And I think what we're trying to do. In both cases, because I'm a one trick pony.

00:20:42.540 --> 00:20:52.980

Fringe: plant that seed, this, this was the argument I made was that actually, if we can embed and there's an example I always share with and it's it's a very classic

00:20:54.180 --> 00:21:03.240

Fringe: Fundraising type structure that Save the Children give is beautifully. If you look at their recent campaign work on TV and in print.

00:21:03.660 --> 00:21:18.840

Fringe: Going through to their website and the way they asked people to donate the plants are very strong see very early on about you can feel good about this you know you are you are going to get x y Zed back but you're also going to get a warm, fuzzy glow.

00:21:19.830 --> 00:21:28.620

Fringe: Of what we started to do around the comms messaging with the fringe. I've got an example that I've shared that as part of a few talks. I've done recently.

00:21:29.520 --> 00:21:37.830

Fringe: From last year's fringe where the very end, just as our French friends, you're going to see 32 shows on average. So the diehards they've

00:21:38.400 --> 00:21:48.360

Fringe: We have an amazing warm fun of the time we send out an email that essentially asks them to give their feedback. So this is the this is just a market research email.

00:21:48.930 --> 00:21:53.340

Fringe: But we experimented with something last year where we just actually put in

00:21:54.270 --> 00:22:01.140

Fringe: Hopefully you've had an amazing time. By the way, your membership has helped do this, this, this, this, and it was

00:22:01.500 --> 00:22:17.880

Fringe: BSL interpretation on the High Street. It was making 61% of fringe trainings wheelchair accessible. It was giving over 10,000 fringe days out to people from backgrounds have never been in trouble. So we, we just emphasize it but then didn't ask them for anything.

00:22:18.390 --> 00:22:18.750

VJ: Yeah.

00:22:18.990 --> 00:22:26.280

Fringe: Them for ticket sales. We weren't asking them to renew their membership. We were the only thing the only ask was now tell us what you think.

00:22:27.930 --> 00:22:41.970

Fringe: And the open regular email was enormous rate when we, when we put out an email. A couple of months later was higher than it's ever been. I think we were up almost 80% on early renewals versus the year before.

00:22:42.420 --> 00:22:52.710

Fringe: So I think there is a way of starting to embed people. And part of that is practical around getting them signed by direct debit rather than credit cards. So again, they feel

00:22:53.370 --> 00:23:05.700



Fringe: More like this is a commitment long term something else. But we know that for the majority, they're not going to suddenly become devoted advocate. But if we can just

00:23:06.780 --> 00:23:11.430

Fringe: Plant something this this is about more than just

00:23:13.080 --> 00:23:20.460

Fringe: Just having a good time. And those people become advocates, they'll support us more they'll, they'll deepen their engagement, all that stuff.

00:23:21.060 --> 00:23:26.910

VJ: No, definitely, I wonder, I wonder is, if it's a little bit about making things relevant

00:23:27.450 --> 00:23:37.050

VJ: And I guess there's that sort of bringing, bringing us back to that idea of kind of the quantifiable metrics. So there's something really solid in 61,000

00:23:37.680 --> 00:23:46.680

VJ: Things and this is how many fringe days out. You've supported, there's a there's a sort of demonstrable thing that that group of people have done and

00:23:47.250 --> 00:23:58.620

VJ: But yeah, I wonder if you sort of been reading a little bit about the idea of relevance almost becoming hyper relevant and the, the sense that as you start to predict people's behaviors.

00:23:58.920 --> 00:24:06.210

VJ: How is that going to change the way that we market culture and creativity is it going to put it out for job, I guess.

00:24:07.950 --> 00:24:13.320

Fringe: That's a very good question. Yeah. Well, I mean, of course, I'm going to say, No, I don't think it is.

00:24:13.350 --> 00:24:14.010

VJ: No, I agree.

00:24:14.520 --> 00:24:27.120

Fringe: Is asking us what it's asking us to do. I guess is that horrible word authenticity and I think we've moved increasingly over the last three, four years away from a space that was about

00:24:28.830 --> 00:24:40.320

Fringe: bright shiny isn't the French huge or massive or you know you've got all this content on your doorstep and almost plugging in research insight by numbers.

00:24:41.220 --> 00:24:56.310

Fringe: And much more about the kind of values and kind of cultural currency that an individual that is likely to come would have. So I'll give you a practical example, the most shared tweet, which was a bit of a

00:24:56.730 --> 00:25:07.860

Fringe: Test sort of flag up the flagpole type thing we did two years ago, most tweeted tweet during 2018 fringe was about the sensory backpacks that we provide to children, adults on the order

00:25:09.300 --> 00:25:13.530

Fringe: Of something like 10,000 likes in a couple of a couple of days.

00:25:14.880 --> 00:25:26.820

Fringe: And impart that was based on it was based on actual stuff that we were doing and a lot of work, we'd spent in time and going, actually, what does the fringe really mean around our 70th anniversary. What is it, what's it for

00:25:27.780 --> 00:25:41.010

Fringe: Which bought us into this idea of it should be for everyone. And it shouldn't be elitist and it should mean that anyone can play and our job as a charity is to try and remove those barriers. So we sort of started from there, but

00:25:41.340 --> 00:25:54.150

Fringe: You start into that space of, well, what content threads. Do we have that actually demonstrate that without looking like marketing message and it's conventional sense I think

00:25:54.900 --> 00:26:06.000

Fringe: We broadened who our audiences away from. We want you to buy a ticket into, well actually, you might be an artist who wants to put on a show, you might well be a community.

00:26:06.240 --> 00:26:11.160

Fringe: Member that wouldn't buy a ticket because I can't afford it. But we still want you to feel like fringes for you.

00:26:11.700 --> 00:26:26.550

Fringe: You know what I mean. So rather than looking at metrics in a in a crude algorithmic our you like this sort of Amazon style you like this, and therefore you're going to like this type one to one relationship. It's much more about

00:26:27.210 --> 00:26:37.530

Fringe: Well, you are the type of person that has this sort of belief system if we're not true and authentic to that belief system. Look, it will be obvious really quickly.

00:26:38.670 --> 00:26:49.530

Fringe: And so everything that we do has to feel like it's built on that foundation. If we get that right, then hopefully we can instill in you something that goes beyond the transaction.

00:26:50.550 --> 00:26:59.820

VJ: Yeah yeah i think that's that's a really, that's a really interesting, interesting point. I think there's, I was reading something else quite recently that the idea that actually

00:27:00.450 --> 00:27:09.660

VJ: What consumers in terms of transact making transactions want is to be told what to do without feeling like they've been told what to do.

00:27:10.140 --> 00:27:17.940

VJ: And so it's it's that kind of, yeah. And as you say that sort of creating that kind of value based approach has the, has

00:27:18.150 --> 00:27:30.720

VJ: The kind of the methods imbued in it to say, well, actually, if you're if you like this. You're like this, but not in the in the Spotify recommendation engine type of way although that's a very sophisticated thing but yeah

00:27:30.810 --> 00:27:33.540

Fringe: It is but yeah i think i think you're right. But then there's

00:27:33.780 --> 00:27:43.440

Fringe: This sort of put me off to an area that I'm really fascinating because we've done a lot of work and I think I might have taught you about before around selection paralysis and this idea that you

00:27:44.160 --> 00:27:54.180

Fringe: See a show. And when I started doing X, we put in innovate UK bid twice actually on this, on this front. And we looked at Spotify.

00:27:55.140 --> 00:28:16.230

Fringe: And what I found fascinating about that. But the algorithm relies on humans. It relies on actual curators joining the dots to make that algorithm actually work. And so you get that low phi textured sense of authenticity that humanizes the algorithm. And I think to some extent.

