

Finding an audience: evaluating the production and marketing of low budget British films in the iFeatures production scheme, 2009 - 2014.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the first iteration of iFeatures, a grant-aided low budget production scheme in Bristol, UK, from 2009 – 2014. The scheme encouraged and trained filmmakers to develop digital marketing and distribution strategies to enable the three feature films, *In the Dark Half* (2012), *Flying Blind* (2013) and *8 Minutes Idle* (2014) to compete in the market place against bigger budgeted films. Little original research on low budget marketing and distribution has been carried out which this thesis attempts to rectify. The research captured a specific period in history in which digital marketing and distribution was regarded by the UK Film Council (UKFC) and other stakeholders as techniques that would allow the low budget sector to find its audience, and overcame the century-long problems of how to sustain indigenous feature film production.

The research findings are based on multiple data sources that collectively fill a gap in original research. Unprecedented access was obtained to major stakeholders including the iFeatures creative teams, BBC Films, the UKFC, sales agents and distributors. The in-depth interviews uncovered motivations and attitudes to marketing and these were analysed using Pierre Bourdieu's framework (1986, 1996, 2001, 2003). In a separate chapter, conceptual approaches underpinning digital marketing and distribution, and the emerging strategies are also analysed. The three films are presented as case studies to show how each film adopted different strategies using digital and traditional marketing techniques. These case studies drew on unique data which captured the impact and scope of the online marketing, and over a thousand surveys from cinemagoers which showed the relative persuasiveness of both digital and traditional marketing.

The thesis argues that iFeatures' objectives were not achieved. Training filmmakers to become marketers did not account for their attitudinal dissonance nor the importance of symbolic capital. Also, coherent marketing strategies were lacking that understood and deployed the principles of marketing and emerging paradigms and logics. The case studies showed that digital marketing is only effective for defined audiences and when manipulated by expert personnel, and that traditional techniques should not be ignored. These results suggest that, as the commercial returns are so small, low budget filmmaking should exist to take creative risks and to develop talent and that its future may best be supported within a television business model.

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I dedicate this thesis to my brother, Piers, who died during its construction far, far too young.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

Distribution is the key to the British film industry. Production exists to meet the demand created by the mechanism of distribution rather than distribution existing to serve production.

Albert Moran, 1996 p. 2

Distribution has always been the biggest problem we have in this country. Our screens are sacrificed to American dross. The studios run up expenses in the UK to reduce their profits from the US domestic market. That is the financing model they have developed and if we can stop them using the UK as ancillary market for expenses, we might have a better industry than we do.

Christian Martin, British low budget film producer, 2012

The problem? That's a given – that's distribution. That is the root of the fundamental problem in the UK. We cannot give our younger filmmakers the oxygen to believe in themselves and their projects. I know digital distribution is aiming to get around this but the problem is still how to deliver a film to its audience.

Guy de Beaujeu, British independent film producer, 2012

This research seeks to investigate if British low budget production teams can utilise new digital marketing and distribution processes, strategies and techniques to find an audience despite the American domination of the British film industry. The quotations above described the fundamental importance of distribution to the film industry – without which no film will be screened to paying audiences. They also showed that independent low budget producers believed that American dominance of distribution and exhibition in the UK impacted negatively on the whole industry. The last quotation recognised that there was an opportunity for filmmaking teams to adopt digital technology to market and distribute low budget films but there was still a large measure of uncertainty about the

process. In the 2010s there was a great deal of 'buzz' around the disruptive power of the Internet and the power of social media to locate and connect with networks of consumers. It was hoped that digital distribution and marketing had the potential to reach audiences which would allow the British film industry the possibility of clawing back some of the value in their work, which could then be reinvested in the British film industry in a virtuous circle. In turn this reinvestment could build a stronger indigenous industry which could support both mainstream and low budget filmmakers and provide British audiences with British films with British narratives; inspiring stories that reflect and explored contemporary Britain.

This research tracked the first iteration of iFeatures, a grant aided, low budget feature film production scheme in Bristol (and managed by South West Screen, the regional screen agency for the south west of England) whose varied objectives sought not only develop creative production talent in writers, directors and producers but also to find a way of getting these creatives to engage with marketing and distribution and to integrate these ideas into the development of the projects. iFeatures was attempting to change what was regarded by many filmmakers as the parasitic relationship of the film business on creatives and their output, to one of symbiosis, where each part supports and develops the other in mutually beneficial ways. iFeatures was ahead of the game. New government proposals in the second film policy review *A Future for British Film: it begins with the audience* (DCMS, 2012) also recommended that British filmmakers' dependence on grants should be altered and successful commercial distribution to audiences should be at the heart of all production schemes. This policy direction makes this research valuable and timely as it investigated the relationship and attitudes of the filmmakers to audiences to the marketing the films and aims to pinpoint areas of conflict and tension.

My personal hope is that this research will encourage British filmmakers to change the way they understand their position in the industry. Filmmakers who rely solely on the income from the production of each film, and without holding on to intellectual rights, risk not being able to sustain their careers in the long term. With a greater grasp of distribution and marketing they would hopefully be able to retain more control over their productions and carve out an increased share of revenues. By exploiting the 'long tail' (see chapter 5 and Anderson, 2006) and multiple productions, rights ownership could lead to revenue streams that might help the filmmakers take creative risks and so create engaging British films for national and international audiences. Essentially this digital development and focus on marketing and distribution, could be the first chapter in a new history of British filmmaking with sustainability at its core.

This thesis will address three research questions:

1. What possibilities do digital marketing and distribution offer low budget filmmakers in the UK?
2. How did the filmmaking teams experience the process of taking part in the iFeatures scheme?
3. Could the iFeatures production and distribution model offer a sustainable framework for future low budget production?

In this introduction I intend to outline the aims and objectives of the iFeatures scheme, and the process it took to first shortlist and commission the slate of three films. I will then outline the content of the following chapters of the thesis, the structure and overall argument.

The initial impetus for the scheme

There were different production schemes in operation from 2006 which included Microwave in London, Atomic Pictures and Moxie Makers in the North East of England and Warp X in the East Midlands: see appendix 4 for further details). But what is clear from the other schemes is that they were created to maximise the potential of cheap digital production techniques, where a feature could be produced for same budget as a short captured on expensive celluloid. However, the creator of iFeatures also saw an opportunity to use digital marketing and distribution to get the films to an audience and build a sustainable filmmaking infrastructure.

iFeatures was the second iteration of a low budget feature film production scheme created and managed by Chris Moll, a film producer with first-class experience. He was at Aardman Animations in Bristol where he produced a half hour episode of the Wallace & Gromit franchise *The Wrong Trousers* in 1993 which won an Oscar. He spent fifteen years in the independent sector which included running his own company Harvest Films.

Digital Departures (2007-9) was the first low budget production scheme which Moll ran based in Liverpool. It was funded by Northwest Vision + Media, BBC Films, Liverpool's Culture Company (created as part of Liverpool's 2008 Capital of Culture celebrations) and the UKFC. Chris Moll was the Trade and Investment Director for Northwest Vision + Media, the agency behind the initiative. It made and released three feature films each with a budget of £250,000. This scheme had a great deal of success with *Of Time and the City*, a documentary essay directed by Terence Davies about his childhood experiences in Liverpool. This specialist film had commercial and critical success; good sales of 10,000 DVDs by the BFI which handled its distribution, and won the New York Critics Circle Award in

2009 (iFeatures, 2010b). The scheme also commissioned a football-themed obsessional love story called *Kicks* and a horror film called *Salvage*. In 2009 Moll joined regional screen agency South West Screen with executive producer credits for four features and numerous short films between 2006 and 2009 (IMDb, 2012).

Moll believed the Digital Departures' films did not achieve their potential due to weak marketing and distribution. They attached an external executive producer to each film to embed commercial acumen in the production team. Creative Skillset offered intensive industry training and mentoring and the digital marketing strategy information was also integrated through the appointment of Liz Rosenthal as a digital marketing consultant who was also CEO of Power to the Pixel, an organisation that trains filmmakers to engage with digital media. However, Chris Moll, while recognising the ability of low budget filmmakers to create projects that could punch above their weight in production terms (South West Screen, 2009) found that the films struggled to find audiences against mainstream competition, which had marketing budgets and could engage audiences through traditional paid-for media. Moll described at training sessions how low budget films typically had poor audience visibility against other films released at the same time for theatrical distribution. As a result, Moll wanted to recruit filmmakers into iFeatures who were aware, to some degree, of the film business and market for their film. In short, who were entrepreneurial. The training offered to the shortlisted teams included masterclasses from distributors and marketers to focus the attention of the filmmakers on the eventual audience for their films (Moll, 2010).

iFeature's objectives

The objectives of iFeatures were made explicit to all of the 550 teams which applied. The guidelines stated on the first page of the application forms that:

iFeatures' intends to raise the bar in micro/low-cost filmmaking at every level – development, production, marketing, distribution and training. Through its partnerships and accompanying professional development programme, it will support the production and distribution ambitions of all participants, developing not just exceptional films but also entrepreneurially-driven teams of filmmakers with the skills, self-confidence and relationships to make significant impact in mainstream feature film.

(iFeatures, 2009a p.2)

This statement is worth unpacking to understand fully the demands it would place on the teams of filmmakers. The list of stages: 'development, production, marketing,[and] distribution' make it clear that the project had wider scope and focus than simply the production. What is not clear from this statement is just who would be responsible for marketing and distribution and how these functions would be financed. However, it was clear that development and production should be given equal emphasis with marketing and distribution by the 'entrepreneurially-driven teams' with 'distribution ambitions'. Chris Moll (Moll, 2010) stated on training days with the twelve shortlisted teams that production was traditionally the focus of creative teams but that in the low budget sphere this meant that the finished films underperformed commercially against larger budget productions and effectively 'disappeared' from the attention and wallets of audiences. Moll saw that this had happened to the films produced in the Digital Departures scheme and was obviously keen to see a different outcome for the output of the iFeatures scheme. As a result, the production of the physical film would not be regarded as the sole focus of the teams' attentions. The successful exploitation through marketing and distribution would be fundamental to the creative development of their films.

Moll intended that iFeatures should be a testbed for a new generation of ambitious and entrepreneurial filmmakers who, despite low budgets, compete for screens in the mainstream film exhibition sector (Moll, 2010) and ‘embrace the myriad opportunities of digital distribution’ (iFeatures, 2009a p. 2). At this time there was a great deal of optimism in digital marketing and distribution due to its low cost and ease of access. It was hoped that, for the first time, low budget filmmakers had a low cost system to get their films to their audience, and garner a potential box office return, bypassing a system dominated by American multinationals.

The application process and iFeature’s objectives

The iFeatures scheme had four main objectives which were used as selection criteria. I outline these below because it is important to understand that commercial success, rather than critical success, was central to its creation. Also application assessors were given significantly different criteria from the applicants.

The quality of the project

Applicants were told that all genres would be considered and that compelling cinematic (in other words not televisual) stories that ‘seek to challenge, move and entertain’ with a ‘clear authorial voice’ were expected although this was not defined further. The films should be ‘provocative, distinctive and ambitious’ in form and content, be made in the Bristol area within a budget of £300,000 and capture the essence of Bristol and its ‘values, culture, energy – and communicate these in ways that will resonate with audiences across the world’. (iFeatures, 2009a p. 3).

The assessor's guidelines for these criteria were more straightforward. The assessors were asked to focus on the 'creative merit' and grade the clarity of the story, the narrative arc, and the characters' journey (iFeatures, 2009b p. 3). Projects should be able to benefit from the training the scheme offered and the teams should be able in the application to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses. Also Bristol and its 'people, values, culture, and energy' (ibid.) needed to be central to the proposal, not inserted as a convenient backdrop. The filmmakers needed to be realistic and aware about the challenges of the budget and have potentially identified creative solutions.

The ability of the filmmakers

Applicants were encouraged to identify themselves as 'committed, ambitious, entrepreneurially driven' who would embrace the challenge of micro budget filmmaking. They needed to show a commitment and ambition to realise the project, proof of established skills, ambitions to develop careers within the industry and understand the challenges of the 'micro-budget parameters' (iFeatures, 2009a p. 3).

Here too, the assessors were instructed to identify if the filmmakers had the established skills to 'execute' and deliver the proposed project including specific skills of writing and direction. The assessors were also instructed to see if the team had identified collaborators (in the form of locations, facilities or key technicians from the film industry). It is clear that the assessors needed to be convinced that the projects would not only be finished to a high technical standard but that the participants were also 'hungry' for commercial success. The teams had to convince the assessors they were prepared to use all their energy, creativity

and resources to make a feature film that would punch above its weight (iFeatures, 2009a p. 4).

Market potential of the product

The applicants had to show 'commercial savvy' and have the ability to envisage the audience for their film (iFeatures, 2009a p. 9). They would also need the capability to deliver a distribution strategy for their film to maximise 'its access [to a wide or new audience], impact [culturally] and [financial] return' (ibid.). The demands on the filmmakers increased with the requirement to have the ability to 'pursue a range of innovative digital/online distribution options as well as more conventional forms'.

The assessor's instructions asked for evidence of an understanding of the potential audience and of the strategy for reaching that audience, including an understanding of marketing and distribution and the genre (or narrative) 'hooks' that were present in their project. The teams were expected to have some basic knowledge of the market, an appreciation of the need for brand positioning and to have analysed why similar feature film projects had been successful, or not. Alongside this, the teams should also be able to demonstrate that they had commercial aspirations for their film and were willing to engage with sales agencies and distributors to achieve this objective (iFeatures, 2009b pp. 4-5). The inclusion of these criteria is important as it fundamentally demonstrates iFeatures mantra 'that the film is only part of the project' (Moll, 2010). This exposes one of the fundamental changes to the grant aided sector and to British film policy – iFeatures wanted to position film as an industrial process with an instrumental profit motive. The scheme required that the films had the

potential to achieve financial success and that solely creative endeavours would not be supported.

The public benefit of the project

The filmmaking teams were asked to outline how their film would have an effect on the community beyond the expected screenings. The applicants' guidelines contained a vague requirement that projects should contribute to the 'cultural life of Bristol and deliver a broader public benefit' (iFeatures, 2009a p. 9). The proposed projects also needed to illustrate how they would engage with communities and audiences that were under-represented in mainstream filmmaking, and also to identify in their applications where their project 'encouraged and stimulated talent across the city's communities'. The vagueness of these requirements may have prevented some applicants from completing this section fully as it was unclear how they could achieve this outcome. On the other hand, the assessors were instructed to reward filmmakers who had identified 'outreach' programmes, to identify that the project stimulates a 'wider audience development strategy' and how it could impact on the region's 'reputation for creativity' (iFeatures, 2009b p. 5).

Conclusion

This comparison of the guidelines demonstrates how iFeatures was created with a recoupment ethos at its heart. The exploitation of the film was as important to the management as the creative development. This would have consequences for the success of the scheme.

The different emphases in the applicants' and assessors' criteria, although subtle, are significant. The lack of clear and full information benefitted those applicants with more experience applying for grants and this had the potential to undermine the inclusive ambitions of the initiative. In interviews conducted by the author, the shortlisted filmmakers revealed that they did not focus on all criteria equally. Some teams with greater experience in applying for grants anticipated that the scheme would focus on the narrative structure, and so the other criteria were regarded as secondary and given limited attention (Sterling, 2011). However, other applicants (McCormack, 2011 and Hayes, 2011) developed detailed marketing plans which they subsequently considered a wasted effort and as a result their project, *Our Own Shadows*, which was part of the final six, was not commissioned.

iFeatures – the scheme's process and milestones

As figure 1 illustrates, the scheme had several development stages.

The scheme was launched on 20 October 2009 with a seven week submission window and a final deadline for applications of 8 December 2009. Over 550 applications were received from teams of filmmakers (usually a writer, director and producer) of both drama and documentary projects from across the UK (Blackburn, 2011). The application process required applicants to submit a four page outline of the project, together with a statement about how it met the objectives of the scheme, including a brief written 'pitch' as to why the film should be made, and CVs of the team with examples of work or show reels from the writer and director.

Figure 1. Scheduled milestones and events for iFeatures.

| Key dates | Event |
|---------------------------|---|
| 20 October 2009 | Launch of scheme |
| 8 December 2009 | Submission deadline |
| 4 January 2010 | Selection panel #1 heard 26 pitches to select 12 projects |
| 25 January – 5 March 2010 | Initial development phase with 12 teams |
| 11 March 2010 | Selection panel #2 |
| 15 March – 23 April 2010 | Full development phase starts with 6 teams |
| From June 2010 onwards | Greenlight of slate of 3 films |
| From July 2010 onwards | Films in production |
| From early 2011 | Films delivered / premiered |

A shortlist of around 70 projects was made by assessors who were made up from employees of South West Screen, its primary partner organisation, BBC Films, and external assessors from some of the funding organisations. That shortlist was then further assessed by the script executive Shefali Malhoutra (Malhoutra, 2011) and an interview list of 26 projects was drawn up.

In January 2010, the 26 teams were asked to pitch their project, approach and team to a panel of iFeatures management, funders, and the film industry. The panels had permanent members who were part of every selection panel. These included Chris Moll, the architect of the scheme, Steve Jenkins, Head of BBC Acquisitions, Counsellor Simon Cooke, Deputy

Leader of Bristol City Council, Shefali Malhoutra, iFeatures' script executive, and Berenice Fugard, Head of Acquisitions at the distributor Optimum Releasing. Feature film directors were recruited for each panel to offer a wider perspective on the proposed films. Julien Temple, director of seventeen features, was recruited for the first panel. The panel discussed each project after the pitch, and also at the end of each day distilled the pitches into a working shortlist. At the end of three days of pitching, a full intensive discussion occurred which concentrated on the creative potential of the idea, its relationship to Bristol and its market potential. In the end, twelve projects were then invited to join the initial phase of the scheme.

