



**HOW RESEARCHER
INTRODUCED SKILLS,
TOOLS AND
COLLABORATIONS
CAN LEAD TO ADAPTED
WORK PRACTICES IN
RESPONSE TO DIGITAL
DISRUPTION**

**THE CASE OF
INDEPENDENT FILM**



ESRC Research
Capacity Building
Clusters 2013
National Summit
Conference, Aston
University,
Birmingham, June 26,
2013

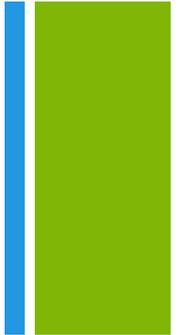
[mcbf@st-
andrews.ac.uk](mailto:mcbf@st-andrews.ac.uk)
ESRC Grant RES
187-24-0014

Michael Franklin
KTP Research
Impact





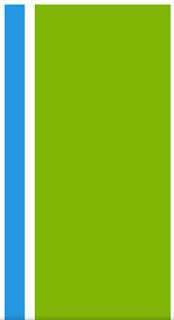
Contents of the presentation



- Introduction
- Context: The digitally disrupted UK independent film business
- Research Challenges Addressed
- Impact: Advantages of the KTP
- Benefits to the academic researcher
- Conclusions



+ Participant Observation of Digital Disruption and Digital Response



The screenshot displays a web browser window with the following elements:

- Browser Address Bar:** `scottish.movies.com/reviews/982-bill-douglas-trilogy`
- Website Header:** **movies** logo, navigation links for [Follow](#), [Search Scottish Film Collec](#), [Share](#), [Help](#), [My Purchases](#), and [Admin](#).
- Page Title:** [Scottish Film Collection](#) > [Bill Douglas Trilogy](#)
- Main Content Area:**
 - Image:** A black and white photograph of a classroom full of students.
 - Buttons:** Three large, colorful buttons: a red triangle labeled **PLAY TRAILER**, a green triangle labeled **RENT FILM**, and a purple triangle labeled **SHARE**.
 - Top Right:** Icons for [Follow](#) (envelope), [Share](#) (share symbol), and [Embed](#) (code symbol).
 - Bottom Left:** **distrify** logo.
 - Bottom Right:** A speaker icon.
- Left Sidebar:**
 - Section:** [Scottish Film Collection](#)
 - Text:** Demo of the upcoming Scottish Film Collection.
 - Navigation:** [All Films](#)
 - CATEGORIES:**
 - [Animation](#)
 - [Shorts](#)
 - [Digicult](#)
 - [Classics](#)
 - [Documentary](#)
 - [Drama](#)
 - [Comedy](#)
 - [Music](#)
 - [Experimental](#)
 - [Sci-Fi](#)
 - [Thriller](#)
 - Buttons:** [+ Follow](#) and [Collection Settings](#).



The Film Value Chain and Digital Disruption > New Market Devices

- Film practitioners respond to high degrees of uncertainty with conventions to formulate and coordinate action
- Digital technology has radically disrupted the independent film industry. UK revenues from physical video fell £564m 2003-2010, with Internet & TV VOD rising only £101m (BFI 2011)
- New digitally enabled initiatives are reorganising the market:
 1. Leverage Internet-enabled content & dissemination tools to create greater consumer demand
 2. Dis-intermediated distribution - circumvent traditional market participants, take greater %



+ Research Challenges Addressed

- Access: film business is exclusive and glamorous; companies under resourced; oversubscribed by outsiders demanding entry
- Extreme uncertainty; large financial exposure by relatively small (sales and distribution) companies, mean data confidentiality is key
- Unique nature of product; fierce market competition for finance and distribution means that deal terms and rights acquisition offers considered highly sensitive
- Participants believe current market information is one of the few sources of advantage

Multiple Case Study via Participant Observation

- Provision of 'expert services' in revenue model generation and Social Network Analysis – gain entry – become part of larger construction being studied
- Jigsaw-like methodological process: charting action through materials, processes and conversations allowed a rare, longitudinal, insider view of a complex system
- Digitally mediated development of creative content, marketing and engagement to build community as target for self-distribution – complex, messy, emergent,
- Agency dissipated to all those enrolled in social networks connected to the film
- Extended chronology of process being studied > adoption of case study method that privileges 'being there' and 'being part of' ground level practices
- Demands researcher reflexivity: partial, biased interpretations? Countered by time



+ Advantages of KTP approach

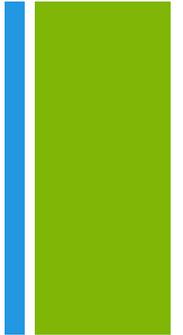
Impact Case 1: Film Gardens

- Participant observation provision of extra resources: financial modeling; introduction and application of SNA; forging of linkages between traditional film producers and digital technology companies.
- *“Film Gardens is intending to diversify its business model...creating and marketing new digital assets and material, embracing the digital and online opportunities that are available to help reach and communicate with their target audience”*
- *“Been run off my feet with Film X in Berlin. Max Distribution, Forks Distribution and Prime Distribution v interested for the UK. With tv gone the offers are small - £100k ish. Prints & Advertising commitment £400k +. Director and I keen to say no but might get bullied into it. Any help with an argument you can think of would be great”*
- Modeling of potential returns and proposed upsides to a digitally supported self-release were successfully adopted by Film Gardens in their deal negotiations
- *“Thanks, that* really helps me with my argument - The film was jointly released by the two parties in September 2011.*