00:28:17.310 --> 00:28:28.680

Fringe: Digital Marketing is in the same space if if you don't have that in there, then sure you'll you'll, of course, you'll still be able to sell tickets, you'll still be able to get people to engage, but it's

00:28:29.460 --> 00:28:35.670

Fringe: Your only then as relevant as no one else trying to do the same thing that you do, but just doing it more authentically

00:28:36.840 --> 00:28:37.290

Fringe: And I think

00:28:38.700 --> 00:28:45.360

Fringe: The fringe for 10 years probably went from so from 2014 to 2000

00:28:46.590 --> 00:29:08.430

Fringe: Sorry from 2013 to 2017 we grew by almost a million tickets that exact approach. We are big, we understand you, we, we really pushed on market research and intelligence we understood where people were we targeted those people with with relevant messaging and the rest is history.

00:29:08.670 --> 00:29:09.060

VJ: Yeah.

00:29:09.300 --> 00:29:18.150

Fringe: And if store up the ticking time bomb, which was the local residents piece and that the artists feeling disenfranchised from that and

00:29:18.390 --> 00:29:35.310

Fringe: This feeling that I don't really discover anything anymore. I just, I go and see what I always do, which becomes massively productive right from the perspective, it means that Jason Bernie successful therefore all our program five comedians that are just like Jason

00:29:36.090 --> 00:29:46.140

VJ: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And it would definitely be interesting to think about our put it in the chat. Actually, the link to the to the cultural map because some yeah we kind of

00:29:46.770 --> 00:29:49.260

VJ: That idea of dispersing

00:29:49.350 --> 00:30:03.930

VJ: Content across the city and what that might look like. Like for the fringe and how because obviously 2021 even if we are physically having live events. They are probably going to look quite different.

00:30:05.370 --> 00:30:17.190

VJ: And that sense that, how will the map of the city. So on that map. If you have a look, you'll be able to, you can you can build up different layers of things and you'll be able to see fringe venues. Other festival venues and

00:30:17.550 --> 00:30:30.840

VJ: Various other data that you can almost create a little mini map of how cultures working in different parts of the city, but obviously that's potentially going to look pretty different this time next year. So I guess then

00:30:32.490 --> 00:30:42.840

VJ: Yeah, what, how do you, how do you think that will work. Do you think that will be kind of digital will soak up some of that do you think it will just be that people will naturally disperse

00:30:43.380 --> 00:30:52.170

VJ: around the city. And how will you sort of create that city center August. Notice in a in a different way. I think

00:30:52.230 --> 00:30:54.150

Fringe: Actually this is one of the areas where

00:30:55.380 --> 00:31:14.280

Fringe: There's a sort of, I guess, a gap between the reality. And then the perceived reality if you and I say this is a fringe fan, first and foremost, but if you really look at the fringe over the last 20 years the fringe is is now building aspect as very much in Old Town city center.

00:31:15.600 --> 00:31:27.060

Fringe: George square that kind of space up to the Royal Mile as its absolute core home and I think a lot of people feel as though that is where the fringes, and has always been

00:31:27.660 --> 00:31:39.210

Fringe: But actually if you even go back 10 years and think about the Assembly Rooms and stand and all this sort of that being north of France history was quite normal.

00:31:40.170 --> 00:31:46.470

Fringe: And actually the fringe being quite disparate from French, French Institute out quite a long ways.

00:31:47.010 --> 00:31:57.180

Fringe: At that point to other things. So lots of these things kind of come and go. We see interested in a huge relationship between where we put things like ticket collection points. So, you know, so

00:31:57.780 --> 00:32:04.320

Fringe: We put a typical action point about three years ago, down in leaf and there are now I think nine or 10 venues that have popped up.

00:32:04.770 --> 00:32:22.590

Fringe: In and around it. And suddenly you get programming innovation, you get a change or shift. But the problem will always be who takes that that risk. And is there is there a declining appetite for taking that risk in light of coded and in light of

00:32:24.120 --> 00:32:29.670

Fringe: The, the social distancing that's going to be required and the practical elements that are going to need to sit in there. I

00:32:30.510 --> 00:32:41.970

Fringe: Think we're going to see some on a on a physical event front. We're going to see some very obvious shifts in terms of this map I think around really basic things like ventilation in spaces.

00:32:42.090 --> 00:32:46.950

Fringe: Yeah, certainly, are you going to see more outdoor events, you're going to see more

00:32:48.150 --> 00:32:55.920

Fringe: Almost office office space converted because like modern office space doesn't have the same demand on it, but it does have

00:32:56.760 --> 00:33:08.370

Fringe: Various different some air conditioning systems that will take that will that will allow for a different way of delivering some quite meaning quite was the word practical considerations.

00:33:08.430 --> 00:33:09.330

VJ: Absolutely, yeah.

00:33:09.870 --> 00:33:12.030

Fringe: Certainly shifting the geography in here.

00:33:13.230 --> 00:33:23.670

Fringe: I think you'll also see a shift by demography and age. So I know we talked to some of our sister festivals, for example, that, you know, if you've got an older audience base then

00:33:24.480 --> 00:33:31.290

Fringe: What are they going to be comfortable with and that will change programming choices. The balance of digital versus physical events.

00:33:31.800 --> 00:33:37.830

Fringe: And you've got fringe venues in there that will be Quaker Meeting House, for example, as one of our friends venues.

00:33:38.490 --> 00:33:52.140

Fringe: Actually in their programming is going to have to look quite different versus someone who's audience skews younger might well be able to do something that's much closer to what they do and and so on. So again, I don't know the answer your question, but I think

00:33:52.380 --> 00:33:55.410

VJ: Absolutely, absolutely. I think, well, I mean certainly

00:33:55.530 --> 00:34:03.120

VJ: For me, I feel like it could go in so many different and probably multiple directions at the same time, I think there's

00:34:03.420 --> 00:34:13.560

VJ: There's been obviously a lot of conversations recently around this idea of cultural year round cultural spaces in Edinburgh and how that might change and what that looks and yes you say there were, there's a there's a

00:34:14.130 --> 00:34:30.600

VJ: Fundamentally, there's a logistical consideration which potentially we haven't had to think about in the same way before and how that will filter through and the way that people use spaces. And I think that's true in life as much as in as much as in culture.

00:34:31.260 --> 00:34:38.550

Fringe: I think you're right, but it is also a really interesting question for me and I was thinking it's actually funny enough, I was walking down along portability beach, the other day.

00:34:39.240 --> 00:34:44.100

Fringe: Thinking about how, particularly in light of what you've just shared with me and around the cultural map.

00:34:44.520 --> 00:34:50.070

Fringe: That we know that a third of fringe audience members come from the City of Edinburgh, you're talking

00:34:50.610 --> 00:35:01.020

Fringe: Around about 100,000 unique ticket buyers who come to the fringe. And if you look at their behavior, both in ticket bone terms. And then what they tell us in a survey.

00:35:01.650 --> 00:35:11.010

Fringe: Three quarters of them come to see something different from the rest of the year. So like there's this latent demand in the city for cultural offering year round.

00:35:11.460 --> 00:35:26.370

Fringe: In different spaces, you know, they live in places like leaf. They live in Port about they live out in Newington areas that don't necessarily have huge amounts of fringe activity going on in the mini usual year or at least in

00:35:27.750 --> 00:35:38.190

Fringe: The hub, but is their appetite for something year round that serves that audience that have shown year on year on year they'll come back to the fringe

00:35:38.970 --> 00:35:54.750

Fringe: But is a cultural moment in time, or is that something that's just a latent demand, you know, we've we've had a similar conversation around music, for example, that only about three or 4% of the fringe program is defines itself as music direct

00:35:55.890 --> 00:35:58.650

Fringe: Maybe 10% for musicals an opera.

00:35:59.700 --> 00:36:08.280

Fringe: But 40% of fringe audiences go and see music gigs year round. So you've got a lot of these sort of weird things in there that

00:36:09.090 --> 00:36:16.740

Fringe: The statistics to so skewed that they suggest there should be a relationship. But there isn't one and that's

00:36:17.610 --> 00:36:26.100

Fringe: Because our city is quite conservative in a way that it tends to run and that people are worried about taking a risk and and

00:36:26.790 --> 00:36:31.560

Fringe: Programming something very different. I don't know whether that's the case or whether it's just that.

00:36:32.250 --> 00:36:44.940

Fringe: We need a critical mass to push these things forward or whether actually the audience have no desire to Asian culture. I mean, I find that hardly but outside of this this small window, but

00:36:45.720 --> 00:36:49.950

VJ: I want it. Yeah, there's, there's so many different ways you can think about that and it would be really interesting.