Initial Development Phase

The twelve teams were invited to join the initial development phase of six weeks slated to run from 25 January until 5 March 2010. A small development grant of £2,500 was given to each of the teams to support the development of the outline to a full treatment of approximately fifteen to twenty pages (a scene-by-scene written description of the film but without any dialogue). Training and mentoring was also given to 'enhance skills and commercial knowledge'. Elements of this training, especially those about marketing and distribution, were controversial for the participants. This will be explored in detail in Chapter 4. At the end of the six weeks of the initial development stage, the twelve teams were required to pitch their idea in outline form to another panel. This included the permanent team and Rebecca O' Brien, producer of Ken Loach at her company Sixteen Films, and Sarah Gavron – Director of *Brick Lane* (2007). The six most impressive projects were selected to enter the full development stage. Projects were rejected if they appeared to be over-

ambitious and could not be realised in the £300k budget or the narrative had not been developed sufficiently within the time scale. One example of this was a period drama shot entirely in a studio using computer generated backgrounds.

The full development stage (15 March 2010 to 23 April 2010)

The six teams now entered into a six week development stage to produce the first draft of the shooting script. Each team received £10,000 to develop their outline to a full shooting script together with detailed preproduction notes on casting, locations, a full budget and schedule. Teams were encouraged to have organised script readings with actors to assess dialogue and/or performance workshops to develop the project.

Guidelines stated that the teams would be given practical assistance to test the market by building relationships with sales agents and distributors as well as 'securing of other financial and marketing partners through sponsorship, private equity, product placement and online media' (2009a, p. 4). At this point the scheme focused on developing commercial positioning within the market and 'in the ethos of iFeatures the emphasis will be on finding innovative routes to market'. At the end of this process the teams were invited to submit their scripts and production folders again and pitch the projects to the core panel of funders in June 2010. Unsuccessful projects would be placed into 'turnaround' i.e. offered to other production schemes or production companies without being saddled with costs incurred by iFeatures that could potentially interfere with these projects being developed further.

The production phase (from June 2010)

At the greenlight pitch, the winning three films were selected and the production budget of £300,000 awarded which was part funded by Bristol City Council, BBC Films, South West Screen, Film Agency Wales, National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (Nesta) and UK Film Council. Two commercial companies came on board to complete the production capital just before the three winning projects were greenlit in November 2010. Content International, a sales company, would coordinate both international and national distribution to cinemas and television and Matador Pictures, part of Regent Capital, which offered 'high net –worth' private individuals investment opportunities in packages or 'slates' of films, contributed the last part of the financing. This mixture of financial sources changed the selection criteria and development of the final films. In the original timescale, all three films would have been developed, shot, edited and screened in a year. However, the schedule was extended due to the production budget not being in place. The new partners demanded that one project return to pre-production so it could be rewritten, a process which delayed production for fourteen months. The total duration of the scheme had increased from twelve months to thirty months.

During this phase, the three greenlit teams signed contracts with iFeatures and its funding partners. This included a requirement to create the legal structure of a limited company, with typical accounting procedures and insurance cover. This would allow copyright clearances of third party material, acceptance of the licence agreement for BBC terrestrial rights, the appointment of collection agents or agencies, and to have a British cultural dimension to qualify for Film Tax Relief (HMRC, 2015 np and see later in Chapter 3) and the

recoupment of the investment and split of profits to be formalised legally (iFeatures, 2009a p. 5).

Mentoring and Training offered

Most of the training offered to the production teams was attended by the author and it consisted mainly of talks and seminars. One to one mentoring also took place which the author did not attend as it might have interfered with the process.

Initial development phase

The development programme (iFeatures, 2009d) for the twelve shortlisted teams included:

- One induction day (which included lectures on film distribution)
- Four training days (these included sessions on marketing and distribution, production management, art direction, cinematography)
- Two team mentoring sessions per team member
- As required: one-to-one script / project development sessions

The full development phase

Six teams were offered:

- Four more training days (these included pitching techniques, masterclasses for directors, producers and writers, and a Q&A with a casting directors)
- Two individual training sessions per team member
- As required: one-to-one script development and mentoring

Production phase

- Three individual training sessions which included directing sessions at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA).

Although this appears on face value to be extensive, the sessions that were witnessed raised some pedagogical issues. The applicants listened to the seminars but were not offered experiential teaching in any depth to allow the filmmakers the opportunity to confront their own ideological position towards marketing or to learn and apply the necessary marketing or business techniques. The training was designed around training needs assessments to plug 'skills gaps' during the induction although this left some of the directors unprepared for their role; one did not know how to direct actors confidently or knew the on-set protocols and had to learn it on the shoot. Another director did not realise the benefit of having a full shooting script or storyboards for a drama production having come from a documentary tradition. Finally the Polish director admitted she did not understand the differences between film genres as she claimed they were not used in Poland although iFeatures training had underscored this as being central to successful marketing to defined audiences. Therefore it could be argued that the scope of the training was too broad and shallow. The teams identified that they required more of a focus on the practical craft issues of technical filmmaking skills and not marketing and distribution knowledge. In a 'Catch 22' scenario, the marketing and distribution lectures identified problems affecting low budget films but offered no practical 'toolkit' of solutions or comprehensive case studies, which undermined the ability of teams to engage with marketing. This issue is analysed further in the chapter 4.

The final three selected projects

The original shortlisted twenty-six projects were a mixed bag. One documentary project was proposed which focused on the Bristol music scene, a science fiction 'mockumentary', a comedy horror featuring a monster snake terrorising Bristol's quayside, an Asian social realist drama, and numerous thrillers and crime movies. Some were too ambitious with complex creative or production issues, such as a science fiction idea that was, in the opinion of stakeholders, not realisable in the budget. However, by not rejecting interesting ideas and allowing teams to pitch these ideas, the recruitment process showed a willingness to consider 'left field' ideas. Various teams applied with star names attached to the productions or celebrity connections. The most well-known of these was veteran director Mike Hodges; in another team writer and broadcaster Julie Burchill was attached. The panel was not swayed by these applications from filmmaking celebrities, although the marketing potential of such a recruitment decision could have raised awareness via a cost effective PR campaign in the traditional media. For instance, in iFeatures' previous incarnation, Digital Departures, Terence Davies' film, *Of Time and the City* (2008), was successful due, in part, to his reputation as a British auteur and as he had not made a film for eight years. To commission a film with celebrities would have allowed these films a marketable narrative, such as 'Cult director returns in low budget scheme', and have cynically delivered iFeatures' objectives. A strength of the selection process was that they rejected these teams while supporting unknown teams with only a couple of short films under their belt.

Of the six films that entered the 'Full Development Phase' the following three were commissioned:

In the Dark Half was a supernatural thriller set in the outskirts of Bristol with the main theme of grief. The relationship between the country and the city, and rebirth of the spirit was also explored. The team included Bristol-based writer Lucy Catherine who had a track record as a writer in residence with the Bristol Old Vic Theatre, and television and radio scriptwriting. Based in London, director Al Siddons had a feature length documentary to his name about break-dancing called *Turn it Loose* (2009) as well as experience in making music videos. Margaret Matheson came onto the project as producer at a late stage and she had extensive experience with fifteen features under her belt.

Flying Blind was set in the aircraft industry of Bristol. This thriller follows a 40 year old female engineer who falls in love with a Moroccan student. With themes of betrayal, sexual taboos and terrorism, it was directed by a Polish Director Katarzyna Kilmkiewicz, whose short *Hanoi Warsaw* won the prestigious European Film Academy Award in 2009. It was produced by Bristol-based Alison Sterling who was making the move up from a BAFTA nominated short *Turning* (2010), and was created and initially written by Caroline Harrington, who had written episodes of BBC Radio's *The Archers* series, with Naomi Wallace and Bruce McLeod (*The War Boys*, 2009) co-writing the shooting script.

8 Minutes Idle was a slacker romantic comedy set in a call centre in Bristol. It was to be directed by Mark Simon Hewis who had an award winning short film (*Life Size Zeotrope*, 2007) to his name. The film was based on an award winning novel by Matt Thorne and the script was written by Matt Thorne and Nicolas Blincoe who was the only team member not connected to Bristol. The film was produced by Sarah Cox

whose company, Arthur Cox, had a reputation for animation and the delivery of high-end commercials and animated films. The film's central character Dan was forced to live in his office, a call centre. While he attempted to hide his living arrangements and navigate dysfunctional office politics, his main aim was to win the heart of co-worker Teri.

The following three did not win a commission and were placed in 'turnaround':

The Bristol Job – a family heist movie about an eleven year old girl who discovered her parents were too poor to pay for her last school trip so decided to rob a bank with her two best friends (Rubberductions, 2010). Written by Carol Nobel, it was to be produced by Nick Pitt and directed by Matt Golding.

Our Own Shadows – A thriller about a man who, after years in an Indian prison for the murder of a close friend while drunk, returned to Bristol and began to question who was guilty and which of his old 'friends' might have actually been responsible for the death. It was written by Matt Hayes and Conor McCormack. Conor McCormack was also to direct and the producer was to be Abigail Davies.

Novikov B - a science fiction crime thriller set in the near future when all narcotics have been legalised. The discovery of a dead body with traces of a new 'superdrug' threatened to throw the fragile status quo out of sync. Grieves, a near-future police inspector, was given the case and this took him into dangerous territory where the hunter became the hunted. Written and directed by Justin Trefgarne and produced by Daniel Jewel.

The final selection process was not straight-forward. *In the Dark Half* was a clear favourite and the first to go into production because it had what the panel thought was a clear genre with a defined audience. *The Bristol Job* was the second favourite but when its director withdrew from the project it returned to development and, in the end, lost out to *8 Minutes Idle (8MI)*. *8MI* had support of the UKFC as it was deemed to be the most commercial. *Flying Blind* had also been green lit and was due to go into production before being unexpectedly returned to development (Sterling, 2011) for a major script rewrite. Of the three projects not greenlit, *The Bristol Job* has not been developed further but *Our Own Shadows* was in development with the Irish Film Board and the writer and director have continued to work together. *Novikov B* was made with private funding, renamed as *Junk* and starred Jonathan Pryce. However, it had not found distribution as of May 2016.

From DIY marketing to agency led

In February 2011, after the first film had been finished, iFeatures announced what amounted to a change of strategy. To aid the development of a marketing strategy for the films, iFeatures negotiated with Creative Industries' Innovation Network (iNET), the European Regional development fund led by South West Screen, for a grant of £45,000 to create audience engagement plans. It called this scheme iINNOVATE. The intention was to 'make the very best use of online, mobile and interactive tools and services to identify and connect with audiences' (iFeatures, 2010 p. 1) as 'few independent filmmakers have the necessary time, resources and expertise to devote to such activity' (ibid., p. 2). The tender document aimed to attract 'digital, marketing and advertising professionals based in the

south west of England' (ibid. p. 3) with added support and mentoring for the teams from the iFeatures stakeholders. There were eight aims that included:

- Identify and capture the target audience
- Build communities of interest
- Create assets that build on the film's story world
- Explore brand, and other, partnerships
- Explore alternative revenue streams
- Identify key performance indicators to measure success

The activities that could be pitched encompassed website design and construction, digital marketing materials, social media campaigns, interactive design/games, transmedia elements, augmented reality games and online data collection. The tender pointed potential companies to film marketing case studies on website 'Power to the Pixel' such as *Iron Sky* and *Age of Stupid*, Lance Weiller's *Head Trauma*, and the UKFC's case studies on *The Infidel* (2010) and *The Disappearance of Alice Creed* (2009) (ibid. pp. 5-6). The grant would be split between each of the iFeatures films giving £15,000 to each (ibid. p. 3).

The structure of the thesis

This introductory chapter introduces the scheme and the projects. The rest of the thesis has been constructed to offer context to the three case studies, which focus on how the iFeatures films were marketed and distributed. Perhaps unconventionally, I have reviewed and analysed the relevant literature in each of the contextual chapters as I felt this allowed a clearer understanding of the potential conflicts or issues and my arguments.

In the second chapter I have included an extensive methodology before venturing into the body of the thesis so that the approach and concepts of this research are transparent. This includes analysis of literature over positive and negative aspects of the different methodologies employed in the thesis. One impetus for this research was to explore whether creative teams could develop an understanding of digital marketing and distribution and so gain control over their output and its revenues. This would enable an industry which is characterised as a cottage industry (see DCMS, 1998a and later) with companies and workers living by their wits in a boom and bust cycle. To evaluate the context of iFeatures creation and organisation, this thesis is informed by various overlapping theoretical paradigms of cultural sociology, business studies and marketing research. It has used online social media monitoring, surveys and in-depth interviews which are understood to be valid and reliable in some disciplines but not in others. These differences are analysed and resolved where possible. The methodology also introduced ethical concerns about the impact on contributors' reputations and livelihoods which are analysed and discussed. Finally the methodology's weaknesses, and its impact on the findings, are also identified and discussed.

In the third chapter, 'The problems of low budget feature film production and distribution in the UK', introduces many of the issues that have dominated the British film industry from the perspective of distribution. The inadequate responses of the British government to US domination is analysed in order to indicate why the iFeatures scheme was conceived in its particular form. This was related to the hopes for digital marketing and distribution in correcting the 'market failure' which threatened to limit permanently the ability of the British film industry to be sustainable. I have reviewed the literature by commentators on the history of the film industry and made links to primary sources that further our

understanding of the British film industry in the digital age. Therefore, this chapter helps the reader to have a context for the current state of the British film industry and the optimism for digital marketing and distribution.

Next, the thesis moves on to understanding the conflicting attitudes to marketing held by iFeatures stakeholders and the production teams. Chapter four, 'Understanding attitudes to marketing in the creative teams of low budget feature films', analyses the main teaching offered to the applicants and what it wanted to achieve set against the attitudes to marketing of the production teams. This chapter analyses the commentaries and literature of attitude formation, especially those using Bourdieu's framework (1986, 1996) to understand the motivations of the teams which largely rejected personal responsibility for the commercial aims of the iFeatures scheme in favour of maximising validation by peers by making work that was creatively innovative. It will be argued that the conflict between these positions had a major impact on both the financial return and creative success of the scheme.

Chapter five, 'Developing a strategy for the distribution and marketing of low budget British feature films', focuses on the digital marketing and distribution concepts that have been employed in the low budget sector. Since *The Blair Witch Project* in 1999 which used innovative nascent digital marketing techniques to launch the film, and with the emergence of digital distribution, there has been increased use of these strategies. This chapter therefore discusses, via a review of the marketing literature, the importance of strategies that were employed in the early 2010s to launch films with both high and low budgets as the power of digital marketing was realised. In this section, case studies from low budget

filmmakers working outside the low budget grant-aided schemes were used to compare approaches.

The individual case studies of the iFeatures slate make up subsequent three chapters.

Although the case studies are analysed using data from similar sources such as surveys and online social media monitoring, each one focuses on different issues or aspects of marketing and distribution. For example, in chapter six, *In the Dark Half* was characterised by an almost complete rejection of digital marketing as the distributor Verve relied on traditional marketing. *Flying Blind*, in chapter seven, was distributed by Soda Pictures which placed it in its low budget marketing and distribution scheme New British Cinema Quarterly and which worked with various digital agencies and specialists to raise its profile on social media.

Chapter eight analyses *8MI* which was due to be distributed by Revolver Entertainment, which had experience in developing features for young adults, in what was thought to be a perfect match between filmmaker and distributor. However, after Revolver Entertainment became bankrupt, the producer arranged a Kickstarter campaign and raised £40,000 for marketing. Therefore, out of a near distribution disaster, the film was released two years later than planned with a social media presence. Therefore each of the case studies had a unique narrative, which determined its approach to marketing and distribution.

I pull the strands of the thesis together in an extensive conclusion which identifies how this doctoral research contributes to knowledge, and what both academic and industry readers can learn from this study. Finally, areas for further study are also identified.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe how and why data was collected and analysed in the ways that it was. Only then can the validity and reliability of the results be judged and whether this study is generalizable to other similar situations become apparent. The intention of the research was that the evaluation of the iFeatures filmmakers' marketing methods and solutions described would be useful to other low budget British filmmakers. iFeatures promoted the innovative use of digital marketing as a low-cost solution to building awareness in the hope that the films would find an audience and be profitable. A lot of different data needed to be captured: the creative and business decisions that influenced the selection and development of the film scripts and production; the development of marketing and distribution strategies and tactics in traditional and digital media; and the effect these decisions subsequently had on cinema audiences and revenue streams.

There were many potential challenges in the scope of the project, which are discussed at length in this chapter. The research project was conceived as an ambitious multi-disciplinary undertaking drawing on diverse areas such as cultural studies, marketing, business studies, sociology, and film studies. As a result, the literature reviews were extensive and time was required to absorb and evaluate the different disciplinary attitudes and to navigate between the potential differences. For example, the early part of the study threw up dissonances between research frameworks from business studies and sociology as they came from different philosophical traditions. The project combined mixed data

collection methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, innovative online social network monitoring and self-administered surveys. To analyse the data, both qualitative and quantitative methods needed to be used, and different software including NVivo and SPSS were employed.

This chapter therefore outlines and discusses the theoretical frameworks and perspectives that have informed the methodology design and indicates the boundaries of the research including inadvertent omissions or limitations that became apparent during the project. In this light, the author makes a tentative claim to originality in adding knowledge to an emergent hybrid field of study Production Studies, where both the industrial and the creative aspects of the creative Industries are discussed simultaneously (Spicer and Presence, 2016 pp. 6-7).