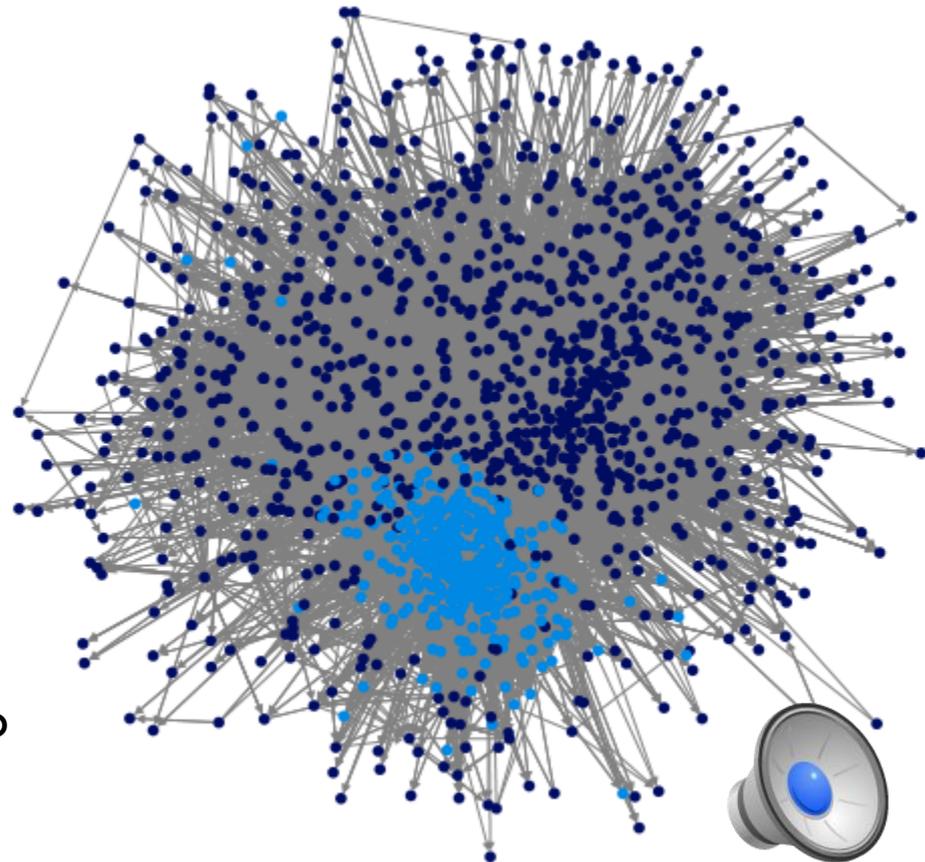
+ Advantages of KTP approach

Impact Case 2 :Giral Productions



■ Impact of SNA in execution of digital marketing and distribution strategies - targeting of marketing messages.

- Basic exploratory analysis of Twitter engagement campaign identified clustering patterns of great potential value
- Users self-reporting as interested in the specific topic of the film drawn out from the main follower base of users
- Capacity to track their reception and re-transmission of marketing messages and refine the film's engagement campaign accordingly
- Additionally - collaborations with digital technology companies: spreadable video trailer player; blogger outreach tool set up.



+ Benefits to Academic Researcher

- Through attendance at meetings, involvement in ongoing work tasks, casual conversation with multiple individuals extended period of months, and the charting of email conversations revolving around particular market actions and tools a wealth of evidence has been built up concerning digital audience engagement work.
- A deep picture of new operations in the film business: who is involved and how they operate, is being utilized in academic research informed by an Actor Network Theory (ANT) perspective examining how calculative devices become embedded in organizational networks.
- Ethical and methodological issues: Investigating film production companies' activities by virtue of access via an external publicly funded organisation could potentially impact the impartiality of data - companies could hide results, provide only partial or skewed information
- Sufficiently extended research process to negate risk, companies heavily under resourced means - any offer of free skilled labour is taken up in good faith and all possible affordances are made to exploit it to the full.



+ Conclusions

- Participant observation: 'being there' and 'being part of it' both enable researcher access and insight, and provide new capacities for SMEs unable to afford such services on a for-hire basis.
- Requires intense reflexivity by the researcher to understand how they are altering and impacting the research as well as the researched
- Without direct, extensive access to the site of market action it is difficult to gain an understanding of the development of process construction in audience engagement initiatives.
- The nature of this impact remain open. Value judgments concerning the validity of industry impact are important. How can we be sure that capacities developed during a participant observer's period of research remain successfully embedded once the participant observer leaves the field? How long is sufficient to count as valuable?
- Relative industrial complexity and problems of access vary between creative industries, this research approach is useful for generating similar impacts outside of film. Access to day-to-day operational procedure with reference to digital metrics is crucial for understanding management and organisation across the current digitally disrupted media environment.



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Many Thanks

This research is supported by the ESRC Capacity Building Cluster, “Capitalising in Creativity” grant RES 187-24-0014

mcbf@st-andrews.ac.uk

[@filmbizresearch](#)

www.filmbusinessresearch.com