00:36:50.160 --> 00:36:59.430

VJ: Potentially, even with with the map today to sort of think about like what does a map look like at different times of the year in terms of cultural attendance. And actually, as you say, like,

00:36:59.700 --> 00:37:07.050

VJ: I mean I think with music, particularly, there is, there are fewer music venues in Edinburgh than there were five

00:37:10.140 --> 00:37:10.440

Fringe: Oh,

00:37:12.360 --> 00:37:12.780

Fringe: Hello.



00:37:12.870 --> 00:37:19.470

VJ: And if you've got big acts coming to the fringe in August. Does that elevate their popularity and it's a bit

00:37:20.610 --> 00:37:21.300

Fringe: Vicki. I lost you.

00:37:21.510 --> 00:37:28.140

VJ: Did you lose me so so ya know that that sense that actually by taking away some of the music venues in Edinburgh for the rest of the year.

00:37:28.350 --> 00:37:36.660

VJ: Does that bolster how much music Edinburgh residents. Want to see come August when they've got that availability, so there's there's that sort of

00:37:36.960 --> 00:37:51.990

VJ: That kind of conversation and that sort of nudging between those two states of being with potentially people who live in Edinburgh will be navigating save. I don't see something at the castle, but you don't, then go to the liquid room in March or

00:37:52.050 --> 00:37:55.830

Fringe: Yeah, no. You're right. You're absolutely right. I think it's just

00:37:57.210 --> 00:38:05.790

Fringe: I think it's interesting dialogue and dynamic that hopefully the map and various other conversations that are taking that are taking place now will bring out, which is

00:38:06.810 --> 00:38:11.670

Fringe: As residents, we feel cultural we feel cosmopolitan

00:38:12.150 --> 00:38:12.510

VJ: Mm hmm.

00:38:12.840 --> 00:38:14.370

Fringe: Does that really mean.

00:38:15.060 --> 00:38:16.170

VJ: Really good question.

00:38:16.200 --> 00:38:34.770

Fringe: What's our investment in that and obviously with all of these organizations now sort of on their knees or really facing some dire circumstances, you're gonna have a real reckoning. I think about what does that yeah what how what were we going to engage with it and I

00:38:35.070 --> 00:38:54.180

VJ: Completely agree, and I guess. Yeah, so that's that's a really interesting idea, like, what, what, what does it mean to be a cultural attend in Edinburgh. And actually, what, what can you as a festival of theater, a music venue, whoever what can they ask about us.

00:38:55.380 --> 00:39:03.090

VJ: In that relationship, I guess. And that comes back to that whole thing we've been talking about, about this idea of kind of values and value systems kind of shifting

00:39:03.660 --> 00:39:10.530

VJ: And how we how we met, but I guess probably like for you guys having to however many hundreds of thousands of people supporting

00:39:11.100 --> 00:39:20.310

VJ: Your campaign. I mean, of course, they won't all be from Edinburgh, but but that maybe speaks to the idea that people are interested in having that conversation. Would you agree.

00:39:20.490 --> 00:39:23.430

Fringe: I know I totally agree. Yeah, I think so. And it

00:39:24.510 --> 00:39:26.910

Fringe: It's I just I just wonder where we

00:39:28.170 --> 00:39:34.560

Fringe: Can I'm getting too philosophical here, but I just wonder where it where it goes. And we felt we felt it.

00:39:35.820 --> 00:39:52.800

Fringe: This summer I think with a with a real groundswell of positivity for the festivals, which is probably the first time that it's it's really felt that way for a good few years now with. Yeah. Not much change from our side yet because we don't have a chance to do

00:39:54.690 --> 00:40:04.260

Fringe: There is going to be a fascinating. I mean, I always make the analogy to the castle right that the castle drives millions of people to visit Edinburgh every year.

00:40:05.280 --> 00:40:12.300

Fringe: And in a lot of cases, it is indirectly responsible for a massive influx of over tourism.

00:40:12.660 --> 00:40:22.590

Fringe: But we still have that it sits up there on the rock. And this, but that relationship is quite a complex one. They're, they're sort of value chain associated with it that

00:40:23.700 --> 00:40:24.960

Fringe: Yeah. Well, yeah.

00:40:25.110 --> 00:40:44.400

VJ: Absolutely. And the fact that that's a tangible, I'm going to, I'm going to speak crispy tangible artifact and then it, it kind of it can negotiate a relationship in the way that a campaign or an idea or a value system that is based more on kind of interests and morals and kind of

00:40:45.570 --> 00:40:53.820

VJ: Yen self, self kind of oriented motives that that call maybe be made tangible in the same way.

00:40:54.450 --> 00:40:56.250

VJ: Yeah, sorry.

00:40:56.700 --> 00:41:03.540

Fringe: No, no, no, no, no. Not at all. I think I mean it's maybe worth saying in this space that one of the conversations I've had

00:41:04.980 --> 00:41:26.010

Fringe: Between us anyway internally about where I'd love the fringe to go in its mindset and in what people feel about us is that I want the residents of Edinburgh to feel that we are part of the family. And what I mean by that is that I can criticize it as much as I like.

00:41:27.600 --> 00:41:36.510

Fringe: Because I'm in the family. But if someone else could sizes it from outside the family. I will jump and leap to its defense.

00:41:37.080 --> 00:41:37.440

VJ: Yeah.

00:41:38.100 --> 00:41:45.480

Fringe: And I wonder how much that's going to happen organically in the next couple of and I think it is. It's true for white culture as well. It's about what does

00:41:46.110 --> 00:42:03.030

Fringe: What does Edinburgh stand for, especially now, now that we've got a lot of the golden goose stuff from our city center and what it looks like. Through to the cultural output of the diversity has a lot of these questions now.

00:42:03.720 --> 00:42:18.750

Fringe: To there and we're not alone in that. Yeah, but we are now being forced to us to answer a question about what our identity is Edinburgh citizens, it is and what we value as us. And what we project out there to the world.

00:42:18.810 --> 00:42:22.440

Fringe: And therefore had to do for it.

00:42:23.280 --> 00:42:24.180

VJ: Yeah yeah

00:42:24.540 --> 00:42:26.430

Fringe: How much are we prepared to

00:42:27.330 --> 00:42:42.090

Fringe: To invest in changing it, because I think the the feeling, we've had for quite a long time with the fringe, for example, is it's not. And this is not to take for go hours responsibility, but it is not our job alone to change what the fringe looks like.

00:42:43.410 --> 00:42:54.690

Fringe: You know, and, and there is there is a there's a collective conversation and the collective ownership that makes the fringe model unique, which is not dissimilar to the chat about Edinburgh. Right.

00:42:55.620 --> 00:43:09.540

Fringe: We all have a stake as residents in what we want and what we are going to push for that city to look and feel and represent and the fringe has that dialogue going on right now, which is

00:43:10.590 --> 00:43:21.120

Fringe: We want it to be more diverse. We want it to be more accessible to people with disabilities. We want it to be greener. We want it to be less than the other. And I think the projection

00:43:21.510 --> 00:43:35.880

Fringe: Analogy, which I think we've all done and I definitely count myself in this with Adam breath you sort of shout from the rooftops going oh my god right at the Council do that. Why did the Council do this and we're now going to be faced with that reckoning all

00:43:37.110 --> 00:43:40.770

Fringe: How do you want that to be and what are you going to do to make it. Yeah.

00:43:42.990 --> 00:43:47.460

VJ: Yeah, I think, I think that's really interesting. I feel like we've we've sort of veered away from just two and I'm

00:43:47.460 --> 00:43:48.300

Fringe: Sorry, I

00:43:49.080 --> 00:44:00.690

VJ: Also know but it's also I think I've been. I've been kind of finding that having conversations about kind of digital experiences and asking people, lots of questions about that. And I think this conversation ethics that feeling to that actually

00:44:00.960 --> 00:44:07.410

VJ: It's become for me research as a researcher quite an interesting lens through which to talk about some of these issues.