The development of the project and epistemology

It is necessary to understand the motivations of the author, how the project came into being and its context to fully understand the decisions made. The research was started with funding from the Digital Cultures Research Centre, part of the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) and was later part-funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), which awarded a studentship based on the scope of the proposed project but also on the author's past employment and academic studies. I had been a factual television producer for almost twenty years and was particularly interested in the business of media and its relationship to creative work. I was also completing a Masters of Science in Marketing and starting to lecture at different universities on television production. The sum of my experience and attitudes seemed to chime with the project's needs and objectives.

My knowledge of television production is particularly important to this study. My knowledge of the media industry allowed me to build rapport and trust with participants, who were themselves from television backgrounds mainly and new to feature film production. This allowed me, I believe, to obtain data that was commercially, professionally and personally sensitive. Also I am an active listener as this is a key requirement in factual television direction. At the same time, without personal experience of feature film production, I came with no specific past history or prejudice about the strategy or tactics adopted and so was in a position to ask, or pose, intentionally naïve questions to reveal insights that an industry insider might have been unable to ask as they were 'obvious' and therefore not considered. As the production teams confronted new situations, I became a 'sounding board' for their frustrations and grievances, as if they were talking to a peer, as they dealt with the considerable pressures of making their debut low budget feature film.

In overview, this chapter will discuss, with reference to relevant literature on each methodology, the different techniques and strategies employed to collect and analyse the data. This included sections on secondary data and its appropriateness to the current project. As the in-depth interviews provided many insights into the attitudes of the participants, I have included a list of the interviewees in appendix 1, and indicated how their recruitment fitted into the data collection methodology. It is also important to describe the software used to code and organise the participants' interviews to demonstrate how any insights were defined and analysed. As a proprietary social media system was used to collect online data, this chapter also needs to describe and evaluate the process of 'sentiment analysis' that was followed and other approaches that were rejected. As the research was intended to be a multi-disciplinary project from the outset, a discussion about the research methods and their validity, reliability and generalizability to other fields is also

discussed. Finally, the impact of the research on participants is also outlined and what approaches were undertaken to maintain the project in acceptable ethical limits.

Reading strategy

As a result of the multidisciplinary nature of the project, the reading period has been extensive. The author conducted an intense and broad literature review over the first year of this doctoral study. This followed what Kwan (2008 p. 43) described as the demarcation view of 'think-then-write' where literature is researched and then later written about, rather than a period of writing from the outset of the study where information and textualisation of the information are carried out simultaneously. This was in part a response to the multi-disciplinary nature of the study and the requirement to identify the gaps in knowledge. The literature on British low budget feature film distribution is limited and not contained in a readily available corpus of work and therefore required extensive searching to find and to extract the pertinent issues. For instance, the reading strategy threw up different potential theoretical 'lenses' to use to analyse the insights that were emerging from the in-depth interviews. I could have taken a 'pure' business studies or marketing approach applying principles such as relationship marketing, service-dominant logic or social marketing.

At the same time, I became aware that many cultural studies commentators were referencing the work of Pierre Bourdieu which had become a dominant paradigm in sociology and, less so, in film studies. Further research indicated that his work on habitus, fields and the cultural industry applied to the experiences and tensions of creative industry businesses and specifically of the stakeholders in the iFeatures scheme. As business studies

researchers were not applying Bourdieu's theories, this seemed to be an opportunity to develop further the multi-disciplinary nature of the project and to fill another gap in knowledge. The outcome of this approach allowed me to understand and analyse the artistic motivations of the filmmakers and their antipathy towards the commercial aspects of marketing their films. Bourdieu's work on cultural capital and on field theory was explored in depth to form the basis for analysis in a full chapter of this thesis.

The development of regions outside of the main media production hub of London continues to be a site of tension both in research and policy-making. Pratt (2005) argues that there are tensions and inconsistencies between explanations of the relationship between creative industries and cities. Michael Porter's cluster concept (1998) which proposed that productivity, innovation and new business formation offered cities competitive advantages, was highly influential. Richard Florida argued that the growth of cities derived from their attractiveness to what he termed the 'creative class' Terry Flew argues that the field of cultural economic geography offers a much more an empirical framework through which to study the effect of clusters and regions on creative development (for an overview of these arguments see Flew, 2010 pp 85-89).

Lastly, I am also aware of the emerging sub-field of production studies, pioneered by John Thornton Caldwell (2008 and Mayer et al, 2009) who explored the cultural practices of the audio-visual production workers in Los Angeles, and critically analysed their entrenched belief systems about their approaches and 'highly coded' (2008, p. 2) internalised rationale for their outputs. Researchers such Paul MacDonald have analysed the traditional marketing and distribution strategies of Hollywood film in the USA and UK respectively (McDonald and Wasko, 2009). Hesmondhalgh and Pratt (2005), Garnham (1990), Drake

(2013) and many others discuss the interaction of policy and creativity and the tensions between the cultural /creative industries. As media production and distribution move into digital realms Jennifer Holt has written and edited books on traditional media industries and production studies (Holt and Perren, 2009, Holt and Sanson, 2014 pp. 19-39)). Spicer and Presence (2016 p. 7) argue that this new emerging field of production studies, which combines cultural studies, organisational studies and business studies approaches, offers the opportunity to understand the 'messy complexity of production cultures' by analysing the tensions between teams and their stakeholders. This approach is valuable in the analysis of the contradictory interviews that were recorded by the iFeatures participants. Because of the reflective honesty of the participants these became a rich seam of qualitative data to mine. Although as a point of caution to new researchers, Caldwell (2008) and Holt (2013 p. 183) both warn there is a need to sift through participants' spin and promotion of their roles or beliefs and to navigate the tensions in the agendas between different stakeholders. They also argued that the fragility of relationships between academics and filmmakers may prevent a true understanding of the root cause of issues.

Data collection methods

Timeline of the research project

The time taken for the data to emerge has far exceeded the usual scope for a full time PhD study due to various factors. The scoping of the iFeatures project started in January 2010 when, initially, the subject of the research was concerned with low budget cultural filmmaking practices. However, as the training for the participants of iFeatures began to

emphasise digital marketing, and with the author’s recent completion of an MSc in Marketing in 2009-2010, the focus of the research changed with agreement from the iFeatures management and supervisory team. An application to the AHRC for a studentship grant followed, which was awarded in August 2010, with the official start of a full time PhD in October 2010 with the expected finish in October 2013. At the outset the timescale was tight. As the iFeatures scheme was conceived as a rapid development and production process the three films were intended to have their premieres in January 2011 i.e. within twelve months, and with marketing and distribution expected to happen before the end of 2012. However, the production process was extended with delays caused by late commissioning due to script issues, longer production periods and the preferred distribution windows for release. These delays meant that data collection took thirty months longer than intended and finished with the DVD release of *8 Minutes Idle* in June 2014.

Timeline for the iFeatures slate: theatrical and DVD release windows

As the table below indicates, the first film was released within the intended window but the two remaining films were released two to three years later than intended. Data collection occurred over an extended period, which meant that writing up periods also lengthened.

Figure 2. Theatrical and DVD release windows of films in iFeatures.

| Film | Production | Theatrical Release | DVD / VOD release |
|-------------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| <i>In the Dark Half</i> | November 2010 | 10 August 2012 | 22 October 2012 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| <i>Flying Blind</i> | January 2012 | 12 April 2013 | 15 July 2013 |
| <i>8 Minutes Idle</i> | March 2011 | 14 February 2014 | 2 June 2014 |

Overview of data collection

It was planned that data collection would involve four methods. They were participant observation at training days, in-depth interviews with stakeholders and film industry experts; online monitoring of digital marketing; and surveys of cinemagoers. At the various stages of data collection, different forms of analysis were used. A hybrid strategy using both quantitative and qualitative approaches was used to uncover themes, evaluate strategies and understand stakeholder and audience motivations. This multiple method research methodology was adopted to collect different data at different times based on the principle of *triangulation*. This is where data is collected from different sources and at different times to develop and verify emerging ideas and to interpret the results (Davis et al., 2011 p. 248 and Dahlstrom et al., 2008 p. 139). Therefore, to investigate these areas fully, the project required data collection at various times and in different forms.

Other instruments to collect data were rejected. Focus groups of audiences were deemed by the author to be too difficult to recruit without incentive. Also the small samples increased subjectivity, reduced reliability and made focus groups, in this instance, methodologically unjustifiable (Hair et al., 2006, p. 199). Post-viewing surveys were rejected as a tactic as it would, in all likelihood, have offered too few respondents due to non-response errors and would have confused the reason for the survey, i.e. I was interested in

the motivations due to marketing for attending the performance rather than the attitude to the film's production values and narrative, which would have been in the forefront of their minds after seeing the film. This might have caused bias or non-truthful answers (ibid. pp. 222-226) as the reception of the marketing of the films required data from actual and potential cinemagoers who could not be pre-selected.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were carried out for various reasons. They were particularly useful to uncover and explore the nature of tensions between the attitudes and motivations of different stakeholders. As some interviews were repeated over two to three years, they were also useful to establish and build rapport with key stakeholders so that maximum levels of trust were built up to enable the exchange of sensitive data. The interviews were very productive and threw up many insights that were used to contextualise contemporary examples of low budget films and their distribution and to analyse iFeatures' objectives.

In-depth interviews were carried out with iFeatures' management, stakeholders and production teams to ascertain their attitudes, and potential strategies and tactics for such campaigns. The author also needed to understand the contextual background to iFeatures' publicised focus on digital marketing and how that might interrelate with traditional marketing.

The in-depth interviews were carried out mainly between July 2011 and December 2012 although the final interview was conducted in November 2015. In this sense the in-depth interviews were used to develop primary data about the scheme and the motivations of

stakeholders, to develop hypotheses and test them and then refine these hypotheses within the grounded theory paradigm (see below for further discussion). The interviews were usually conducted face-to-face as it was thought that this was the most appropriate way to build trust, clarity and to capture honest insights. The ability to read body language as a qualifier of congruence between verbal thoughts and actual feelings was also important and offset the time and travel expenses. Only one interview was carried out by telephone - with the producer of *In the Dark Half*, Margaret Matheson - due to intense demands on her time and a perception by the author of the fragile nature of the agreement to be interviewed.

Sample selection

Twenty-five semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out (for a full list see Appendix 1). The selection for most subjects (eighteen) was obvious. They were either a member of the production teams, key iFeatures stakeholders such as the UKFC or BBC, the commercial funders, on selection panels or had an impact on the marketing of the films. Seven interviews were from comparator low to medium budget filmmakers or people outside the scheme. The insights from the in-depth interviews were used throughout the thesis, that is to say, in the three contextual chapters and in the three case studies of each of the films. The first interview was with Lucy Catherine, writer of *In the Dark Half*, in July 2011, and the final one was with Alison Sterling, Producer of *Flying Blind* in November 2015. Twenty-five interviewees were recruited and there were thirty one separate interviews i.e. some interviewees were interviewed more than once due to production developments. The in-depth interviews ceased when the number of insights plateaued and the list of potential interviewees had been exhausted.

Question strategy

In each case, the interviews were semi structured by asking open prepared questions. In some senses this was a 'fishing' exercise. After listening to responses, and taking regard of body language, secondary questions would be asked to explore any insights or to clarify responses. Once those lines of enquiry had been exhausted, the interview returned to the planned questions in order to reduce bias and to make sure all areas were covered. Each interview took between 75 minutes and 100 minutes to complete.

The questions followed this general structure:

- Questions on the application process – what marketing aspects were perceived in the development of the project?
- Project development – was their project developed in ways that improved the marketability of the project?
- Audience – what was the stakeholders' / production team's concept of the potential audience?
- Production – how did the budget constrain the creative ambitions and therefore the marketing of the project?
- Digital marketing and distribution – what were the strategies that were suitable, what advice did you take and who was carrying out the work?
- Traditional marketing – what techniques were you using and what advice have you received?
- Cinema – what was the intended audience and how would they be persuaded to attend?
- Sustainability – is this a sustainable marketing and distribution model for low budget feature film production?

The interviews tested whether insights from the literature review were proven, disputed, or whether wholly new themes were emerging. They also showed that there were conflicting

attitudes to iFeatures commercial objectives (explored later in chapter 4) which meant that the planned DIY marketing campaigns by the production teams would be ineffective.

Interview sample selection strategy

The interviews fell into different categories of respondent, although in this research the interviews covered at least two of the following classifications outlined by Hair, et al. (2006, pp. 202-203). Some interviewees were 'experienced', that is they were selected for their experience and knowledge that could offer insights to the research; some were selected for their ability to evaluate the scheme or knowledge of low budget feature film production, that is to say, 'protocol' interviewing; and all were 'articulative' (ibid., p. 205) interviews where conflicts among the stakeholders and in industry practice were explored.

For the in-depth interviews, I attempted to interview the writer, director and producer of each of the three films. I was able eventually to do this for the whole team associated with *In the Dark Half*. However, the original writer for *Flying Blind* had been replaced during the project and did not respond to invitations to participate but I did have excellent access to the producer and director. For *8 Minutes Idle*, I interviewed the producer and director. The writing team was willing, but due to their professional commitments, we were unable to arrange a mutually convenient time within a timescale when the memory of events would have been fresh. Other stakeholders were generous with their time and also helped through 'snowballing' (a recommendation of further interviewees from their own contacts). For example, Steve Jenkins, BBC's Head of Acquisitions, facilitated an interview with Ed Fletcher, at distributor Soda Pictures. This was particularly useful as Fletcher not only offered insights about the potential issues with digital marketing for low budget British

feature films and iFeature's commercial objectives, but subsequently became the distributor for *Flying Blind* and defined its distribution strategy.

In the end twenty-five people gave in-depth interviews for this research. Most were internal stakeholders to the iFeatures scheme, but others were external stakeholders who were not involved with iFeatures such as independent filmmakers Christian Martin and Guy de Beaujue. It was necessary to ascertain if their experience of making low budget British features and their attitudes to marketing confirmed or disputed emerging themes and theories. One interview with Emily James was the least applicable to the research as she is a documentary director. However, it was useful to confirm whether the issues that emerged were only applicable to fiction. They were not.

Some people, usually producers, were interviewed several times due to their responsibility for marketing and distribution; Sarah Cox, producer of *8 Minutes Idle* and Alison Sterling, producer of *Flying Blind* were both interviewed three times at different stages of production. In both cases, two interviews were conducted before or after production and another when distribution had been completed. Toby Melling, the sales agent and funder for the slate, was also interviewed three times; at first he outlined the potential general issues affecting international distribution of low budget films and iFeatures in particular. Later, he also supplied financial data for each of the films and estimated their lifetime income.

Methodological justification for in-depth interviews

The author used constructivist grounded theory, as proposed by Charmaz and Bryant (2006), as it was not positivist (Clarke and Friese, 2007, p. 436), more relativist and subjectivist (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006 p. 31) and was more congruent with the author's own epistemology as the political role and influence of the author was acknowledged in data collection. Constructivism, which had its roots in Strauss's development and evolution of Grounded Theory from 1987 onwards (ibid. p. 32), 'denies the existence of an objective reality believing instead that 'realities are social constructions of the mind' (ibid., p. 26). Traditional grounded theory attempts to generate and discover a 'unified theoretical explanation' (Strauss and Corbin, 2008 p. 107) that has been informed explicitly from the participants' responses rather than through established theory or the author's prejudice (see Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

However, there has been growing criticism over 'the amount, depth, and quality (i.e. accuracy) of data' (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011 p. 298), of 'classical' grounded theory research and, therefore, its theoretical credibility. Siggelkow summarised the main criticism and the dilemma faced by grounded theory fundamentalists who claimed to have 'entered the field with no preconceptions. In my view, an open mind is good; an empty mind is not.' (2007, p. 21). He then goes on to argue that observations were bound to be influenced by prior knowledge. There was also discussion that the originators of grounded theory would not have been so naïve (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006 p. 28) and so I would argue that traditional grounded theory has been misinterpreted and required reframing by Charmaz. It is recognised in this research that any themes that emerged from the interviews were

contextualised by the author's personal experience and accompanying research into the history of distribution and marketing studies.

Data collection for the purposes of hypothesis development or testing ceased when 'theoretical saturation' was reached, or in other words when new distinctions or refinements to the emerging theories stopped (Dey, 2004 p. 81). For instance, as the interviews were carried out, a theme emerged around the attitudes of stakeholders of low budget filmmaking as being either a commercial or an artistic endeavour. The author was particularly receptive to this insight and tested whether this was a minority viewpoint in subsequent interviews using 'theoretical sampling', (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011 p. 292) with iFeatures stakeholders, as well as comparator 'independent filmmakers' working outside iFeatures or similar schemes. This theme was confirmed and became a hypothesis which was later tested in the online and survey data collection instruments.

Qualitative data collection

Interview analysis

Transcript analysis of the in-depth interviews was carried out in two ways. The first fifteen interviews were transcribed professionally through a grant from the Digital Cultures Research Centre, with the remaining ten conducted in 2013-14 being transcribed by the author using voice recognition software. In each case the transcript was checked for accuracy against the original recordings before the recordings were permanently destroyed. Although the participants in interviews had consented to the data being available for further study by researchers, some recordings of the iFeatures recruitment process did not have

written consent of all participants, although the recording process was announced. Additionally, some statements, if taken out of context, would have misrepresented the views of the participants. It was also important in building trust and rapport that stakeholders felt that commercial and reputationally sensitive statements would not be made public. iFeatures' contract with the author also assigned them the authority to redact commercial information from the thesis prior to wider dissemination beyond the internal assessment of the PhD by the examiners. The author felt that this compromise did not limit the outcomes but made the project stronger as it included data of secondary distribution contracts that were made between the sales agent and the foreign distributors. This revealed the fees and expected revenues, which allowed the author to fully understand if digital marketing had been successful or not.

NVivo was selected as the analysis software due to it being the preferred package at the University of the West of England. NVivo is a form of quality data analysis software (QDAS) which allows users to manage data, to manage ideas including conceptual and theoretical knowledge, to query of data complex and simple questions, to visualise data to aid interpretation, and to create reports about the data (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013 p. 3). It has been argued that caution is required when using NVivo, as although it is a useful and powerful tool, it can also prevent the researcher from getting an overview of the project (Kozinets, 2002 p. 64) by getting bogged down with coding, which, because it has become so much easier is therefore a more distracting process. As Goulding (1998 p. 868) argued, simultaneous data collection and analysis can encourage the researcher to continue to focus on collection rather than analysing what has been collected. However, other researchers argue that the software acts like a lens to gain 'augmented or alternative' views of issues (White et al., 2012 p. 45) although a review of research methodologies from 2000-2010

showed that few researchers used it comprehensively because of their unfamiliarity with all the functions of the packages (ibid. pp. 52 and 66).

The concerns of these researchers and potential dangers of using the software did not materialise for the following reasons. As stated above, the author's epistemological position rejected the existence of an objective reality and so took a relativist ontological position where 'rationality, truth, reality, right, good, or norms' are linked and relative to the researcher's conceptual schemes, theoretical frameworks, lifestyle and culture (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006 p. 26). It is acknowledged by the author that for this research the software was used to collate statements into themes and then to conduct the analysis manually. The software has functions that were rejected as unsuitable, including graphic representations. This was done due to the author's belief that tools used without understanding the programming behind them can produce results that could easily skew the research; and this is argued by Hutchinson et al., (2009 p. 285) as a recurrent issue with using software. A hybrid approach of computer and manual coding was developed as Schmidt (2010 p. 145) recommends, based on traditional coding techniques. The author then spent two months sifting through the transcripts line by line. The author annotated the transcripts and placed them into single, or usually, multiple nodes. Each node was then analysed within the software with further contextual notes being written where themes emerged. The software was useful in being able to show where concerns and issues were shared and it enabled emerging themes to be built into hypotheses, which were then tested by subsequent interviews, and in online or survey data. Later interviews were treated in the same way and broken down into the same themes or within existing or new nodes. This allowed early conclusions or hypotheses to be tested.

Coding, which 'attaches meaning labels to sections of the data' (Hutchinson et al., 2009 p. 289), can be responsible for introducing errors into data analysis. Coding can reinforce prejudices about the data and prevent counter intuitive themes being recognised. One remedial approach to this is to 'blind code' with multiple researchers (see Barker et al., 2001 p. 169) so that data would only be placed in codes after agreement had been reached to limit researcher bias; however, this approach was not possible for a single PhD researcher. As I accepted that I might make assumptions about the interviews, I purposely took two months to analyse, line by line, the first fifteen interviews. NVivo allows researchers to add annotations to transcripts so that observations, discrepancies or connections to other themes can be noted. These can be used throughout analysis to double check inferences of interviewees. I also repeatedly checked the context of the interviewee's statements by re-reading passages of the original transcript before and after a selected section. I also rejected the use of automated visual aids as the computational algorithm was not identified. I believed the use of such functions were too rudimentary and potentially indicating, or worse amplifying, a false connection or insight. As a result, I believe I sidestepped some of the criticisms of using the software.

Eventually the interviews were coded into 55 'nodes' (or themes). Some nodes seemed important at the beginning of the process but did not have significance by the end. Nodes such as 'self-distribution' and 'branding' were defined in early interviews but actually did not feature in many respondents' comments with only nine and six references respectively. Other nodes such as 'iFeatures/support and training', 'positive attitude to marketing' and 'audience knowledge' had over 70 references each, and after manual analysis, were regarded as more important.

Monitoring of online marketing

Introduction

To ascertain the scope and effectiveness of any digital component of the marketing and distribution campaign of each of the films, the author used a proprietary social media monitoring tool Brandwatch (www.brandwatch.com) to capture and collate the sentiment of *public* social media posts across the main platforms including Facebook, Twitter and blogs. Although there are free social network monitoring platforms such as Tweetdeck, Monitter, Social Mention (Veeck and Hoger, 2014 p. 38), at the origination of research these were not available or regarded as unstable. Also after early talks with Brandwatch in January 2011, it was anticipated that 10,000 online posts about each film could be expected. Therefore a company like Brandwatch was the only route to collate the data and prevent the author being overwhelmed. The sample for online research was selected when people wrote about the films using some of the terms identified in advance. They only came to the attention of Brandwatch by making posts, and only if they had made these posts without privacy controls.

Evaluating the methodological issues with social media monitoring

This research project started in 2009 when academic research into the monitoring of social media was at a nascent stage. Since then more research has been published and the methods used in this project subject to critique and further development. What follows is a discussion about how social media was tracked in this project in order to understand the scope and impact of any digital marketing for the iFeatures films.

As Kaplan and Haenlein argue, there are many social networks which offer a cost effective and efficient way to connect with the end user (2009, p. 7). The Brandwatch platform offered a flexible capability to capture social media data on the films wherever it existed. The technology also promised real-time feedback for brands on what consumers were saying about their products or marketing across the web. The software uses a 'crawler' technology to sift through websites finding 'mentions' (attributes defined by the user) automatically and then algorithmically analysing sentiment and social demographic data. The author was able to negotiate an academic rate of £600 per film in return for a case study from the data, which the DCRC generously funded. Three queries were defined using basic Boolean operators (which are defined later in the case studies) but centred around three identifiers: name of the film, the director and the principal cast member within a specified number of words in an attempt to capture specific references to the iFeatures films. This was not fool-proof and did capture mentions of similar sounding feature films. The search for *ITDH* also included mentions of *The Dark Half* (Romero, 1993), a filmed adaptation of a Stephen King novel, and these mentions were manually deleted from the data set.

In the end, only 1,239 social media posts were captured from platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, websites and blogs. The active use of digital marketing did not materialise by the production teams and by the time this was recognised, the rationale and choices for the data collection had been selected and started in the case of the first film to be released, *In the Dark Half*. Although it was anticipated by iFeatures that digital marketing would become an important focus of marketing for the release of the second and third film, this did not happen.

The software was selected as it promised to collect all public social media and online communication about the feature films, collate them and carry out automatic sentiment analysis and link this sentiment to some socio-demographic data. Sentiment analysis, classification or opinion mining is the process of 'natural language processing and text analytics to identify and extract evidence of subjective and emotionally toned evaluations' (Gunter et al., 2014 p. 234). This analysis uses algorithms to analyse posts in a variety of ways; it can analyse the document, or sentence for single attributes mentioned or where there are many attributes. It requires terms to be defined by the researcher such as a title of a film or actor (for full discussion of the process see Feldman, 2013). The software promises to analyse automatically the sentiment of consumers' posts on social media so that brands can quickly interact with consumers where negative PR is being created or circulated. The opportunity to evaluate commercial platforms that commercial companies were using as the foundation for business decisions allowed the author to fill gaps in knowledge, especially as there is wide discussion about the limitations of sentiment analysis.

Although there is debate over the ethics of social media monitoring, there is also concern about the effectiveness of social media marketing tools. The potential for automated sentiment analysis has helped to create the 'affective economy' (Andrejevic, 2011 p. 609) as companies have monetised behaviours and controlled participants but attaching meaning and arriving at reliable conclusions remains highly contested (Kennedy, 2012, p. 448).

Although the companies selling these products claim that they are powerful tools and almost 'intelligent', they fail to recognise sarcasm, synonyms, homographs, sentence shifters or the richness and variety of colloquialisms and dialect in text (Schmidt, 2010 p. 485). Indeed the demand for more intelligent algorithms that can apply context has started

(Feldman, 2013 p. 89 and Petz et al., 2014 p. 900) especially as evidence mounts that automated sentiment analysis has poor accuracy (Kennedy, 2012 p. 437) and that much of that data had referential inaccuracy, that it was fake or otherwise unreliable data, and so manual human analysis was required (ibid., p. 438). The presence of unidentified spam (such as online advertisements that seek to mimic real blogs to circumvent automated blockers) also skewed results by 30 per cent (Petit, 2013 p. 15). Walmsley (2010 p. 12) and Buckley (2013 np) equate the reliability of these companies being accurate as 'guessing', as the variance around certain statistics is placed at + 91 per cent to - 99 per cent, and where sentiment has been judged as 'neutral' between 3 per cent to 92 per cent of the total number of mentions. For Walmsley, 'software tools just aren't enough. At a basic level, expert human analysis should be layered on top' (Walmsley, 2010 p. 12). Also some anonymous blogs (analyticuspicians.wordpress.com, 2013 np) question the claims made by social monitoring companies like Brandwatch because their insights are based on only the 7 to 25 per cent of *public* Facebook accounts. This, they argue, resulted in Twitter's impact being exaggerated due to its absence of data protected by privacy controls combined with researchers' and commentators' access to its data which is published in the public domain. Marketers regularly use this data but without clarification or a coherent rationale.

Basing business decisions on sentiment analysis is also further criticised as there is evidence that the impact of negative sentiment artificially amplifies as 'negative valence is more likely to be re-circulated' (Gunter et al., 2014 p. 240). Automatic sentiment analysis should not to be used without qualification, and should be treated as non-positivistic and suspected of the same levels of bias as human centred research (ibid., p. 243)

Therefore for this research, manual sentiment analysis was carried out on all the posts that were captured. The epistemology of the author and distrust of automated systems meant that the automatic sentiment analysis was checked manually and many inaccuracies were corrected. This required the development of a framework to be developed to analyse how a blog post of 200-400 words should be identified as positive, negative or neutral. The general structure of blog posts tended to include an 'interest grabbing' opening paragraph, a short description of plot, followed by the style of film and finishing with a summing up paragraph. It soon became apparent that the writers had various audiences in mind. These included potential cinemagoers who trusted their reviews, and distributors who wanted to leverage the trust the readership had in a particular blogger. Therefore the blogger gave the distributor positive 'sound bites' to use as publicity but also in the final summary, gave their readers a clear 'take out' about any problems with the film (see the case studies for specific examples). This allowed the author a clear method of using the final paragraph, i.e. the final 'take out' by readers, to assess whether the blog was positive or negative. This approach has also been used by other researchers (see Gunter et al., 2014 p. 244). Defining a neutral sentiment was more difficult. Even if the blogger had said the film had positive and negative aspects, the order of the comments was crucial to the audiences' 'take out'. As a result, a neutral sentiment was not found.

For this project, online references or 'mentions' were collected via Brandwatch for four to six months – a period of one month before release of the film and the onset of marketing, and for two weeks after the release of the DVD. This pattern was determined after interviews with stakeholders to allow a base line where no marketing activity occurred, followed by an opportunity to identify the marketing for the theatrical release and its impact over time. For the DVD release, the same pattern was followed to try to find out

how the marketing over the theatrical release aided the DVD release or how new marketing assets were required and then to record the cessation of marketing activity. It was anticipated by Brandwatch that 10,000 posts for each film could be generated by the digital marketing. If so, that amount of data would have overwhelmed the resources of the researcher and as a result the validity of social media monitoring, as a conduit to consumers' actual beliefs or actions, would have been both questioned and questionable.

Surveying cinemagoers

The third form of data collection was used to understand cinemagoers' reaction to the various forms of marketing. Without these surveys it would have been impossible to assess the effectiveness of the marketing strategy or digital tactics and find out which specific channel of marketing had been important, or not, in the audience's decision to see any of the three films. It also allowed the author to ascertain the audiences' attitudes to, and use of, digital marketing and which attributes of the film projects (for instance story, cast or location) were the foci of the marketing and became the impetus for attending the cinema screening.

In the end, 1,029 self-administered paper surveys were completed and the results analysed with SPSS. The structure of the survey's five sections was designed to fit onto one page of A4 paper to increase the likelihood of completion. The structure of the survey was designed as follows (see the example in appendix 2) with simple nominal questions at first, leading to more complex ordinal questions and finishing with a simple nominal question:

1. Socio-demographic information (age, gender and post code).

2. To select any piece of marketing that raised the respondent's awareness of the film from a list of fifteen traditional and digital platforms (social media, newspapers, cinema brochures, etc.).
3. To indicate which was the most influential or persuasive source of marketing from the choices in question 2.
4. To select three ranked attributes (1st, 2nd and 3rd) of the film from a list of fourteen (including cast, genre, budget, reviews, peer pressure and Bristol location) that persuaded the respondent to see the film.
5. To indicate if they had used social media to recommend, discuss or arrange to see filmed entertainment in order to understand their attitude to, and the use of, social media.

The survey used structured questions (Hair, Bush and Ortinau, 2006, p. 430) as it reduced thinking and completion time, and interviewer bias. The survey allowed each respondent to select specific marketing elements which reflected their orientation to marketing and lifestyle. For instance, the intention was that it would have allowed the number of cinema goers persuaded by the host cinema's printed brochure, emails or website to cross reference this with age or gender. It could also be related to specific attributes of the film such as positive word of mouth recommendations, knowledge of the iFeatures scheme or budget of the films to be explored. The survey data could therefore have created new theories and confirmed hypotheses about digital marketing for low budget British features.

Consideration was initially given to collecting the survey at the end of the screenings. However as the research was wholly interested in why people had chosen to visit the cinema at that particular time, and not what they thought about the film per se, the data was collected prior to the screening. Respondents would have more time to fill in the questionnaire (5-10 minutes) as the auditorium was opened, or as the trailers ran, and

completing the survey would focus their minds on their reasons for attendance, not their thoughts on the quality of the film. One important element could potentially be missed by this approach. It could have been important to see if cinemagoers would recommend the film through their social networks to their friends and contacts, i.e. whether they would use digital or traditional word of mouth recommendations. However, this data was captured with two separate questions in the survey - about how they had found out about the film from friends and whether they had used social media to make appointments for themselves and friends to attend the cinema. So rather than an *intention* to recommend the film to friends, an actual visit was recorded which is a more useful piece of data.

However mistakes in the clarity of the questions and the limited number of questions did cause some confusion, which greater preliminary testing could have avoided. The importance of the Watershed's online marketing via email or website was not anticipated and so led to many people placing this option into the 'other' category which made coding more difficult. The rank order scale in question 4 (that is evaluating the first, second and third most important attributes of the film that persuaded them to see the film) led some respondents to evaluate all fourteen responses. In hindsight, the question was too complicated as it had more than five criteria (Hair et al., 2006 p. 406). However, the question offered a relative scale which identified which criteria were more important to the cinemagoers, and therefore which criteria could be used to market low budget feature films in the future. However, fewer than 30 surveys were affected, and these responses were not included in the analysis.

In all, 1,029 surveys were completed over a total period of four weeks spread over two years, representing approximately 80 per cent of potential cinemagoers for the three films

based on known sales of tickets and auditorium size. Not every cinemagoer took part in the survey. Five people declined to take part and some cinemagoers were not approached due to their late arrival at the cinema where intervention would possibly have been interpreted as coercion and been fruitless; some were given the survey but returned it uncompleted. Only two screenings were missed due to the author not anticipating *Flying Blind* would have its theatrical run extended to two weeks because of strong demand. The films were mainly programmed for one, or occasionally two, screenings per day in screens with capacities of 42, 102 or 198, although mainly the smallest cinema was used.

The survey sample

The subjects for the surveys were all cinemagoers who decided to go to the Watershed cinema in Bristol. The cinema had given permission for the author to carry out the surveys under the proviso that no pressure was to be placed on any person to take part in the survey. The author personally attended most screenings of the iFeatures films. As cinemagoers approached the screen prior to performance, the author verbally introduced the context for this PhD research project and asked if they would like to participate. If so, paper-based surveys were given to cinemagoers as they waited for the doors to the auditorium to be opened, and they were completed without the author being present. Consent to participate in the research was therefore assumed to be given if they completed the survey which was then collected personally from them, given to the cinema usher, or left in envelopes provided for collection the next day. The day and time of the screening was manually recorded on each survey after collection.

Coding

The surveys were coded using a hybrid automatic system that reduced data inputting errors. The author had access to Qualtrics, an online survey tool, via the host university. This was used to code the surveys for SPSS with a technique that he had first utilised for his MSc research project. Qualtrics allowed the author to build a survey digitally that replicated the paper survey. Usually a web address or link would be sent to potential participants and it would be filled in online. However, for this research project, the author then transferred the information from the paper surveys onto the digital survey within the Qualtrics cloud-based platform with 9 – 15 ‘clicks’ of a mouse and some manual typing of a postcode or other responses. Once inputted, the Qualtrics platform was able to reproduce the raw coded data in a form that could be understood by SPSS in ‘.csv’ format. The innovative development and use of this process meant that after only three hours of inputting data, initial SPSS analysis was possible on *In the Dark Half*, which was shared with the Watershed’s marketing team. This was done without introducing errors to the data set through the fiddly process of inputting data into SPSS.

In SPSS the data was analysed for frequencies, Chi Square correlations and statistical significance using Pearson’s Co-efficient to ascertain any positive or negative correlations. Using SPSS to calculate frequency distributions allows the analysis of a great deal of basic information but is also the building block of useful descriptive statistics such as mean or median values (Hair et al., 2006 p. 511). The totals from each question are also useful and can help to answer hypotheses about the most used form of social media. Chi Square was used to study relationships between variables (ibid., p. 549). This allowed tests to be run on

whether age was related to social media use, or whether more women than men attended screenings on weekdays.