00:44:07.770 --> 00:44:24.540

VJ: Because I think it's it's sometimes it's easier to start with what digital is not and it makes you want to talk about what it is that you want from a live experience in a way. So it's, yeah, it's, it's kind of really interesting to use that as a as a tool almost and

00:44:25.140 --> 00:44:34.920

Fringe: And I actually think you that has just sparked something off in my head, which may or may not be helpful. But I think one of the reflections that we've had this year and it definitely fits with some of the

00:44:35.520 --> 00:45:00.180

Fringe: Whether it's donors to our crowdfunding campaign or viewers to the live shows we are almost precisely because of the market research, the algorithm, the structure, the tribe that we have that are going to access fringe content digitally is necessarily a lot narrower and a lot more

00:45:01.980 --> 00:45:15.510

Fringe: A lot less interesting I guess a lot less diverse by, I don't mean by by ethnicity or gender. What have I just mean diverse in terms of what it looks like everyone sort of has a similarity than a fringe or

00:45:16.020 --> 00:45:38.070

Fringe: Yeah, because the more organic found most of it is removed, and I think it sort of speaks to the difference between Netflix and the BBC right that either line of duty can be watched by a real sway the people because they just happen to turn the TV on at nine o'clock.

00:45:38.130 --> 00:45:46.560

Fringe: Yeah, Netflix relies on me being in a demographic that fits the type of person that looks like someone else.

00:45:47.190 --> 00:45:57.180

Fringe: And funnily enough, or we were looking at the selection paralysis algorithm we put to innovate, UK, we were talking about Amazon or Spotify, because what we didn't want to do was to go to

00:45:57.930 --> 00:46:05.490

Fringe: The almost a supposition that we can find the perfect show if only we we know you better. It was more about a taster menu.

00:46:06.690 --> 00:46:09.180

Fringe: To take you to the outer edge of your comfort.

00:46:09.180 --> 00:46:17.340

Fringe: Zone and see if we could expand that. But use big data in a slightly more nuanced playful way.

00:46:17.550 --> 00:46:17.820

VJ: Again,

00:46:18.390 --> 00:46:30.600

Fringe: If you want to experiment. What we can do is say, well, we know roughly how comfortable you are so we know that a contemporary dance piece, full of new dances is probably beyond your

00:46:31.290 --> 00:46:43.260

Fringe: Your remit Chile face may well be, but just let's plug that into the into the algorithm. See how you respond to that and maybe

00:46:43.590 --> 00:46:48.900

Fringe: Opens up a slightly bigger conversation. So I wonder how much digital is going to have to reckon

00:46:49.290 --> 00:47:04.860

Fringe: And it does what you were saying about I don't want to click on that bad. I've been said, I don't want to exhibit the behavior of being stuck in a box and being made to feel like, you know, based on my cookie preferences, you're, you're, you're telling you I am

00:47:04.980 --> 00:47:05.670

VJ: Yeah yeah

00:47:05.910 --> 00:47:16.470

Fringe: Really, I think there's a substantive thing that's going on. And I don't know how to frame this but art feels like it's at the heart of it and music. Likewise with Spotify.

00:47:17.190 --> 00:47:33.390

Fringe: I want to discover music genuine want to feel like I found it. We hear that all the time with French that I was there when Stephen Fry was a spotty 15 year old and it's two or three people. I found

00:47:33.810 --> 00:47:40.200

Fringe: Yeah. And that doesn't work if you're if you're match made by an algorithm. No.

00:47:40.920 --> 00:47:57.870

Fringe: No, that sounds Luddite like but I wonder how digital engages with that type of dialogue, which is almost the reverse, it's sort of, I'm going to boldly go to a random show that I've been flying tangibly because I spoke to this person. I thought they were kind of cool.

00:47:58.290 --> 00:48:03.210

VJ: Yeah, I think that I mean I'm obviously old enough to remember like pre algorithm and yes

00:48:06.600 --> 00:48:14.520

VJ: It's, yeah. Is that and I think that, again, is pizza that experiential thing and it's got made me think of improv book which you'll obviously be

00:48:14.520 --> 00:48:15.570

Fringe: Aware of it.

00:48:15.840 --> 00:48:19.350

VJ: And actually, one of the things that I found so entertaining from that.

00:48:19.680 --> 00:48:38.580

VJ: Is that sense that there's a can almost we spoke last time. And I said, I added to the fringe program one year. So I, I could almost feel myself typing some of those generated NLP generated things and you see all my goodness, like why I was I was an algorithm before I even knew I wasn't

00:48:40.410 --> 00:48:40.950

Fringe: Completely

00:48:41.370 --> 00:48:48.990

VJ: Some of them are just classic and it really makes me think about the language we use when we're not sure what to say about something.

00:48:49.770 --> 00:48:51.660

VJ: And I, I wonder if kind of

00:48:51.720 --> 00:48:57.600

VJ: Digital programming on its own or it's part of life experiences or or whatever hybrid blended

00:48:58.350 --> 00:49:06.030

VJ: Language, which is, I feel like that's almost still going to be in train with that digital program for a while because

00:49:06.420 --> 00:49:17.310

VJ: I don't know about you, and this is this is a sort of this is kind of my final my final question about, do you, do you feel that the language that you use to describe the digital program.

00:49:18.450 --> 00:49:30.540

VJ: Has changed or has become more sophisticated. Do you feel more confident about what you're saying one part of it is, and one part of it is not like or do you think it's still like those pieces is still yet to land.

00:49:31.350 --> 00:49:35.730

Fringe: Really good question. I haven't really thought about it all that much. I mean, I think we

00:49:37.230 --> 00:49:45.900

Fringe: We've spent a lot of time as part of what I was talking about around the what the soul and core and actual authentic authentic message of the fringes.

00:49:46.980 --> 00:49:50.340

Fringe: Then lead into our tone of voice and all these sorts of things that are

00:49:51.930 --> 00:50:01.560

Fringe: I think as valid now in a digital context as they are otherwise. And maybe that one foot in in fundraising has helped keep us there, right, because

00:50:02.460 --> 00:50:10.920

Fringe: We if we were doing this more as a sort of straightforward buy a ticket, then maybe that might have led us into a slightly different language space.

00:50:13.770 --> 00:50:14.730

Fringe: Question I

00:50:15.630 --> 00:50:16.770

VJ: Mean, maybe don't know yet.

00:50:17.340 --> 00:50:27.480

Fringe: Yeah, I mean, I think there is a bit of that. I think there's also a little bit of, as I was saying, if you think take open rate. So you take engagement rates with

00:50:28.620 --> 00:50:37.290

Fringe: Our activity. I don't think we've been successful. This year, so that would indicate that either the appetite for this type stuff is in there.

00:50:37.470 --> 00:50:37.830

Fringe: Which I think

00:50:38.130 --> 00:50:41.970

Fringe: Of it, but it also might indicate that our language should be slightly different.

00:50:43.050 --> 00:50:43.500

Fringe: Maybe

00:50:43.920 --> 00:50:44.280

Yeah.

00:50:45.840 --> 00:50:58.110



Fringe: Can be a timeframe point as well as language around, and I'm sure you've come across this already, but you know we chatted to colleagues. Hey on white and all those guys about the last minute isn't

00:50:58.950 --> 00:51:11.010

Fringe: Of people booking ironically there being more of a behavior that leans towards scarcity. So time bound events seem to have done better than events that are always on.

00:51:11.490 --> 00:51:11.910

VJ: Yeah.

00:51:12.240 --> 00:51:13.440

Fringe: Yeah, I think so.

00:51:14.160 --> 00:51:29.670

Fringe: And that might be a that might be due to covert and wanting a bit of like lurching back to old certainties like broadcast and you know movies that we loved in the 80s and all that there might be a bit of founder in that mix, but

00:51:31.620 --> 00:51:36.660

Fringe: I don't know. Yeah, I think that's, as you say, I think it's probably too early to say for definitely

00:51:37.230 --> 00:51:38.970

Fringe: Yeah, obviously switched anyway.