Using Case Studies

With all research projects there needs to be a clear rationale for structuring the data. In this study the subjects for the case studies were defined by the iFeatures plan to commission the three final projects, which they believed could deliver on the scheme's commercial and cultural objectives. It was decided early on in the planning of the PhD that to combine the data into film-specific case studies would be most appropriate, as it would allow the reader to understand how the individual films were marketed rather than compare online marketing of three films followed by the audience surveys of three films because the films were fundamentally unique and could not usefully be compared.

In cultural studies, the case study is a dominant paradigm for qualitative data collection but this is not the case in business studies where concerns are expressed over how generalisable outputs may be so a brief discussion is warranted. A case study is defined as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context and can use theory to guide the research and analysis (Yin, 1993 p. 59 and Meyer, 2001 p. 331). It can have various uses including 'the revelation of situations unfamiliar to the audience or of making findings more accessible to non-professional audiences' (Platt, 2008 p. 113), which is appropriate to the wider dissemination of this thesis to industry, non-academic, audiences. Flyvbjerg argues that case studies contribute to theoretical development but also have strengths by being practical or 'concrete' and therefore *context – dependent* (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 421). This means they can be compared to similar situations (Stake, 1995 p. 1-3 and

see Eisenhardt, 1989 and Meyer, 2001 and Siggelkow, 2007 and Welch et al., 2011).

Although Eisenhardt, who justified case study methodology, conceded that while theories developed in case studies were 'testable, novel and empirically valid', the outcomes regularly lacked the scale of theories developed in other methodologies and could be 'narrow and idiosyncratic' (1989, p. 547). But it has also been argued that case studies contribute to knowledge gaps (Platt, 2008 p. 113) and are suitable for hypothesis generation and testing at all stages of research. Indeed the structure of this research project, with the use of multiple methods research, and triangulation ameliorates the criticism of case studies with simpler data sets (Davis et al., 2011 p. 473). The benefits of a case study to look at specific examples in unique situations offered the opportunity to develop a marketing toolkit – a selection of general approaches, theories, strategies and tactics that could be applied to other films and schemes in similar, if not the same, situations. Since I started this research project the BFI have begun working with Peter Buckingham, one of the first interviewees, who now publishes case studies with the same ethos under the title 'Insight Reports' (Buckingham, 2011 and see BFI, 2015)

Internal validity can only be proven if the research design accurately captures data that links a cause and an effect. There are many threats to internal validity (Hair et al., 2006 pp. 276-8). In these case studies this could be caused by their having different release windows, and different competing films with different profiles of core audience. However, the triangulation of methodology meant that cause and effect can be tracked more accurately (Meyer, 2001 p. 347).

Ethical Issues and Consent

The project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of West of England along with a report on 18 May 2011 which is attached as Appendix 3.

The relationship with iFeatures as an organisation was at times difficult although this research project was only possible through their agreement. To agree to their participation, a contract was drawn up that outlined their authority to protect commercial or privileged information, and therefore participants, through redaction. At other times a perceived conflict of interest developed when the author proposed developing an MA in Low Budget Film Production at a local university. Although the research continued, access to Chris Moll, the Executive Producer, evaporated despite numerous requests for an interview. This has meant that some of the detailed motivations for the creation and development of the iFeatures scheme, the reasons for its focus on digital marketing and the reasons for its success or failure have had to be deduced from brief impromptu meetings with Moll at iFeatures events or from other members of iFeatures management or stakeholders.

Informed consent to participate in this research was treated as sacrosanct. Interviewees were given ample opportunities to question the purpose of the research and how their contributions would be used prior to the interviews being recorded and transcribed, and before any appointment was made for a meeting. They were given clear and concise printed information on how to withdraw completely from the research by contacting via email the author and/or Director of Studies if they so wished without needing to feel any level of coercion. They were also invited by the author to consider their interview overnight and could request sections to be redacted or they could ask to clarify the meaning of any

language or terms that they had used before transcription or analysis. This was never requested.

The reason for this approach was to ensure that the interviewees felt they could speak freely and that no negative professional or personal impact would emanate from their participation in the research. The best research, the author contends, is where the respondents have complete trust in the motives of the author and can regard it as a collaboration. Only then would respondents be prepared to speak freely about their experiences, attitudes, disappointments and achievements honestly. Therefore, in the spirit of this ethos, they were asked for their written consent at the end of the interview, when they were happy with the overall direction of questions and their answers, and not at the beginning which is a usual practice. Not all responses were used in the final report; some were too blunt or reacting to short term conflicts and pressures that were skewing their responses and were incongruent with the spirit of their contribution as a whole. For instance, some interviews took place after the production schedules were extended, when the ability of the iFeatures filmmakers to take on external work was restricted and therefore personal debt had increased. Once the project was finished and incomes returned, it was anticipated that different and more measured responses would have been recorded. The author believes this approach gained a breadth of insights into the respondents' attitudes, concerns, hopes, beliefs, and these allowed the author to understand the issues in greater depth.

The ethical and privacy concerns of using ethnographic approaches for online communities and sources of data has been analysed by authors but it is still an unresolved area of study. Kozinets (2002, p. 65) identified Netnographers as 'professional "lurkers": the uniquely

unobtrusive nature of the method is the source of its attractiveness and contentiousness' (ibid., p. 65). It has been specifically used for market research into, among other products and services, feature films (ibid. p. 61). The ability to receive informed consent (ibid., pp. 63-66) from online 'chatrooms' or online areas which had restricted access is a key area for researchers to negotiate as there should be the assumption of privacy (ibid., 2010 pp. 136-156). However the emergence of social media by hundreds of millions of users and its dependence on user generated content and the inherent sharing of private data in a public realm, and the recognition that this data is sold to marketers is what makes many commentators such as Kozinets' 'rules of engagement' seem quaint and out of date. The Association of Internet Researchers has addressed the assumption of private communication, arguing that if the subjects' communication are in the public domain then the ethical obligations are reduced. (Ess, 2002 p. 7).

However, I would suggest that simplistic assumptions of what constitutes 'publishing' and the 'public domain' requires further thought and is problematic. Marwick and boyd [sic] (2010) describe how Twitter users have an 'imagined audience' that is entirely different to their actual readership (ibid., p. 115) and that the users also mediate their language and interests based on who they perceive they are communicating with at different times. These included personal constructs of 'broadcast' and 'networked' audiences (ibid. p. 129 and Brandtzaeg et al., 2010 p. 1026). This has been conceived as 'context collapse' so that diverse audiences receive a single feed of mediated communication thereby making such posts unreliable sources of data. Vitak describes how less than 20 per cent of Facebook users use the technology to communicate with subsets of their audience (2012, p. 468) due to the conflicting need to obtain or increase their social capital. Privacy – 'the need to determine for themselves when, how and to what extent information about them is

communicated to others' (Houghton and Joinson, 2010 p. 76) – is therefore of critical importance to researchers using posts with the authors' identity (avatar, pseudonym or real name). Arguments that the original author has forfeited his or her right to privacy due to 'publishing' it on a platform that exists in the public domain is therefore weakened. Also in this research, because access to the posts was not kept behind any form of security or required membership, did not engage with participants directly, seek to elaborate on those relationships or build detailed or 'thick descriptions' of participants, the use of posts can be argued as being ethical to use (Langer and Beckman, 2005 p. 192). However, their use is still controversial and this is an unresolved issue in research.

Limitations and validity considerations

Limitations

There are various limitations that impact on this research project. The first is the limited numbers of 'mentions' from online sources which meant that the data was compromised. Many teams did develop social media strategies during production but these were not maintained through to release of the film and their effect was deemed negligible. Also, due to the limited marketing skills and negative attitude of the teams, the marketing of the films was mainly carried out by traditional agencies on very low budgets. As a result, the digital marketing data was limited and did not reveal reliable quantitative results. However, the data has been used qualitatively and has revealed interesting themes and theories to test on other schemes in subsequent research.

The surveys were carried out at a single cinema in Bristol, Watershed, which was planning to screen the films. It was selected for convenience; the author is based in Bristol and could attend daily for the four weeks of screenings with minimal cost. The cinema is the regional 'art house' or, as it calls itself a 'cultural cinema', with a loyal and distinct customer base that turned out to see films made in Bristol by Bristolians. Also many cinemagoers had a personal connection to the film by working as cast or crew, or were related to them or generally wanted to support the local filmmaking community. The author recognised that a different set of results would have been gained from surveys carried out at a cinema in a different town or with a different customer base with different loyalties. Therefore the choice of the cinema to collect these surveys had a significant impact on the research and its generalizability to other filmmaking contexts or regions is questionable.

The author's bias is also an important factor to be considered. As reported above, although the in-depth interviews were conducted in the spirit of constructivist grounded theory it would be unlikely that pre-existing prejudices about the film industry could be completely discounted and hypotheses were not wholly created out of the interviews but to some extent confirmed by them. Although this experience had positive impacts in the collection of data, with contributors quickly building strong rapport and trust with the author there was, at the very least, an interplay between established thinking and any insights emanating from the discussions.

It could be argued that further quantitative analysis should be carried out on the survey data. This would allow greater understanding of the cinemagoers who attended the screenings. However, it was decided by the author that this was a *potential* post-doctorate research project as the survey data was intended only to establish what element of digital or

traditional marketing had been most effective and this already filled a gap in the literature in understanding how to market films for regional arts cinema. Schneider (2007 p. 182) argued that given enough data, every variable will show a significant relationship to another, so further in-depth research on this specific question could be carried out in future.

Validity of the research design

The outcomes of this research project have a high level of validity and the conclusions can be applied to other films produced in similar ways. Some methods to improve internal and external validity – using control groups, determining when and how productions would market their films, controlling or pre-selecting those who participated in the research, and randomisation was not possible or appropriate to this research. However, the use of triangulation (see Davis et al., 2011 p. 468) improved internal validity and allowed interviews to be tested by data from online monitoring and survey data. This also contributed to external validity as the methods used and the theoretical limitations and strengths meant that the research could offer other low budget filmmakers an indication of which tools were effective or ineffective in delivering audiences to cinemas. Construct validity is also an important issue in many research projects (Dahlstrom et al., 2008 p. 150) as the ability of the methodology design to record correctly appropriate variables was almost lost in this project because the projects using digital marketing had such a low number of mentions. Therefore although validity was threatened in the research design, the breadth of data collection techniques and the unique data that has been collected does fill a gap in the knowledge of the future development and sustainability of the low budget British feature film industry and its filmmakers.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the decisions taken to construct a research methodology that could answer the research questions. The use of in-depth interviews, surveys and case studies combined to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings and I have outlined some of the theoretical frameworks that underpin these instruments. The sample selection, the analytical techniques within both qualitative and quantitative paradigms have been discussed.

Innovation has also been part of this thesis: data collection methods have been developed such as using commercial software to monitor and analyse social media, voice recognition software to transcribe interviews, and to code quantitative data for SPSS analysis. This has allowed gaps in knowledge to be filled with new, albeit minor, developments in methods of research. At the same time, any limitations or shortfalls in the overall methodology have been examined honestly.

However, the use of online social media monitoring has thrown up ethical, validity and reliability concerns that were not known at the onset and is an inevitable consequence of the lag between research and publishing data. Although these have not invalidated the outputs, they have required greater discussion and justification to be included alongside the data from other sources described above. However, the use of triangulation has improved validity and generalisability of the data and, therefore, conclusions.

No research methodology is perfect and the limitations of this project have also been discussed. Ethical considerations of using online data have been discussed as have the limitations of the author and the methodology in general. Indeed the chapter has been an

attempt to show, rather than conceal, omissions. The author's constructivist epistemology has strengthened the analysis of in-depth interviews and the monitoring of social media.

However, there is no claim made that this research project is applicable to all marketing and distribution strategies. It is concerned with a limited subset of the British film industry: low budget feature film distribution. Therefore the results from this project cannot be applied to medium or high budget film marketing. It simply means that these conclusions should only be applied to low budget productions, and where they are screened in regional independent cinemas with similar highly loyal audiences. Thankfully, there is still a network of similar cinemas in the UK with audiences which should be comparable to those described in the conclusions.

Chapter 3

The problems of low budget feature film production and distribution in the UK.

Introduction

The 2012 film policy review, *A Future for British Film: It begins with the audience*, summarised the continuing problems of post-war UK film policy:

From the introduction of the Eady Levy in 1950 onwards, the history of UK film policy has tended to focus much more on interventions to remedy supply-side market failures than on demand-side interventions. Yet the distribution and exhibition of independent film in particular suffers from market failures, in addition to those affecting the production of culturally British films.

DCMS, 2012 p.11

Elsewhere, the review identified American domination of distribution networks and exhibition circuits as the cause of this 'market failure', which was impeding the ability of independent British filmmakers to reach audiences irrespective of any problems they might encounter in making 'culturally British films'. However, the review also suggested that a possible solution was at hand: the use of emerging digital platforms that might circumvent the century-old problems of the distribution and exhibition of British films and which should be at the heart of a new approach to film policy (ibid., p. 12). The iFeatures scheme emerged at this important cultural juncture. It was an experiment that intended to harness the emerging digital technologies in distribution and marketing and thus help to create an economically viable British low budget film production sector. The creators of the scheme had offered evidence to the review (ibid., p. 73) as its objectives were in the vanguard of this emerging policy.

This chapter provides an historical contextualisation of the iFeatures scheme that helps to explain some of its major elements. It is organised into two parts. The first part analyses the persistent tension between commercial and cultural imperatives, the structural characteristics of the UK film industry and its domination by American companies and the key policy initiatives that have shaped low budget feature film production and traditional distribution systems in the UK from the 1920s until the 2010s, i.e. before the influence of digital platforms on film distribution. The analysis will build on previous discussions of UK film policy, particularly those of John Hill and Andrew Higson. However, as no existing account has charted the 90 year history of low budget production and policy in its entirety, the chapter contributes to existing scholarship. The chapter will also analyse the continuous tension in the British feature film industry between the desire to have an economically viable industry that would be self-sustaining, and the opposing demand that it embrace financially risky experimentation, encourage new emerging talent and promote cultural diversity.

The second part of the chapter discusses the opportunities for new distribution platforms to alter the structure of the British film industry. The influence of public service broadcasting, notably Channel 4, in supporting indigenous production is considered and the chapter discusses in detail the hopes of policymakers that surrounded the new platforms for film distribution that were dependent upon emerging digital technologies. It seemed a moment of opportunity in which the age-old problems of the UK feature film industry might be changed decisively and held the promise of producing challenging, culturally important indigenous films that could also reach audiences. There is an overlap between parts one and two that enables the iFeatures scheme to be positioned within its evolving historical context. This second part therefore analyses the interaction between the developments of

the scheme, the wider processes of transformation within the film industry and the concomitant reshaping of film policy. However, before proceeding to part one, it is necessary to describe the problem of how low budget filmmaking has been defined and understood.

The problems of defining 'low budget' feature filmmaking

There are two problems in defining low budget filmmaking as the term has both economic and cultural connotations. Culturally, 'low budget' has often been equated with creative ambition, radical and avant-garde filmmaking – where the choice of subject, treatment or style was regarded by filmmakers and stakeholders as more important than financial success or recoupment (Hill, 1999 p. 65). Indeed, such films have been made for niche audiences making recoupment unlikely (Caterer, 2011 p. 19). These films were often produced using some form of direct or indirect state support, and were thus insulated from the commercial imperatives of the marketplace.

By contrast, there has been a long history of producing low budget features commercially, both in the UK and in America, either by small, cost-conscious companies or by larger firms which supplied their cinema chains with new product and to keep their labour and studio infrastructure optimally deployed (Cagle, 2007 pp. 295-96 and see Quinn, 2001 for an account of the industrialisation of distribution in the US industry). From the 1930s onwards, exhibitors in both countries started to package an expensive 'A' feature with a cheaper 'B' feature into a 'double bill' programme. Using sophisticated distribution networks the intention was to entice audiences with reduced spending power with programmes that changed weekly and that put a 'premium on variety and quantity over quality' (ibid., p. 296).

Low budget films had different distribution contracts as distributors shared box office returns for 'A' features with exhibitors, whereas the 'B' feature was rented at a flat rate. Therefore the role of the 'B' feature was to create a programme of cheap film entertainment while maintaining the profits of the main feature (Jacobs 1992 p. 13). In the UK in particular, this had the effect of associating low-budget films with poor quality and unpopularity as major studies by Steve Chibnall (2007) and Chibnall and Brian McFarlane (2009) have shown.

Until quite recently, no absolute cost definition had been applied to low-budget features in the UK. Chibnall (2009 pp. 69-75) estimates that a production budget level of £7-10,000 was economically viable for low budget indigenous features made during the 1930s; post-war that figure rose to around £15,000 (Spicer, 2005 pp. 25-26) until the end of the double-bill in 1964. These figures were approximately one tenth of the cost of a typical first feature, a proportion that is a useful indicator for subsequent productions even if the distinction between a first and second feature had lapsed. For instance, in the mid-1980s *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), a low-medium budget British production, was made for £650,000 as opposed to £7,670,000 for the American-financed and distributed *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) (Box Office Mojo, 2015). In the late 1990s, *East is East* (1999) cost £1.9 million (IMDb, 2015) as opposed to the average cost of an American-financed UK feature which was £15 million (BFI, 2002 p. 69).

In 2008, for the first time, absolute cost definitions, based on what producers were actually spending, were applied to low budget filmmaking by the UKFC in its report *Low and Micro Budget Film Production in the UK* (UKFC, 2008). Low budget production was defined as being between £1 million and £250,000; 'micro budget' between £250,000 and £50,000;

and 'no budget' being under £50,000 (UKFC, 2008, p. 9). However, by 2010, stakeholders thought that only if budgets were in the lower 'micro budget' category would films have a chance of successfully recouping their costs. Film London's Microwave scheme originally set its budgets at £100,000, which was approximately 4 per cent of a median budget of a domestic feature at £2.4 million (BFI, 2011 p. 69). Edward Fletcher, Managing Director of British distributor Soda Pictures believed that £100,000 represented a financially sustainable model for low budget production based on the typical demand of audiences in the UK for low budget British films based on traditional distribution models (Fletcher, 2011). iFeatures' original production budget for each film at £300,000 (later increased to £350,000), was around 20 per cent of the median budget for a domestic feature. This higher and more ambitious figure, designed to improve production value to attract greater audiences (Collins, 2011), had repercussions that will be discussed.

Part 1: The issues affecting low budget production and distribution

The crucial tension in British policy between cultural and commercial imperatives

One of the key issues for UK film policy has been how the film industry has been perceived. As Andrew Higson has argued, there was an initial divide between those who considered that film was simply a commercial entertainment and thus should not be treated differently from any other industry as opposed to those who judged that it had a significant cultural role in the creation of national identity, promoted Britain and British values abroad, and so deserved special treatment (Higson, 2011 p. 65). Widespread fears about the influence on UK audiences of American films – 'mass produced, artistically impoverished, trivia' – were coupled with more proactive demands to create a cinema that built on European traditions

of art and of European art cinema (Higson, 1997 pp. 13-15). Despite these differences, John Hill has argued against understanding film policy as dictated by the binary opposition of culture versus commerce because these two drivers became increasingly entangled. He notes that even if the acknowledgement of film's cultural role was not explicit, economic and industrial policy 'typically possessed implicit cultural underpinnings' (Hill, 2004, p. 33). However, as Hill goes on to argue, although economic and cultural goals became 'routinely linked together within UK film policy discourse, *this does not mean that the relationship between the two is clearly agreed and settled*' (Hill, 2012 p. 353, my emphasis).

This relationship took a particular form when 'New Labour' came to power in 1997. Its cultural policy was influenced by John Myerscough's *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Great Britain* (1988), which defined the value of culture in economic or instrumental terms; in short, the discourse of cost-benefit analysis was applied to justify cultural funding (Holden, 2004 p. 13). The switch was from a 'cultural' industries to a 'creative' industries discourse (Dickinson and Harvey, 2005 p. 4) where the measurement of the economic value of culture became 'central to both the case for government "investment" in - rather than "subsidy" of - the film industry and the benefits that might be seen to accrue to the taxpayer (or lottery player)' (Hill, 2012 p. 343).

Thus when the UK Film Council (UKFC) was established in 2000 in a major reorganisation of government support for the industry, that was partly intended to streamline the various funding and support mechanisms available (Dickinson and Harvey, 2005 p. 89). The UKFC was required to develop both an 'economically viable and sustainable film industry and also to support a diverse film culture' (Hill, 2012 p. 337). This forced the UKFC, when lobbying for the British film industry, to walk a delicate line between economic arguments and

emphasising film's cultural dimensions if it wanted 'to be taken seriously by the Treasury' (Higson, 2011 p. 48). In the context of a national industry that had been dominated by American companies (see below), the definition of what constituted a British film became more and more complex due to the dependency on inward investment. From the 1950s through to the present day, a British film became defined as one made by company registered in the UK that used significant British labour and infrastructure. However, the British company could be a 'shell' for a foreign company that would repatriate the profit, and therefore lose any hope for the strengthening and sustainability of the film industry (see Stubbs, 2009 pp. 4-5). More recently Dickinson and Street argue that due to the British film industry's dependence on inward investment from the USA, the main driver is now to compete with other film producing nations (Dickinson and Harvey, 2005 pp. 6-9) such as the Czech Republic and their Barrandov Studios which recently made Twentieth Century-Fox's *The Martian* (2015).

These contradictory imperatives also characterise the ways in which the iFeatures scheme was set up. The scheme contained instrumental economic elements – primarily films were expected to recover their costs and provide economic benefits to the region – and also secondary cultural ones, such as having Bristol-based narratives, acting as training vehicles, and helping to build a local feature filmmaking infrastructure. iFeatures thus attempted to commission films that would be both culturally and commercially successful. However, as will be argued later in the thesis, any attempt to combine both commercial and cultural orientations is problematic and the scheme demonstrated how deeply rooted these divisions were.

The structural characteristics of the British film industry

Well, I think if the [iFeatures'] films get their budgets back it will be pretty amazing. Can you imagine any other business in the world where people regard it as a great triumph if they just break even? If they get half their money back, they're actually really pleased. It is such a stupid business from that point of view.

Nigel Thomas, managing director of Matador Films and one of iFeature's funders, 2012.

This remark by one of the funders of the scheme was made when only *In the Dark Half* had been finished and the two other films were still in preproduction. He summarised the expectation that many producers were resigned to economic impoverishment as a characteristic of making feature films in the 'stupid' UK film business. This section outlines the reasons for this situation; how American distributors were able to dominate theatrical distribution and exhibition in Britain and its deleterious consequences for UK filmmakers. The dominance stems, partly, from a shared language, which has meant that the British film industry has been a primary target for US exports (Roddick, 1985 p. 5). The British film industry has, therefore, for almost a hundred years, been in the shadow of the US industry, especially through its control of film distribution. As a result, British filmmakers at all budget ranges have lacked commercial sustainability, but this has been especially true for low budget filmmakers.

In its inception the British film industry was very successful. During the early 1900s it had captured 60 per cent of the US market (Bakker, 2005 p. 313). However, by 1925 the industry was on the brink of collapse. During the First World War European film production was halted while at the same time the US industry expanded and became better organised, developing much larger production companies and a co-ordinated distribution system. This allowed companies to capitalise on the demand of a huge domestic market which was in

1934, thirteen times bigger than the UK at \$518 million (Sedgewick and Pokorny, 2005 p. 82). Because they could recoup their production costs in the home market, American films could be exported cheaply, thereby undercutting indigenous film production (Dickinson and Street, 1985 p. 11). The UK was the primary export market whose importance grew further after the introduction of 'talkies' in the 1930s when the shared language became a major factor in the appeal of American films for British audiences (Sedgewick and Pokorny, 2005 pp. 82-83). However, even before that by 1925, Britain's home market had become dominated by American films; only five per cent of films screened in domestic cinemas were British (Dickinson and Street, 1985 p. 10). American producers and distributors developed an effective lobbying organisation, exercising their industrial clout through the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). They imposed anti-competitive measures such as block booking to exclude British or European films (Swann, 2000 p. 30) while at the same time maximising their own revenues. Without a domestic market that could recoup production costs and which was excluded from the US market (Blair and Rainee, 2000 p. 197) the British film industry became increasingly reliant on American capital, and this penetrated deeply through a network of British subsidiaries (see Ryall, 2000). As Andrew Spicer notes:

The most important consequence of this dependence has been a fracturing of the British film industry itself, divided between distribution and exhibition sectors that have been consistently profitable through handling American films and were opposed to any form of state regulation, and a much weaker production sector that looked to the state for some form of support.

Spicer, 2014, p. 67

American domination was largely unchallenged by the internal organisation of the British film industry. The two most powerful and long-lasting British film companies – the Rank Organization and the Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC) – had fixed links with the

American majors and therefore colluded in their domination by screening American films on the two main cinema circuits, the Odeon and ABC respectively. Distribution was controlled by Rank and ABPC operating alongside the American majors, which meant that indigenous independent producers, distributors or exhibitors were forced to compete for a tiny fraction of the market (see Dickinson and Street, 1985). Because, as has been noted, their profits were generated through exhibition and distribution, neither Rank nor ABPC had 'a compelling economic incentive to create or sustain a varied indigenous film production ecology' (Spicer, 2014 p. 67).

The authors of the 1998 film policy review, *A Bigger Picture: the Report of the Film Policy Review Group*, noted that this American dominance of the UK film industry, established in the 1920s and strengthened in the 1930s, continued through to the present. The report helpfully characterised feature film production and distribution in the US as being 'distribution led [by companies with an] integrated structure' whose business model depended on retaining intellectual property rights (IPR) within vertically integrated corporations. This organisation meant that box office sales could directly finance new productions with profits being circulated within one organisation. By contrast, the report characterised British film production as a 'cottage industry' of small companies that were 'production led, and fragmented' and thus often had to surrender their IPR to finance their productions (DCMSa, 1998 p. 3).

The problem of American dominance and internal restrictive practices were recognised throughout this period and there were repeated calls for the government to intervene – in 1944, 1966, 1983 and 1994 (Spicer, 2014 p. 67). However, the British state was reluctant to intervene to curb corporate power (Street, 2009, pp. 20-22.) The next section discusses why

British film policy makers, despite recognising the industry's problems, failed to act decisively and thus why their interventions were unable to overcome the inequalities of the marketplace or alter the dominance of the US industry.

British film policy: major initiatives 1927-1990

The first attempt by the government to support the British film industry – after its near collapse in the 1920s – was to impose a quota. The Cinematography Film Act of 1927 required exhibitors to screen 7.5 per cent of 'British' films (raised to twenty per cent in 1935). Although the Act stimulated production through limited control of distribution, it failed to address the control of distribution by American companies allied to US studios. In fact, it often had the opposite effect of forcing British producers to work for, or 'collude' with American companies (Higson, 1997 p. 12) through the production of low budget, poor quality 'quota quickies' that were made by American companies solely to meet their quota obligation (Chibnall, 2007 p. 253). As a result, the low budget UK production sector suffered reputational damage for sub-standard output (Blair and Rainee, 2000 p. 196), especially in contrast to the glossy and glamorous 'super' productions made by the US major studios, which increased the public's demand for the American product. Although the Act was renewed in 1938 and 1948 with quality thresholds, its focus remained on bolstering the production of British films for the UK market rather than challenging the power of US distributors.

The next important intervention occurred almost immediately after the Second World War. In 1947, the British government attempted to improve the balance of payments by imposing a series of duties on luxury items including film. As a result, distributors importing American

films were subject to an 'ad valorem' tax (known popularly as the Dalton Duty because it was introduced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Dalton) of 75 per cent on the anticipated income of each film. The British government believed that after wartime solidarity the US industry would accept a measure that would give the British production sector a much-needed boost as it tried to re-establish itself in peace time. The policy proved to be naïve; the US distributors were fearful of losing their export markets and that Britain's actions would be setting a precedent in other international territories (Dickinson and Street, 1985 p. 180). As a result, the Motion Picture Association of America organised a boycott of US exports (Caterer, 2011 p. 98). This move forced the British government to remove the duty, which served to entrench the US film industry's domination of distribution. It also damaged British companies such as Rank that had increased production patriotically to fill the anticipated void (Caterer, 2011 p. 97). Thus although it was an attempt to curb American dominance, the duty only succeeded in increasing the power of US distributors.

The other initiative at this time was moderately successful: the introduction of a production subsidy, the British Film Production Fund (Dickinson and Street, 1985 p. 225). The subsidy, which became known as the Eady Levy, after the name of the civil servant who introduced the measure, was created by imposing a small tax on every ticket sold in cinemas and then allocating these funds to 'British' films. The levy was an important source of production finance for the cultural filmmaking activities of the British Film Institute and its production fund and training at the National Film and Television School and was important for the development of low budget national cinema (see below) and did help British producers generally. However, the fund was rapidly colonised by the American studios making US 'runaway' films under 'shell' companies that were incorporated in Britain for the sole

purpose of accessing the levy (Dickinson and Street, 1985 p. 236 and Stubbs, 2009 p. 4).

This form of what is now known as 'inward investment' was recognised by the government as beneficial in maintaining an indigenous industry and offering employment for British creatives and technical personnel, though that was not the prime intention (see Dickinson and Harvey, 2005).

The third policy initiative of the post-war Labour government was a 'film bank' designed to support British production and to alleviate another crisis in the UK film industry. The National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC) was created in 1948 to give financial aid to British Lion, a British studio, (Harper and Porter, 2007 p.8) but later benefitted from the Eady Levy and helped support hundreds of British films. The NFFC tried to support British filmmakers by supplying the most risky element of a film's budget known as the 'end money', i.e. finance recouped after the distributors, producers and exhibitors had received their share. There is no space here to provide a history of the NFFC, but in general terms it was moderately successful, supporting over 750 features in its first twenty years (Street, 2009 p. 16). However, the criteria by which the NFFC was expected to allocate funding for films was, characteristically, a confused mixture of backing ones that were expected to be commercially successful as well as those that would provide aesthetic experimentation, cultural diversity and nurture emerging talent. There were also shifts in emphasis. During the 1950s the NFFC pursued a cautious policy (Harper and Porter, 2007, pp. 8-29); in the 1960s and 1970s the NFFC funded riskier low budget cultural films (Miller, 2000 p. 84). The NFFC was axed in 1985 by the Thatcher Conservative government (which also ended the Eady Levy) and a new 'public-private' partnership created, British Screen, which funded on the basis of a film's anticipated returns. However, it was able to finance experimental films, such as Derek Jarman's *The Last of England* (1988), provided they were made on very low

budgets where recoupment was very likely (for an account of British Screen see Spicer, 2014, pp. 74-82). British Screen's powers were absorbed by the UK Film Council in 2000.

These overarching film policy initiatives were designed to stimulate and support indigenous production and had different degrees of success. However, they failed to tackle the systemic problem of the American dominance of the British film industry and its stranglehold on distribution and exhibition which were, arguably, much more significant issues than the volume of indigenous production. Successive governments were unwilling to alienate American interests – as had happened disastrously in 1947-48 – or to curb the power of the major British studios such as Rank and ABPC which each controlled a third of British screens and regularly barred independent productions from their circuits. They were referred to the Monopolies Commission in 1966 (MacNab, 1993 p. 229) but without formal sanction. Overall, film policy during this period was timid, confused, and contradictory and therefore the systemic problems of fragmentation and lack of access to effective distribution persisted, making it very tough for British filmmakers. However, there were some measures introduced specifically to support low budget filmmakers and these are considered in the next section.

Government support for low budget filmmaking

Pre-war, low budget filmmaking had been regarded as mainly a commercial activity by policy makers. Post-war, there was an increasing sense of its potential cultural value as evidenced by the Group Production scheme that was set up in the early 1950s, with a third of its funds being provided by the NFFC. Although Groups 1 and 2 were commercial enterprises supporting the two main production companies, Rank and ABPC, Group 3 was

designed specifically as a training ground for low budget filmmakers with a budget ceiling of £50,000 for any individual production (Caterer, 2011 p. 21). Group 3 was run by John Grierson who had a reputation for taking risky decisions in the projects he had supervised as the leader of the British Documentary Movement.

There were some critical successes, such as Philip Leacock's *The Brave Don't Cry* (1952) about a mining disaster, but many of Group 3's output were dismissed as 'sub-Ealing comedies'. Its major commercial success was the documentary, *The Conquest of Everest* (1953), which repaid almost £100,000 back to the scheme although this was regarded as a fluke as Group 3 had had serious structural issues (Dyer MacCann, 1977 p. 172). The major problem that Group 3 encountered was distribution: the agreements with the cinema chains were weak and therefore Group 3's films were given limited release and had little chance of attracting a substantial audience or box-office returns. Thus the initiative 'was fatally flawed creating an enterprise with objectives totally beyond its economic capability' (Pople, 1996 p. 138) and did nothing to alter the patterns of distribution that worked against low-budget filmmakers.

A more important and much longer term initiative was the BFI's Experimental Film Fund, which later became the BFI Production Scheme. This was an important source of finance for low budget productions, supporting over 400 shorts and feature films between 1952 and 1999 (Dupin, 2008). The fund was supported by the Eady Levy and the NFFC becoming the 'unrecognised research and development unit for the British film industry' (ibid., p. 159). The scheme had some significant successes, supporting critically acclaimed films such as *Radio On* (Petit, 1979) and *The Draughtsman's Contract* (Greenaway, 1984). It also acted as a training ground for emerging directors and producers who would go on to develop major

careers including Tony and Ridley Scott, Ken Russell and Karel Reisz (Dupin, 2003 pp. 85-87). Initially these films were screened at the BFI's cinema in London but when Peter Sainsbury took over, wider theatrical distribution became an integral part of the filmmaking process (Sainsbury, 1981 p. 46). Sainsbury negotiated a 'first look' deal with Channel 4 television in exchange for an annual fund, which further increased the production board's funds for low budget filmmaking (Wickham and Mettler, 2005 p. 13) and increased the exposure of the BFI's films. (The impact of television on the industry is discussed further below). However, despite these efforts, films financed through this scheme existed on the margins of the industry and did not challenge the main structures.

Policy initiatives, 1990-2012

The current period of film policy needs to be considered separately from what has preceded it as the changes have been far-reaching and quite complex. It would be fair to say that the current period has seen an unprecedented level of government involvement in the operations of the film industry, far higher than in other periods, with a raft of reports, statistical data and initiatives. The present period can be dated from the renewed support offered by the Conservative government for British film consequent upon another crisis in the late 1980s. The industry had argued successfully that policy changes in the 1980s (during the Thatcher Government of 1979–1990) had brought the industry 'to its knees' (Hill, 1999 p. 31) through the removal of the quota, Eady Levy and privatisation of the NFFC into a new body, British Screen (Hill, 2012 p. 335). Cinema admissions had dropped precipitously and by 1989 only 30 films were produced in the UK, the lowest tally since 1914 (ibid. p. 49). The responsibility for film policy was moved from the Department of Trade and Industry to a

newly established Department of National Heritage (later renamed the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)).