00:51:39.330 --> 00:51:48.210

VJ: No, absolutely. But yet, so I'll maybe I'll maybe you were you and ask you that question a few times when you've had you've had a rest, and you feel a bit more kind of

00:51:48.600 --> 00:51:55.080

VJ: Like it's like it's done all the listeners. Thank you so much. I said, half an hour. And it's nearly four o'clock, so I apologize. It's

00:51:55.740 --> 00:52:03.750

Fringe: Fine. Sorry, I'm not ready, that's been really helpful tool. Absolutely. It's, it's always really really interesting to chat to you. And then, yeah, I think it's a yeah

00:52:03.810 --> 00:52:11.940

VJ: I think there's this so much still to land so hopefully in this kind of during festival conversation will have captured actually what's happening.

00:52:12.570 --> 00:52:17.460

VJ: Now and then maybe in the, in the future, you can you can have a look at what I've got. And you can tell me that it's all

00:52:18.240 --> 00:52:24.060

VJ: Nonsense. But, and yeah, thank you. Thank you so much. It was really, really interesting to talk to you. I will

00:52:24.300 --> 00:52:34.470

VJ: It's going to take me, realistically, it's going to take me months to write all this stuff up. And I've got loads of tweets, but I will, I will keep in touch and let you know how it's going. That's okay.

00:52:34.650 --> 00:52:41.340

Fringe: Sounds great. Yeah. Well, best of luck with it. Done. If you need to do that catch up in a couple of months to see where it is.

00:52:41.400 --> 00:52:42.450

VJ: All right. Appreciate that.

00:52:43.230 --> 00:52:44.490

Fringe: Just let me know. I'm happy to, like,

00:52:44.490 --> 00:52:50.190

VJ: Well alright well listen good luck tonight. I hate the last one goes really well. And yeah, and I'll be in touch.

00:52:51.210 --> 00:52:52.260

Fringe: Thanks. Have a good week.

00:52:52.830 --> 00:52:53.190

VJ: Take care.

## Appendix 2

### Appendix 2a: Participant Information Sheet – Zoom participants

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
EDINBURGH COLLEGE OF ART

FUTURE CULTURE EDINBURGH  
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Alongside your participation in the *Future Culture Edinburgh* event, broadcast from Leith Theatre on 1 September 2021, you are being invited to take part in research on **Communicating value and values in Edinburgh's arts and creative industries**. Vikki Jones, PhD Researcher at Edinburgh College of Art is leading this research. Before you decide to take part, it is important you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The Covid-19 pandemic has shone a brighter light on areas of inequality in the arts and creative industries, including a lack of diversity in the cultural workforce and a desire to develop access to the arts for more diverse audiences. This research puts forward the notion that communications, particularly around the value of the arts and its shared values with audiences, are central to equitable audience, and cultural workforce, development.

*Future Culture Edinburgh* is a public, hybrid event which aims to spark conversations, creative thinking, and collective action towards an equitable and inclusive future of culture in Edinburgh. It will explore challenges, inequalities and precarity within cultural work, policy, infrastructure and access for audiences.

Data gathered from provocations delivered by speakers, as well as anonymised responses to activities generated by both in-person and online participants, will be analysed by the event instigators, Vikki Jones (above) and creative ex-producer Morvern Cunningham, to suggest

actions required across Edinburgh's cultural ecosystem in the immediate and longer terms. The dataset will also be analysed as part of Vikki's PhD thesis.

#### WHY HAVE I BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?

You are invited to take part in this study because you have registered to attend the *Future Culture Edinburgh* event, broadcast from Leith Theatre on 1 September 2021.

#### DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?

No – it is entirely up to you. Please note however that the event will be recorded via the following means:

##### **Zoom recording:**

Public elements of the event – not breakout room activities – will be recorded, and online participants who choose to attend with cameras on will appear in that recording and may also appear on a projection screen in Leith Theatre. **If you do not wish to be recorded, or to appear on-screen in the venue, please switch your camera off during recorded elements and adjust your screen name to suit you.** Only the content delivered by hosts and speakers will be made publicly available after the event.

Please note that the event will take place in 'Meeting' format on Zoom, so we ask that you keep your microphone on mute, except during breakout rooms. The event Q&A will take place via the meeting's chat function.

A live transcript will be available on Zoom during the event, although please note the accuracy of this transcript may vary. To activate this feature, click on the '**Live Transcript CC**' button at the bottom of your screen and adjust the settings of the transcript to suit you. If this feature is not available, please check you are using an up-to-date version of Zoom.

##### **Filming and photography in the venue:**

If you are participating in person at Leith Theatre, the event will be filmed, with some photographs of group activity responses taken by the event instigators. If you do not wish to be

filmed and photographed, please indicate this on your consent form and identify yourself to the event instigators on your arrival at the venue on the day.

### **Responses collected on Miro:**

The Miro (<https://miro.com>) boards used to collect participant responses before the event and on the day of the event will be publicly available for one week before and one week after the event. After that, the public link will be closed, and the data downloaded and anonymised by the researcher. Only anonymised data from Miro will be used for research and shared with other stakeholders.

If you do not wish your name to be associated with your responses on Miro, please access the board anonymously. This is the default option on Miro if you do not have, or are not signed into, a Miro account.

### WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I DECIDE TO TAKE PART?

If you choose to take part, your responses from the *Future Culture Edinburgh* event will be recorded, anonymised, and retained for the purposes of the above research. Findings from the event will also be shared with event instigators and stakeholders, for example City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh Festivals, and cultural organisations.

### WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

By sharing your responses with us, you will be helping Vikki, The University of Edinburgh, and cultural ecosystem stakeholders to conduct research that considers challenges around equity, representation and innovation in Edinburgh's cultural infrastructure and creative industries and seeks to drive changes to address the issues raised.

*Future Culture Edinburgh* offers participants an opportunity to share views with these stakeholders and contribute both to research and action in these areas.

### ARE THERE ANY RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH TAKING PART?

There are no significant risks associated with participation. All identifying data collected as part of the event will be anonymised for research purposes, and instructions are provided above to further minimise identifying data collected about you during the event activities.

#### WHAT IF I WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

Attending the event and agreeing to participate in this project does not oblige you to remain in the study nor have any further obligation to this study. If, at any stage, you no longer want to be part of the study, please inform the project administrator, **Vikki Jones**,

. You can also request that only certain statements you have made be redacted from the research should you wish.

You should note that your data may be used in the production of formal research outputs (e.g. journal articles, conference papers, theses and reports) prior to your withdrawal and so you are advised to contact the research team at the earliest opportunity should you wish to withdraw from the study. On specific request we will destroy all your identifiable answers, but we will need to use the data collected prior to your withdrawal, and to maintain our records of your consenting participation.

#### DATA PROTECTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Your data, associated with both attendance at the *Future Culture Edinburgh* event and resulting research, will be processed in accordance with Data Protection Law. All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Unless they are anonymised in our records, your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. The data stored for the purposes of the event will only be available to the research team.

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All electronic data will be stored on password-protected university systems and devices, and any paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses to minimise risk.

### WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY?

The results of this study may be summarised in published articles, reports and presentations. Quotes or key findings will always be made anonymous in any formal outputs unless we have your prior and explicit permission to attribute them to you by name. Information may also be kept for future research.

### WHO CAN I CONTACT?

If you have any further questions about the study, please contact the researcher:

**Vikki Jones,**

If you wish to make a complaint about the study, please contact:

**Professor Richard Coyne,**

In your communication, please provide the study title and detail the nature of your complaint.

You can get this document on tape, large print and various computer formats if you ask us.

Please contact the lead researcher using the details above.

For general information about how we use your data go to:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/records-management/privacy-notice-research>

## Appendix 2b: Participant Information Sheet – in-person participants

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
EDINBURGH COLLEGE OF ART

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#### ARE THERE ANY RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH TAKING PART?

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#### RISKS OF PARTICIPATION (COVID-19)

In partnership with the venue, we have taken specific steps to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 during the study by adhering to the most up to date Scottish Government [guidance](#). These measures include maintaining 2 metres social distancing; using face coverings if social distancing of 2 metres cannot be maintained; ventilation in the venue; approved routes through the venue; avoiding crowded places; cleaning hands and surfaces regularly.