The government's first measure was the introduction of fiscal tax relief (FTR) in 1992, which gave 100 per cent tax relief for films with budgets over £20 million, reduced to £15 million in 1997. John Major's Conservative government was unable to countenance ideologically state subsidy (Hill, 2012 p. 344), and Magor and Schlesinger argue that the administration extended this necessary fiscal policy due to the recognition that the industry would collapse without intervention (2009, p. 300). Tax relief was effective giving £560 million of funding to the film industry in 2005-6 (Hill, 2012 p. 345), and served also to attract City investment, partly induced by the controversial tax incentive 'sale and leaseback' (Blair and Rainnie, 2000 p. 200) that would later cause the relief to be withdrawn. Like the Eady Levy, as the tax relief was non-selective, it could be used effectively by American companies to reduce their costs by filming in Britain, even if this 'inward investment' benefitted the UK film industry only through providing employment.

To counter charges that the government was failing to support indigenous production, it introduced another fiscal relief, the Film Tax Credit (FTC) in 2006, which relied on a points-based 'cultural test' to define the benefit to the British economy and society. The test had been created to promote the UK industrially as a creative hub, but was forced to have stronger cultural elements through the intervention of the European Union (Newsinger, 2012 p. 136). Higson has argued that 'Britishness' was not defined in the test as 'it is taken for granted that producers and others will know what Britishness is' (ibid, 2011, p. 61).

Distribution by British companies was not rewarded with any points thereby maintaining the characteristic focus on production. The cultural test was an important intervention because

it did 'represent a genuine attempt to carve out a recognisably British product – a national cinema – from Hollywood's transnational investment capital and production processes' (Newsinger, 2012 p. 137), even though it also promoted the UK as a location for inward investment (Hill, 2012 p. 348). Thus although cultural benefits of film were acknowledged, economic justification remained central. Tax relief remains the main government support of the film industry. In 2013 it provided £206 million of the total public funding of £392 million (BFI, 2014, p. 207).

The other major provision came indirectly, through the National Lottery, introduced by the Conservatives in 1994. Over a five-year period, 1995-2000, the government, through the four UK Arts Councils, gave £135 million of Lottery money to the UK film industry, part-funding over 400 films (Caterer, 2011 p. 1). Distributing money through the Arts Councils represented a significant cultural shift: for the first time film was treated as having the same status as 'fine art' activities such as opera and ballet (*ibid.*, p. 2). However, as James Caterer has demonstrated in his detailed study, the Arts Council of England (ACE) once again had to balance the demands of art and commerce, funding both highly commercial features and avant-garde short films, encouraging diversity but also needing to recoup their costs, if not show a profit (see Caterer 2011).

A third initiative was the Lottery Franchise scheme (1997-2003) in which the incoming Labour government, using lottery funds, granted film franchises of over £30 million each (DCMS, 2008a p. 55) to create three companies – Pathé Pictures, DNA Films and The Film Consortium – capable of producing a portfolio of films that could be competitive in the international marketplace. The scheme was not designed to support low-budget features but The Film Consortium in particular did welcome initiatives from producers outside its

own partners. The scheme itself was a ‘highly controversial but ambitious attempt’ to create a sustainable industrial structure and to tackle some of the problems of distribution as well as production (Spicer, 2014 pp. 83-4). However, it was seriously flawed: such integrated structures would have required decades, not years to become effective and needed a far higher level of funding to achieve their aims (see Caterer, 2011). The franchise scheme thus failed to alter the fundamental patterns of the UK film industry.

In 2002 the UKFC commissioned Simon Relph to report on how low budget film production might become more competitive and to draw up production guidelines. The report concluded that UK films needed to reduce costs because the high cost of production ‘has forced producers to dispose of all value in their films simply to get them made’ (2002 p. 8). This meant that British producers sold their intellectual property rights and so did not benefit from successful products. The report urged the UKFC to ‘protect a sector which is vital for the development of home grown talent, providing opportunities for culturally marginal as well as mainstream subjects’ (ibid., p. 3). Although the Report’s recommendations to save money were pragmatic, they were not implemented by the UKFC because of concerns about union opposition to the potential job losses that they seemed to imply (Spicer, 2014, pp. 86-7). Spicer argues that:

Seen in context, the report was swimming against the tide. Although the UKFC offered limited support to less profitable forms of filmmaking and opportunities for emerging talent, including the New Cinema Fund and the Low Budget Film Scheme (see below) designed to support low-budget production, the major thrust of its policies was to improve the British film industry’s commercial viability. Under the direction of its chairman, Alan Parker – a well-known advocate of high-budget international films involving partnerships with American companies and a scathing critic of parochial British filmmaking – the UKFC gave larger amounts of funding to high-end productions and to encouraging inward investment.

ibid., p. 87

However, Relph himself recognised that the report quickly become outdated because of the digital developments discussed below.

The UKFC (2000 – 2010) was created with an ‘interweaving of policy objectives’ (Hill, 2012 p. 337) meaning that it was responsible for both developing a sustainable industry and supporting film culture. Although there is not room to discuss the UKFC in detail (see Doyle et al., 2015 for a full account of its initiatives, life and demise) it is important to outline the different approaches that it had to low budget film production and distribution. Doyle (2014) outlines how, at the beginning, the focus of the UKFC was on high budget inward investment films, such as the animation film *Valiant* (2005), but later, with laudable flexibility, revised its focus under the chairmanship of Tim Bevan to embrace the development and funding of films such as *The King’s Speech* (2010), which had a more obvious appeal to UK audiences. The New Cinema fund was not as ‘adventurous’ as the BFI Production Board (Hill, 2012 p. 341) but supported *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006) and *Fishtank* (2009). It therefore continued a tradition of filmmaking developed by the NFFC and BFI production Board (Hill, 2012 p. 342).

The UKFC was closed down by the incoming Conservative/Liberal Democrat Government and responsibility for funding film production transferred to the BFI (Higson, 2012 p. 66 and see Doyle, 2014 pp. 143-146). The UKFC was quite successful in bringing strategic coherence, including the dispersion of funds, and in the application of commercial acumen in its decision making of which there had been little evidence before. However, it also suffered criticisms that were due to its wide remit of being responsible for all aspects of film support and so could not satisfy equitably independent and industry participants. This replayed the historic tension between commercial and cultural imperatives and

compromised the UKFC's effectiveness. It failed to achieve what Doyle describes as an 'unattainable' (p. 145) target of commercial sustainability. iFeatures was saddled with this same objective, one that would prove to undermine its selection of projects and teams.

Apart from investments by public service broadcasters discussed in Part 2, production finance is now provided through the BFI's Film Fund (18 per cent of the total public funding) and four national agencies – Creative England; Film Cymru Wales (Film Agency Wales), Creative Scotland and Northern Ireland Screen. These also provide a range of smaller funding and development opportunities in their respective regions with a separate fund administered by Film London. The Film Fund provides funding for development, production, completion, distribution and sales, hence widening the support available beyond just supporting production. The Film Fund is intended to support more risky, less obviously commercial filmmaking and evaluates projects on their 'cultural value' as much as their anticipated box office success (see BFI, 2015, pp. 1-14). The Film Fund has absorbed the three production funds administered by the UKFC. These were The Premier Fund (for commercial films), the New Cinema Fund (for experimental films) and the Development Fund. There was also a separately administered Vision Awards (2013-15) that provided up to £200,000 to support independent companies, such as Warp Films, to develop a slate of projects and grow their businesses.

Though there have been many initiatives and policy developments that have influenced production and stimulated the making of British films, the fortunes of low budget filmmakers have still been defined by the absence of effective policy to alter the structure of the distribution sector especially for independent producers making low budget film. Blair and Rainee concluded when writing in 2000 (but it still applies in 2016):

Throughout the history of the film industry in Britain, the prosperity and existence of independent producers has repeatedly been affected by the actions of distributors, and to a lesser extent exhibitors. The complex interrelationships between the functions of production, distribution and exhibition and the companies performing them is a crucial dynamic in the present day industry.

Blair and Rainee, 2000 p. 202

Part Two – New platforms and business models for low budget feature film distribution

Part two will summarise briefly how public service television became an alternative source of finance, distribution and exhibition for low budget filmmakers and subsequently the ways in which digital marketing and distribution offered new opportunities for low budget feature films to find an audience.

Television as a distribution platform for low budget filmmaking

John Hill has argued that since the early 1980s ‘all cinema, and not just that in Britain has come to rely upon television (and video) both for funding and revenues’ (Hill, 1999, p. 64). The changing relationship with television has provided the film industry with a lifeline during a period in which low budget features had limited access to distribution and exhibition (Dickinson and Harvey, 2005 pp. 427-8). In the UK, the decisive intervention came with the introduction of a second public service broadcaster, Channel 4, in 1982. Channel 4 was established after *The Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting* (1977) chaired by Lord Annan ‘picked up on the need for television to do more for the ailing domestic film industry’ (McDonald et al., 2013 p. 356). The 1980 Broadcasting Act required Channel 4 ‘to provide for tastes and interests not generally catered for on ITV and to encourage

innovation and experiment in the form and content of programmes' (Goodwin, 1996 p. 28). Jeremy Isaacs, Channel 4's first Chief Executive, was keen to support film and appointed the experienced David Rose as the first film commissioner (1980-89) with an initial budget of £6 million and a rough budget ceiling of £300,000 per film (Wickham and Mettler, 2005 p. 5). Films had an initial theatrical release and an arrangement with the Cinema Exhibitors Association permitted Channel 4 to broadcast films budgeted at under £1.25 million soon after their initial cinema run and thus command audiences of between 3.5 to 6.5 million. Not only did this maximise the Channel's ability to get a rapid return on its investment, it also made film production a more attractive investment for potential funders (Pym, 1992). Films commissioned by Channel 4 were varied and often challenging. They included political drama with *Angel* (Jordan, 1982); art cinema with *A Draughtsman's Contract* (Greenaway, 1982); and contemporary issues with *Moonlighting* (Skolimowski, 1983). It was a major production slate which revitalised an ailing industry (see Andrews 2014), providing a forum for filmmakers that was 'aesthetically, socially and/or politically oppositional' (McDonald et al., 2013 p. 358). Rose reflected that during this period there was 'hardly a film made without television money ... and most of the films are made very much with Channel 4' (quoted in Hobson, 2008 p. 64). Channel 4 also supported a scheme aimed specifically at very low budget filmmaking.

Channel 4 and the franchise workshop scheme

In its early years, Channel 4 was also committed to subsidising low budget films of socio-cultural provenance and purpose that went beyond any focus on financial returns or ratings (Hill, 1999 p. 61) through the Franchise Workshop scheme. This initiative was created in

partnership with the filmmakers' union, the Association of Cinema and Television Technicians (ACTT) to encourage accredited groups of filmmakers to make non-mainstream films for television and limited theatrical release. The subject matter was inspired by left-wing radicalism and many of the films were about marginalised working-class communities and issues such as the loss of traditional manufacturing industries (Lovell, 1990 p. 104). Because members of the workshops were paid outside union-determined pay scales, they were able to extend production schedules and thus to collaborate with communities to achieve more authentic depictions of British working class life without having to worry about ratings (Newsinger, 2009 p. 387). For example, Amber Films received £1.2 million from Channel 4 between 1982 and 1994, the equivalent of £216,000 per 90 minute film (Thomas, 2011 p. 225). As well as supporting production, the scheme required workshop filmmakers 'to attend to the issues of distribution' (Long et al., 2013 p. 381). Because Amber had a member of its collective dedicated to distribution, it received revenues from the distribution of its films in places such as Northern Europe and Australia as well as the UK (Dickinson, 1999 p. 255).

For all their success Channel 4 abandoned support for the workshops by 1991 preferring to fund feature film projects where they had direct editorial influence (Thomas, 2011 p. 204) and could acquire more rights than specified in the workshop declaration (Lovell, 1990 p. 102). However, the Workshop Franchise represented an important episode in low-budget cultural production (Andrews, 2014 p. 113).

Channel 4 (through Film 4) continues to fund feature filmmaking but does not specifically target low-budget filmmakers. However, it supports a range of projects that have different budget levels (including very low budget) and wide subject matter. It continues to retain a

commitment to progressive, challenging work; Film 4 currently emphasises that it seeks to make work with 'contemporary relevance' that will 'push the boundaries' rather than develop family films (Film 4, 2016). It set up Film4.0 to continue this policy of supporting innovative filmmaking by funding Ben Wheatley's 17th century horror *A Field in England* (2013) (Dawtre, 2012 npn). It has been joined by a reinvigorated BBC Films which supports new filmmakers and challenging films from various low budget film production schemes such as Microwave that can be broadcast on mainstream television in (usually) late night slots. Neither broadcaster fully funds the schemes or individual features, instead they co-finance with other companies, distributors, sales agents or private equity firms. Both broadcasters thus remain important sources of production finance, and projects that they fund will, through the halo of their brand, be most likely be guaranteed distribution and exhibition making them highly attractive funders, especially for medium to low budget filmmakers (Melling, 2011).

New models of distribution

This section explores the new forms of distribution made possible by emerging technology that has enabled audiences to see feature films outside theatrical circuits. The new technology has offered the potential to disrupt or circumvent the established distribution business model, spurring a re-evaluation of the terms of trade and rights ownership, and allowing, potentially, low budget filmmakers to become sustainable by reaching their audience.

The root of this optimism started in 1999 when *The Blair Witch Project* became a global success through using the Internet to engage with, and market, to audiences before the film's release. The filmmakers created a 'buzz' around the film by creating faked websites

which reported that rushes from a murdered student film crew had been found which might hold the secret of their disappearance. *The Blair Witch Project's* miniscule production budget of \$35,000 (or approximately £17,500) (Telotte, 2001 p. 32) showed that digital production techniques enabled a feature film to be made for the same cost as many short films produced on celluloid at that time. It inspired in both America and Britain, the growth of low budget production capitalising on new digital production techniques such as the *Mumblecore* 'movement' (for a full description of the movement see King, 2014 pp. 122-168). It encouraged cultural stakeholders such as the BFI, the UKFC and the Regional Screen Agencies to shift their focus from funding the production of short films of up to 30 minutes with budgets of £10-30,000 to financing low budget features running at 70-90 minutes for £100,000. Unlike shorts, these feature length films had a commercial and reputational value for directors as they could be screened theatrically, with the potential of building a niche audience, or by earning screening fees at the myriad of film festivals. They were also regarded as better training vehicles for emerging talent and could help develop a regional filmmaking infrastructure (Simmons, 2011 and see UKFC, 2008). The first UK scheme, Microwave, was organised by Film London in 2006 and was followed by several others (see Appendix 4). This included iFeatures, which as discussed, was unique because it insisted on applicants developing digital marketing instead of relying on traditional systems.

The UKFC saw the potential for British filmmakers to reach audiences free from the influence of the traditional gatekeepers – such as cinemas and existing exhibition practices:

In the fast changing media landscape, theatrical exhibition no longer governs the extent of a film's potential cultural impact ... There are now highly democratic virtual communities of interlocutors, sharing information, recommendations and debate ... And the blogosphere now supplements a wide range of consumer journalism about film, and this can mitigate the lack of critical exposure for less commercially high profile films.

No longer, it was argued, would Hollywood studios be able to use their huge marketing budgets to 'drown out' competition for their \$100 million plus films and overwhelming the typically under-resourced marketing campaigns of low budget filmmakers (Ulin, 2010 pp. 119, 384). The 'highly democratic virtual communities' (UKFC, 2009 p. 7) in the mid-2000s seemed to be in control of the social media platforms and thus were able to mobilise support for low budget productions and compete with paid-for traditional marketing.

There was a general acceptance that traditional distribution would also change. The disruptive nature of the Internet and digital convergence has been well-documented (see Jenkins, 2008) and works through a process known as 'disintermediation', where 'middle men' or companies taking fees between the producers and customers are bypassed (Adam, 2015 p. 106). The power of the distributor and exhibitors – whose fees had previously removed up to 80 per cent of box office revenues (DCMSa, 1998, p. 52) – was diminished because the film's producer could distribute their films directly to audiences. Thus digital technologies were potential game changers: the reliance on distributors and their *de facto* gatekeeping role would cease. The revenue cascade that favoured distributors and made producers unlikely to see a financial return, was, potentially, up for renegotiation. New terms of trade would then come into force that would overcome or bypass the structural failures that British producers had been forced to accept for so long.

This potential for radical change in the economics of the British film industry was tested by iFeatures' stakeholders. The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (Nesta) developed a research project, *Take 12*, which sought to develop new Internet

business models in the creative industries. Film producers and film distributors such as Metrodome Distribution, Revolver Entertainment and Warp Films took part in an experiment where they attempted, alongside other companies in the creative industries, to create new digitally-enabled business models. As Nesta reported, the transformative characteristics of the new technology encouraged innovative thinking: 'New companies are rewriting the rules of film and other creative media rather than trying to adapt them, and creating radical new models around free distribution, cross-media narratives, Creative Commons licensing, viral marketing, and crowd funding.' (Nesta, 2010 p. 13).

However, the project also identified problems. Although there was enthusiasm for finding new methods and models in the feature film industry, the established companies had difficulty in adopting new processes and strategies. When reviewing the film industry, Simon Relph had also identified that the structural weaknesses that had beset the industry for over 90 years created a 'huge force of inertia created by a sense throughout the industry of the way things should be done and a sometimes understandable caution about risking change' (UKFC, 2002 p. 1). In other words, the resilience of the traditional structure and its associated ideology prevented change in the short to medium term. However, it was felt that this was liable to change gradually as the financial benefits and creative possibilities became evident over time.