Further, you will only interact with researchers who have experienced no COVID-19 symptoms nor had any known contact with COVID-19 positive individuals for the 14 days prior to the research interaction.

However, even with these control measures, there remains some additional risk of exposure from participating in this study.

#### **Storing contact details**

This research requires you to be in contact with the research team in an indoor space out with our University campus, then you may be required to provide your name and contact details to the managers of that space. If there is no requirement by the managers of that space to provide such information, then for the purpose of [NHS Test](#)

[and Protect](#) we will request and store your name and contact details for 21 days after the research interaction.

If during this 21-day period, the researcher(s) has a positive COVID-19 test then, if requested, your contact details will be shared with NHS contact tracers, who may then contact you directly. The period of 21 days will ensure full cover of the typical incubation period and additional time during which people may be infectious. This information relating to your name and contact details is in addition to the data collected as part of the research study, will be stored separately from the research data, shared with NHS Test and Protect if requested, and the legal basis for collecting these data is substantial public interest.

#### **What if I am unwell prior to the research interaction?**

If you feel unwell, experience COVID-19 related symptoms, or have been in contact with a COVID-19 positive individual in the past 14 days, then please contact the researcher **Vikki Jones**, , and we will cancel the in-person research interaction and invite you to participate via Zoom if you feel well enough to do so.

#### **What if I become unwell after the research interaction?**

If you experience COVID-19 related symptoms, and/or have a positive COVID-19 test following the research interaction, please follow the Scottish Government guidance (or local equivalent).

#### **WHAT IF I WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?**

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Your data, associated with both attendance at the *Future Culture Edinburgh* event and resulting research, will be processed in accordance with Data Protection Law. All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Unless they are anonymised in our records, your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. The data stored for the purposes of the event will only be available to the research team.

Full recordings of the public sections of the event will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. No audio recording will take place during group activities in breakout rooms, or around tables in the venue.

All electronic data will be stored on password-protected university systems and devices, and any paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses to minimise risk.

#### WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY?

The results of this study may be summarised in published articles, reports and presentations. Quotes or key findings will always be made anonymous in any formal outputs unless we have your prior and explicit permission to attribute them to you by name. Information may also be kept for future research.

#### WHO CAN I CONTACT?

If you have any further questions about the study, please contact the researcher:

**Vikki Jones,**

If you wish to make a complaint about the study, please contact:

**Professor Richard Coyne,**

In your communication, please provide the study title and detail the nature of your complaint.

You can get this document on tape, large print and various computer formats if you ask us. Please contact the lead researcher using the details above.

For general information about how we use your data go to:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/records-management/privacy-notice-research>

## Appendix 2c: Consent Form – Zoom participants

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
EDINBURGH COLLEGE OF ART

FUTURE CULTURE EDINBURGH  
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

### STUDY TITLE

Communicating value and values in Edinburgh's arts and creative industries:  
Future Culture Edinburgh event

**Please circle**

Have you read the information sheet and had an opportunity to ask questions about it? YES / NO

Have you received enough information about the research project? YES / NO

Do you understand that participation is completely voluntary, and that you can leave the project at any time, without having to give a reason? YES / NO

Do you understand you can ask for specific quotes or statements not to be used (or to be redacted from the data) if I wish? YES / NO

Do you understand that the event will be recorded and how best to minimise the collection of identifying data about you during the event? YES / NO

Please also indicate your responses to the following statements:

**Please circle**

I **AGREE** that my responses during Future Culture Edinburgh can be captured by the research team via:

1. Zoom YES / NO

2. Miro YES / NO

3. Filming and photography from the venue YES / NO

I **AGREE** that the project can use anonymous statements generated by my participation for educational and/or non-commercial purposes; for example, reports, presentations, publications, websites, and exhibitions connected to the research project YES / NO

I **AGREE** for the data I provide to be anonymised then retained by the researcher in secure storage for use for this research for a minimum of 5 years and that it may be used in future ethically approved research

YES / NO

Name of person giving consent

Date

Signature

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---

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Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

---

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## Appendix 2d: Consent Form – in-person participants

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
EDINBURGH COLLEGE OF ART

FUTURE CULTURE EDINBURGH  
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

### STUDY TITLE

**Communicating value and values in Edinburgh's arts and creative industries:  
Future Culture Edinburgh event**

**Please circle**

Have you read the information sheet and had an opportunity to ask questions about it? YES / NO

Have you received enough information about the research project? YES / NO

Do you understand that participation is completely voluntary, and that you can leave the project at any time, without having to give a reason? YES / NO

Do you understand you can ask for specific quotes or statements not to be used (or to be redacted from the data) if I wish? YES / NO

Do you understand that the event will be recorded and how best to minimise the collection of identifying data about you during the event? YES / NO

Please also indicate your responses to the following statements:

**Please circle**

I **AGREE** that my responses during Future Culture Edinburgh can be captured by the research team via:

1. Zoom YES / NO

2. Miro YES / NO

3. Filming and photography from the venue YES / NO

I **AGREE** that the project can use anonymous statements generated by my participation for educational and/or non-commercial purposes; for example, reports, presentations, publications, websites, and exhibitions connected to the research project YES / NO

I **AGREE** for the data I provide to be anonymised then retained by the researcher in secure storage for use for this research for a minimum of 5 years and that it may be used in future ethically approved research

YES / NO

I **AM AWARE** that participating in this study at the current time may carry risks in relation to potential exposure to COVID-19, and I understand the steps that have been taken in relation to minimising the risks of exposure and transmission.

YES / NO

Please clearly print your name, sign and date below:

Name of person giving consent

Date

Signature

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Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

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## Appendix 2e: Future Culture Edinburgh Data Management Plan

|                       |                             |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| School/Department     | ESALA                       |
| Name of student(s)    | Vikki Jones                 |
| Name of supervisor(s) | Richard Coyne               |
| Project title         | Future Culture Edinburgh    |
| Project ID            |                             |
| Source of funding     | Edinburgh Futures Institute |
| Start and end dates   | August – December 2021      |

Research data are collected, observed, or created (derived), for the purposes of analysis to produce and validate original research results. Formats may include (both digital and analogue) text, numeric, multimedia, models and software. Further guidance is available from <https://www.ed.ac.uk/is/research-data-service>

|                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>1. Data Collection:</b> description including type/format/ volume, methods of collection/creation, existing datasets to be used, QA processes.</p> | <p>Data will be collected from attendees at Future Culture Edinburgh</p> <p><a href="https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/future-culture-edinburgh-tickets-165459739535">https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/future-culture-edinburgh-tickets-165459739535</a> a hybrid event broadcast from Leith Theatre on 1 September 2021.</p> <p>Multiple formats will be collected:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Zoom recording EXCEPT for breakout room activities – video, audio, chat</li> <li>2. Miro – pre-event activity and activities for Zoom participants in breakout rooms</li> <li>3. Filming – video recording of the event from the venue – only hosts and speakers, other identifiable participants will be incidental</li> <li>4. Photography – taken by researchers of paper activities conducted in venue. Indentifiable participants will be minimised and incidental</li> </ol> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>2. Documentation<sup>1</sup> and Metadata:</b> information needed for data to be read and interpreted in the future (and where feasible reproduced), plan for collection or creation of this documentation and metadata, any metadata standards to be used.</p> | <p>Zoom – data will be downloaded after the event and deleted from cloud storage. Chat and transcripts will be anonymised and retained</p> <p>Miro – public URLs to Miro boards will be available one week prior and one week post event. Subsequently links will be closed and data downloaded and anonymised</p> <p>Filming – videographer will package hosts and speaker presentations into a film to be made publicly available after event.</p> <p>Photography – photographs of paper responses will be transcribed for use in research</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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<sup>1</sup> Documentation could include: lab notebooks and experiment protocols; questionnaires, codebooks, data dictionaries; software syntax and output files; database schema; methodology reports; provenance info about sources of derived data.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>3. Ethics<sup>2</sup> and Legal</b></p> <p><b>Compliance:</b> details of consent needed for data preservation and sharing; steps to be taken to protect identity of participants; steps to be taken to ensure sensitive data is stored and transferred securely; owners of the data; licences for re-use, restrictions for third party use.</p>            | <p>A Participant Information Sheet and consent forms are in place which ask for explicit consent for each type of data collected through participation.</p> <p>Participants are advised of ways to minimise the collection of personal information during the event and that the data will be anonymised after the event.</p> <p>All data will be stored on password protected devices and university storage – OneDrive and Data Store.</p> <p>Only anonymised data will be shared</p> |
| <p><b>4. Storage and Backup During the Project:</b> where will live data be held<sup>3</sup>; how will files be organised/ structured and named consistently; what backup/recovery provision is there; security risks and how these will be managed, who will have access, if transferring data collected in the field, how will this be transferred safely.</p> | <p>Live data will be held on a password protected computer via a separate password protected partition drive and backed up to OneDrive. Only the student and supervisors will have access to all data with access to findings granted to the supervision team.</p> <p>Security risks are managed through unique password protection with access to relevant files granted without the need to transfer data.</p>                                                                        |

<sup>2</sup> Cross-reference to ethics applications can be made here to prevent duplication.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the UoE's DataStore facility.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>5. Selection and Preservation:</b></p> <p>what data will be retained and shared/preserved; what length of time should the data be kept beyond the end of the project; where will it be archived.<sup>4</sup></p>                                                           | <p>Only anonymised data required for text analysis and non-identifiable photography will be held and can be archived to DataStore on completion.</p> <p>A film from the event will be publicly available with consent for this acquired from hosts and speakers.</p> |
| <p><b>6. Data Sharing:</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>Will the data produced from your project be made open?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes: go to q. 6.a</li> <li>- No: go to q. 6.b</li> </ul>                                                                                                      |
| <p>6.b Please explain why your data cannot be made open, e.g. costs/resources, ethical or commercial confidentiality or sensitivity.</p>                                                                                                                                         | <p>Express permission would need to be, but could be, sought to make the dataset open.</p>                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <p><b>7. Responsibilities &amp; Resources:</b> persons involved in collection/management of data and implementing plan; training required; hardware/software requirements; charges for data repositories; costs and resources for preparation for preservation/data sharing.</p> | <p>The student is responsible for management of all resources and preservation of data for this project,</p>                                                                                                                                                         |

- ☒ I confirm that the dataset produced during this project will be cited appropriately in my thesis, and a data availability statement will be included in my thesis and any publications arising from it.

<sup>4</sup> The UoE's DataShare (open) and DataVault (restricted access) services, or national/disciplinary repositories are recommended.

Signed .....V.Jones..... Date.....17  
August 2021.....

## Appendix 2f: Off-campus research checklist for COVID-19

### Starting/ Restarting Off-campus Research and Research-related activities: Researcher Checklist (C19)

**Study title:** Communicating value and values in Edinburgh's arts and creative industries – Future Culture Edinburgh

**Researcher:** Vikki Jones

**Location of research:** Leith Theatre,  
Edinburgh

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way research and research-related activities (including knowledge exchange and public engagement) are undertaken. The University continues to follow Scottish Government advice as applies to the sector and the procedures for undertaking research and knowledge exchange with human participants will continue to reflect these principles. Any research, including face to face research activities with human participants, must be in harmony with the respective stages of the [Scottish Government Route Map](#), Scottish Government [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Protection Levels](#), and [Scottish Government Guidance for Universities](#) or similar national Public Health guidelines in other countries. At present research-related activities are expected to continue to be undertaken using digital methods, whenever possible.

In some circumstances, starting or restarting research activities off-campus may be viable, and this checklist has been developed to support researchers in navigating this new research landscape. The checklist is designed to document the consideration and potential impact of starting or restarting research activities out-with the University campus. The aim of the checklist is to inform the decision as to whether it is viable to start or restart a study, and to identify, document and mitigate risks to the safety of participants (where applicable), and researchers. This does **not replace** other approval processes including the TRA1-C19 ([link](#)), which must be approved by the Head of School (or equivalent), prior to the research starting/re-starting.



In CAHSS this is a **mandatory supplementary form** to be included with the ethics application form/amendment for review by Research Ethics Committees (this may be uploaded with PIS and consent forms for online forms). Please note that completion of this form should not replace full answers to the ethics application form. Other Colleges please check local requirements.

| <b>PART A: Study Viability</b>                                                                                                                     | <b>Yes</b>                                                                                            | <b>No</b> | <b>N/A</b> | <b>Provide brief detail</b>                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Funder has assessed and agreed to restart (if applicable)                                                                                          |                                                                                                       |           | X          |                                                                                             |
| Alternative digital approaches to this research have been considered, and are not considered viable                                                | X                                                                                                     |           |            | The hybrid nature of the event that is central to the research is fundamental to its design |
| All members of the research team, and any other involved staff are willing and able to participate in the research                                 | X                                                                                                     |           |            |                                                                                             |
| The researchers have considered a 'Plan B' for the proposed research in the event of an increase in restrictions that will make 'Plan A' unviable. | X                                                                                                     |           |            | Were the in-person 'Plan A' element not possible a 'Plan B'                                 |
| Proposed location, start date and duration of research activity                                                                                    | The in-person element of the research will take place on 1 September 2021 at Leith Theatre, Edinburgh |           |            |                                                                                             |

| <b>PART B: Safety</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>N/A</b> | <b>Provide brief detail</b>                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The COVID related safety risks inherent in undertaking the trip/activity do not <b>substantially exceed</b> the background risk level to which a researcher is likely to be exposed to were they to remain in their study or work base. | X          |           |            | Due to planning and preparation with the venue to ensure strict Covid-19 protocols are in place according to and |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          |  |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|--|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          |  |  | exceeding government guidelines                                                                                                                                                                  |
| If the research activity involves spending time in a third party building (e.g., library/ archive/ café), then the managers of that space have appropriate COVID-19 mitigation procedures in place.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>X</b> |  |  | See above                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Prior to engaging in the research activity, the researcher(s) will confirm with an appropriate colleague (e.g., supervisor, PI) that they have not experienced COVID-19-related symptoms, and have had no known contact with a COVID-19 positive individual for the 14 days prior to the scheduled research interaction.                                                                                                                                   | <b>X</b> |  |  | This is required by the venue and will be communicated to the research supervisor                                                                                                                |
| Research participants will be advised via the Participant Information Sheet that they (or a representative) should contact the researcher prior to meeting if they have experienced any COVID-19 related symptoms, or have been in contact with a COVID-19 positive individual in the 14 days prior to the scheduled research interaction. The researcher should 'check in' with the participant prior to meeting to confirm.                              | <b>X</b> |  |  | This will be communicated to in-person participants in advance through booking information                                                                                                       |
| During the research interactions, risk of exposure to COVID-19 for participants and researchers will be mitigated in line with the most up to date Scottish Government guidance (i.e., physical distancing arrangements, arrangements for hand washing/ sanitisation and drying, procedures for cleaning of surfaces and communal areas, avoiding crowded places and minimising group size, minimise time spent together, use of face coverings (NB if can | <b>X</b> |  |  | Mitigations are in place in partnership with the venue including physical distancing; wearing of face coverings except during speaker presentations; sanitising points; ventilation of the venue |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |   |   |  |                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| maintain 2M physical distancing and stationary in a non-communal space then may consider whether face covering is necessary) (or as per local guidance – please provide details and links). We encourage researchers to use the Protect Scotland app (see <a href="#">link</a> ).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |   |   |  |                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Is any researcher or research participant in any of the higher risk Covid-19 groups due to age or health conditions? If “Yes”, please detail why this research is required, and any additional safeguards that will be in place to provide enhanced protection for any individuals judged to be at increased, but low risk.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |   | X |  |                                                                                                                                                                                |
| If the research is undertaken in an indoor space, then the researcher should confirm if the managers of that space will collect details for the purpose of <a href="#">NHS Test and Protect</a> (or local equivalent). If there is no requirement by the managers of that space to collect such information, then the researcher should request and store the participant’s name and contact details for 21 days after the research interaction for the purpose of Test and Protect. If the researcher subsequently tests positive for COVID-19 then they will be able to provide information regarding the research interaction to contact tracers. This information is in addition to the data collected as part of the research study, and should be stored separately from the research data (local arrangements TBC). The participant should be informed of this requirement in the PIS (see below). | X |   |  | Test and trace information will be included in the participant information sheet for in-person participants and details will be stored separately for 21 days after the event. |
| The researcher will follow <a href="#">standard staff procedures</a> for the reporting of any COVID-related symptoms.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | X |   |  |                                                                                                                                                                                |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |   |  |  |                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|--|--|-------------------------------------------|
| <p>This includes the reporting of <a href="#">both self-isolation and a positive test for COVID</a>.</p> <p>As per standard protocols, staff members will be contacted by Health and Safety in the event of reporting a positive test. Researchers will be expected to provide Health and Safety with details of research activities undertaken.</p>                                                                                                                          |   |  |  |                                           |
| <p>The researcher will ensure the participant has the researcher's contact details, which can be shared with NHS Test and Protect if the participant experiences any COVID-related symptoms following the interaction.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | X |  |  | Provided on participant information sheet |
| <p>The researcher will monitor the local COVID-19 related guidance, and adjust or suspend the research in line with these requirements. If the guidance is unclear, then researchers should discuss the changing guidance with colleagues (including, if appropriate, Health and Safety) and document the decision making. This may require further adjustments to risk assessments and insurance approvals, and updating the School given the fluidity of the situation.</p> | X |  |  |                                           |
| <p>Have updates been made to the study protocol/other study documents (including Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms) to incorporate additional risk and safety measures required? (see Appendix 1 below for suggested text)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | X |  |  |                                           |

CI/PI Signature (*delete as appropriate*): \_\_\_\_\_ V.Jones\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ 11.8.21\_\_\_\_\_

### Useful resources to support decision making:

Support for [Early Career Researchers](#) on ERO website



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
*Edinburgh College of Art*

Support  
for Research  
during  
Covid

EDINBURGH SCHOOL  
OF ARCHITECTURE &  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
SCHOOL  
OF ART  
SCHOOL  
OF DESIGN  
SCHOOL OF  
HISTORY OF ART  
REID SCHOOL  
OF MUSIC

Hub ([SERCH](#))

## Appendix 2g: Edinburgh College of Art Ethics Review Committee Opinion

30<sup>th</sup> August 2021

Dear Vikki,

### Subject: Outcome of ECA Ethics Review

Thanks for sending your work '*Communicating value and values in Edinburgh's arts and creative industries (Future Culture Edinburgh event)*' for ethical peer review. Please find the response below.

The reviewer(s) will have responded with one of four possible opinions on its ethics. Please note that these are opinions not approvals. If you go ahead with the work (as described in your ethics checklist) then a 'favourable opinion' here means that we believe it will be ethical.

In this form the Further Comment section, below, will outline broad comments and any additional conditions or provisions that are being made along with the opinion.

### Committee Response:

#### **ü – Favourable Opinion**

☐ – Favourable Opinion with Additional Conditions (In this circumstance there is no need for you, the researcher, to respond to confirm the completion of these conditional actions. Please just apply the amendments requested in the conditions detailed below and it will be taken in good faith that you will do so.)

☐ – Provisional Favourable Opinion (In this circumstance you, the researcher, should apply the amendments requested in detail below and should then evidence this in a response to the ECA Ethics Committee via the ECA Ethics Director.)

☐ – Unfavourable Opinion (Please see Further Comments, below.)

### Further Comment from Reviewer(s):

The research ethics of this hybrid (online and offline) project are particularly well thought-out. There is great care taken in the management of data, consent and confidentiality issues, and in the ethical organisation of an event during Covid-restrictions. The Participant Information Sheet was reviewed alongside the checklist and it is particularly robust and considered in its design.

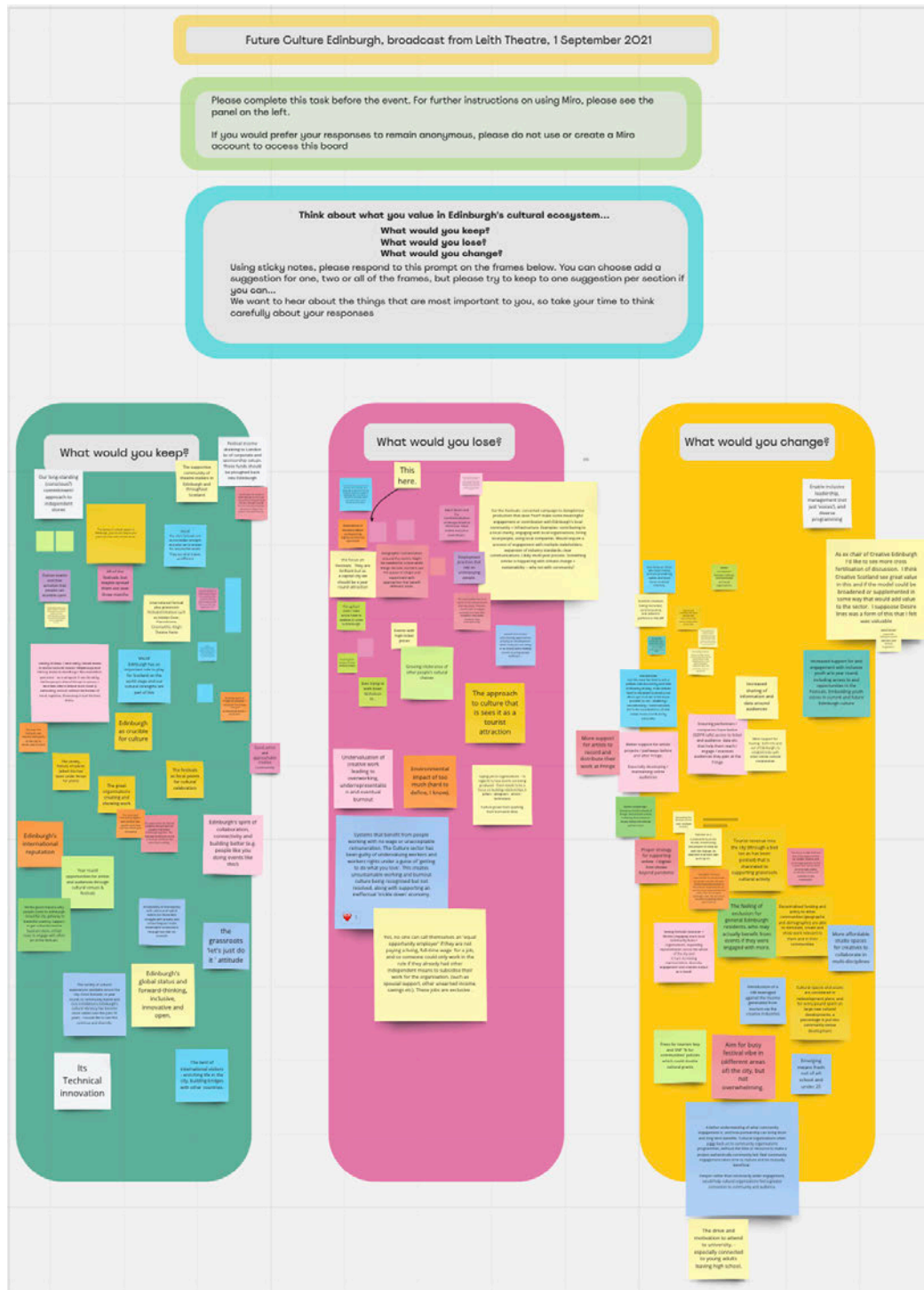
### Name and Signature on behalf of ECA Ethics Committee:



Rachel J. Harkness

## Appendix 3

### Appendix 3a: Future Culture Edinburgh ‘keep, lose, and change’ activity, recorded on Miro



### Appendix 3b: Rob Hopkins activity from Future Culture Edinburgh, recorded on Miro





# Appendix 3c: Imagining collective action activity from Future Culture Edinburgh, recorded and coded on Miro