Other stakeholders also perceived digital technologies as having the potential for radical change, including the need to rethink the terms of trade for feature film producers. The Producers Alliance of Cinema and Television (PACT) commissioned a report, *A New Business Model for UK Film Producers* (PACT, 2010), which analysed the business model and rights distribution under which British feature filmmakers were obliged to work. It concluded that

a lack of retained Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) ownership was the foundation of this fragmented and powerless 'cottage industry'. PACT's report identified that the producers are the least rewarded in the film value chain because the 'revenue cascade' from exhibition revenue is allocated first to exhibitors, then to distributors, next to investors and finally producers. This system meant that after the first three 'upstream' stakeholders had removed their fees or recouped their investment, there was usually nothing left for low budget producers (PACT, 2010 and DCMS, 2008a p. 52). However, digital media had changed consumer behaviour and how audiences could be reached. John McVay, Chief Executive of PACT, argued that the opportunities afforded by disintermediation needed to be acted on quickly before the US industry could regroup to maintain their powerful position:

The cultural aims that underpin UK policy will continue to be fundamental to the sector's development ... It is vital that these changes happen now so that content creators are in a position to take advantage of the digital revolution ... This disintermediation will allow content creators to move up the value chain by having more direct relationships with their customers, but opportunities will be missed unless the film businesses have the financial strength to serve as a platform for this expansion.

John McVay quoted in PACT, 2010 p. 2

When the UKFC was disbanded in 2011, PACT's report filled 'the vacuum' (O'Brien, 2012 npn). It suggested that production funds from the UKFC should not be subject to recoupment but become the producers' equity, with 70 per cent of recouped funds ring-fenced for future UK filmmaking thereby rewarding success and improving the future position of the successful producer in a revised revenue cascade. PACT also suggested that terms of trade between independent feature producers and public service broadcasters mirror the IPR transferred to independent television production companies in the 2003

Communications Act (PACT, 2014). It was hoped this would allow the previously under capitalised companies to share in the global exploitation of their back catalogue and attract investors. PACT's report recommended that grants and development costs should be treated equally with the investment made by commercial funders and so recouped at the same point in the revenue cascade. Finally, they wanted to force broadcasters to return rights after five years, not, as was typical, fifteen, and thus prevent distributors from 'warehousing' finished films; they would be required to actively exploit the films in their portfolio or be forced to return the rights to producers. Although PACT claimed that these recommendations were, arguably, cost neutral they would have overcome the major reasons for 'the cottage industry' status of the industry and would seize the potential afforded by the 'digital revolution'.

The 2012 Film Policy Review *A Future for British Film: it begins with the audience* also advocated a major rethink. The review argued that some of the new developments increased the pressures on the British film industry. As broadband coverage had almost saturated the UK's population (Ofcom, 2014) and larger, high definition television sets were becoming ubiquitous, the demand to see film in cinema was changing. Until 2004, DVD sales had been the main source of revenue for low budget British features as the theatrical screenings were widely acknowledged as a loss leader (BFI, 2011 p. 124). However, by 2010 revenues from DVDs was declining while VOD (video on demand) rentals were increasing. However, each viewing by VOD offered less than 10 per cent of financial return to producers as compared to revenue from a DVD, and so this form of digital distribution significantly reduced income and created greater financial insecurity (Finney, 2010 p. 124).

As in Nesta's *Take 12* initiative, the DCMS report identified that although there were clear signs that the audiences' viewing habits were changing and embracing new technology, producers were still resistant to adaptation and slow to see alternative methods of distribution and exhibition. The report argued that: 'The British independent film industry has a world-leading reputation for *creative* experimentation but traditional film funding structures – both private and public – have not lent themselves to *commercial* experimentation' (DCMS, 2012 p. 20; original emphasis). However, the 'potential rewards for success [were] huge' because British low budget filmmakers had an opportunity through digital feedback from their audience, to 'determine what people want, how they want to access it, and what they are prepared to pay' (ibid., p. 27) and therefore filmmaking teams (not only distributors) had to be part of the solution to satisfy these expectations.

The DCMS review recommended a raft of radical policies that would encourage this commercial experimentation to change fundamentally the UK filmmaking ecology. These included that in future funding should be shared between production and distribution activities, multiple slates of production should be funded to reward and develop creative vision, the recycling of profits to reward success, and systems to encourage and commission a wider variety of scripts and ideas than had occurred before. In addition, the review suggested a range of business-focused policies to encourage filmmakers to work with distributors and financiers in partnership with 'joined up interests' to develop more profitable relationships in a 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' government policy (DCMS, 2012 pp. 36-51). PACT's direct influence can be clearly traced in these recommendations, but they have remained only recommendations at the time of writing as the government has not yet proposed any new legislation in line with the review.

This part has demonstrated that the emergence of digital marketing platforms from the mid-2000s has been, although the term is overused and can be a cliché, a potential ‘game-changer’ that could challenge the stranglehold of US domination. The potential to overcome a century of market failure and to develop a vibrant low budget sector and even a national cinema has seemed to be a real possibility. However, PACT’s report and the film policy review also suggest that the terms of trade, and with them the relationship between producers, distributors and exhibitors, also needed to change decisively if the UK was to develop a diverse and sustainable film industry.

Conclusion

During my interview in 2011, Chris Collins, Head of the UKFC’s Film Fund, argued that the UK had, in effect, two industries: the studios and high-end facilities which serviced multi-million dollar Hollywood productions that benefitted from government support in the form of subsidy or tax relief, and the low budget cultural films which piggybacked on that infrastructure (Collins, 2011).

This chapter has traced the historical causes of this situation and thus the difficulties created for indigenous low budget filmmakers. It has shown how, from the end of the First World War, the UK film industry has been dominated by American companies and that major UK corporations colluded with them because their own profits stemmed from producing, distributing and exhibiting American films.

This chapter also discussed the various interventions that have been made since the 1927 Cinematograph Act to support UK film production and the specific schemes that were aimed

at sustaining and nurturing low budget production. The chapter has shown that, with the exception of public service broadcasters, especially Channel 4, these interventions have been largely ineffectual, often confused, contradictory or short-term. Successive governments have been too timid and too frightened of upsetting American interests to tackle the deep-seated problems of access to effective distribution and exhibition but have, instead, concentrated on overcoming some of the inequalities by supporting production. British film policy has been far less interventionist than Continental Europe (see Betz, 2009 p. 12). The main effect of government policies has been to encourage inward investment by the Hollywood majors rather than encourage a diverse and economically viable low budget sector. Thus the UK feature film remains a fragmented 'cottage industry' that is underfunded and precarious, dominated by American multinationals.

The final section discussed the hopes that digital technologies held the promise of radical change that could overcome the systemic weaknesses of the UK film industry. Digital and social media platforms have offered an alternative future including cheap and effective DIY marketing for low budget filmmakers which could allow them to compete, for the first time, on a level playing field with the large marketing budgets of mainstream films. However, there has been an acknowledgement that, on its own, technological developments did not provide a full solution. The 2012 film review and PACT's 2010 report argued that the terms of trade for feature film producers needed to change radically if the UK were to develop sustainable businesses.

Thus the iFeatures scheme was born in this difficult and conflicted context, and this needs to be recognised and understood.

Chapter 4

Understanding attitudes to marketing in the creative teams of low budget feature films.

iFeatures has always been about Bristol and talent and cracking stories. We have always had a commercial emphasis and said that we want people to go and see them, that we don't want it to have one person in the cinema and one person buying it on a DVD. Marketing has been very important to us but at the same time we are interested in quality.

Melissa Blackburn, iFeatures1 Project Manager, 2011

I think the directors have to stay true to their vision, do what they feel and follow their instinct and then if it works, if the film is good enough, people will want to see it. Attempting to second guess the market because a sales agent or distributor tells you that they can sell it in Korea if you put a helicopter on the poster, it doesn't help you make a good film.

Chris Collins, Head of the Film Fund, UKFC, 2011

I mean from my point of view all the marketing stuff [training] was completely useless to me. It's not helpful for a writer to even be thinking about that at that stage. It's not my job anyway.

Lucy Catherine, Screenwriter of *In the Dark Half*, 2011

These quotations suggest a tension in the iFeatures scheme between management, funders and participants. Blackburn, iFeatures project manager, summarises the scope of the iFeatures objectives while also introducing a distinction between 'marketing' and 'quality'. The UKFC, which was a funder of one of the iFeatures films, had a film policy that emphasised commercial success rather than cultural success (Dickinson and Harvey, 2005 p. 426); however, the quotation from Collins, Head of the UKFC's Film Fund, suggests that directors, for him the prime creative force, should not second-guess the market but follow their 'vision'. Catherine, a writer with broadcast television credits, sums up the attitude of

many iFeatures filmmakers that her role and responsibility was not marketing and that commercial concerns negatively impacted on her vision and the craft of scriptwriting. Taken together, these viewpoints outline the tensions between commerce and culture, and specifically between marketing and creativity. This chapter explores the attitudes held by the iFeatures management, funders and participants and seeks to answer how these tensions played out in the production of the low budget features, why these different positions were held and what could be done to ameliorate these tensions in future.

In the first part of the chapter I will briefly describe the marketing training provided by iFeatures and explore the attitudes and skills of the filmmakers who received that training. To understand the motivations of the filmmakers I am going to use the theoretical work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to interpret why the particular attitudes of the filmmakers were confined within the specific field of cultural production by 'first time' teams making low budget films with both commercial and cultural objectives. I will also argue that the filmmakers in the scheme did not have the skills or right attitude (or in Bourdieu's terminology, 'disposition') to market the films as a result of conflicting pressures within the field of cultural production. I will also argue that the training was oversimplified, which set up confusion and false expectations that were not clarified by the iFeatures' management team. The consequences of these issues will be explored in later chapters when the marketing of the three films in the iFeatures slate is evaluated in depth through case studies of the three iFeatures films.

The strategy for transforming filmmakers into marketers

iFeatures had a bold and innovative ambition: to make three low budget films with teams that had a story that sought to 'challenge, move and entertain' (iFeatures, 2009b p. 3), and

which were commercially focused to a degree that would allow them to pursue financial success alongside their creative ambitions. Moll stated that the aim of the scheme was to make films for £300,000 that look like £3 million was spent 'and can still make a significant cultural and financial return' (Northern Ireland Screen, 2009).

It was stated in the applicants' guidelines that in making a submission to the iFeatures scheme - alongside other aims of project quality, ability of the team, and public benefit – under the heading of 'Market potential of the project', that:

iFeatures wants to work with filmmakers who are commercially savvy, can envisage the audience for their film and are *capable of delivering a distribution strategy* to maximise its access, impact and return.

iFeatures, 2009a p. 9, my emphasis

This firmly indicates an extension of the typical creative responsibilities for filmmakers and requires these teams to 'deliver' and engage in the distribution aspects of the film industry. It is less clear what is meant by this. For the filmmakers, they interpreted iFeatures' rules as a requirement that they be involved 'hands-on' in a marketing campaign to the audience/consumers during theatrical and subsequent release windows.

The selection process went into greater detail about iFeatures' ideal applicant who would be able to conduct a marketing campaign. The assessors' guidelines required an evaluation of whether applicants demonstrated a clear understanding of the potential audience and indicated 'how they plan to reach that audience' (iFeatures 2009b p. 4). Also knowledge of current market conditions with an evaluation of the commercial success of other similar projects and their 'marketing/ positioning would be helpful'. The teams should also demonstrate a willingness to work with distributors as well as having identified 'any innovative digital/online distribution options as well as more conventional forms' (iFeatures,

2009b p. 5). Taken together, these multiple criteria should have provided a shortlist for the scheme with a set of attitudes, or dispositions, toward the development and creation of ambitious commercial projects. Again, it appears, attention was attached to marketing the film to audiences through a variety of distribution channels including digital.

Confusion over the techniques and strategies is not unusual for people not professionally engaged in marketing. Kerrigan and Özbilgin describe how film marketing is a *process* concerned with the goal of maximizing the audience, and thereby the earning potential of a film. This starts with the development of an idea through to exploitation in all the ancillary windows, but 'often the focus is placed on the "marketing campaign" rather than the marketing process'. (2004, p. 229) and that this focus was usually centered on the theatrical release (Finney, 2010, p. 105). iFeatures sought to remedy any focus on the 'selling' stage by offering the whole cohort of shortlisted applicants training to raise awareness of the marketing process.

Transforming filmmakers into marketers

Training was offered to filmmakers so that they could achieve the iFeatures objectives. A fortnight after the twelve shortlisted projects were announced on 21 January 2010, the Skillset funded training started with a focus on the film business, which the author attended. On 2 February 2010, Ed Sharp from Film Tree, a UKFC funded partner, gave a presentation on product placement contracts which are used by blockbuster films to supplement the production and marketing budget. He used examples taken from the Bond franchise, *Quantum of Solace* (2008) where only Ford vehicles appeared exclusively in the film. This was generally regarded as out of sync with the needs, aspirations and potential of low-

budget feature filmmakers and the subsequent training assessments by iFeatures confirmed this position (Olsberg/SPI, 2010c and Howe, 2011).

Other sessions were more useful: a question and answer seminar with a panel which included a low budget feature director, producer, and importantly, distributor (iFeatures, 2010a). David Shear, Head of Theatrical Distribution at Revolver Entertainment, introduced the filmmakers to various ways of marketing the films using examples from iFeatures predecessor scheme Digital Departures films such as *Salvage* (Gough, 2009), *Of Time and the City* (Davies, 2009) and the Microwave film *Freestyle* (Lee, 2010). For example *Freestyle* held a 'find a star' competition on Bebo, a social network, which built awareness of the film to 50,000 people through the audition and selection of a 'fan' for a major role. Shear also discussed using a 'Day and Date' release model where the film is released simultaneously in cinemas, VOD and DVD so that any marketing spend is efficiently used in one major campaign rather than, more typically, multiple releases over many months. The questioners explored what criteria Shear would have looked for if he was going to distribute one of the iFeatures slate to which he answered; 'Knowing your audience, number one. Ideally a commercial genre. If you can do these things, it's golden' (iFeatures, 2010a p. 6). However, the impact of this talk was minimal as none of the participants recalled this session when interviewed.

Further business training for the iFeatures filmmakers occurred two weeks later on 19 February 2010 with another session on the international marketplace for film, which was central to Chris Moll's international ambition for the films and a guiding reason for the focus on marketing and distribution training. Carl Clifton, Managing Director of The Works International, a feature film sales company, who after a brief introduction about the major

international films he had sold in foreign markets, answered the first question ‘What films are selling?’ with the curt reply, ‘Commercial.’ (Clifton, 2010). He then went on to explore international sales through a brief case study of *I Am Love* (Guadagnino, 2009) by breaking down expected returns via territories such as Japan, Russia and Italy and advised that the teams do research on similar feature films as their own to understand building an audience early and sticking to a popular genre. Many interviewed participants (see later) doubted the usefulness of this session as they could not imagine that their small films had the potential for any significant foreign sales exposure.

The session entitled ‘Marketing in the digital age’ was run by Morgan Holt, the chairman of the Branded Content Marketing Association whose mission is stated on its website: ‘The BCMA is the trade body for branded content and is designed to bring together and benefit a broad spectrum of content creators and owners’(BCMA website, 2012). Like the earlier presentation on product placement, this was seen by the filmmakers to be largely irrelevant to their ambitions, or to the subjects commissioned for development, and was largely derided. Rory Ahern, from the viral marketing agency, *Teamrubber*, discussed strategies for engaging potential audiences via social media using ‘mavens’ (respected and influential people who act as nodes with access to consumers), bloggers, and participatory devices such as social games using examples from *Antichrist* (von Trier, 2009) and *Shutter Island* (Scorsese, 2010). The key result was that Ahern confirmed Moll’s assertion that the film is only part of the project and that success would depend on the production team allocating resources to the distribution and marketing issues.

In general, this day was congruent with the ethos of the scheme, which was succinctly defined by Abigail Davies, producer of *Our Own Shadows*, as ‘low-budget film-making in the

marketplace, for the marketplace'. (Davies, 2011). The workshops promoted a clear hands-on DIY marketing ethos as good practice for aspiring low budget film makers. In the competitive 'hot house' environment of the iFeatures scheme where filmmaking teams wanted to impress the regularly occurring selection panels, many teams, and especially the those involved in the production of *Our Own Shadows*, actively switched attention from the narrative issues and development of their scripts to create detailed marketing plans, blog entries and websites. However, this was a strategy which failed and was regretted by the team (McCormack, 2011).

The speaker who made the most impact on the filmmakers was Pete Buckingham, Head of Distribution and Exhibition at the UKFC. Almost evangelical in tone, his presentation was intended as a provocation, to reframe film production as an industrial process with typical business concerns such as a return on investment and profit. He spoke for almost 90 minutes on recent UKFC research, which I explore in depth later in this chapter, about audience motivation and its relevance to understanding how the film business operated. He said about the research:

I think the reason why it's so effective is that it is a very rare piece of research which examines *why* audiences do things, not *what* they're doing ... And once you understand a bit more of the *why* then you can then begin to understand some of the other motivating factors inside the system which is why a film's financed, how much are the budgets, why those budgets are there, why is the P&A [prints and advertising] big on that one and small on that one, why one film will go out in 10 screens and another will go out in 500 screens.

Buckingham, 2011

Buckingham went on to argue that he had filmmakers' interests in mind: they were not aware of how the film business operates, how value is added to a film through the

production and delivery chain, and ultimately how investments in production are repaid.

His reasoning for giving this lecture was as follows:

I don't know if I have a sense of justice or a sense of mission, but I don't think it's fair in lots of ways to allow filmmakers to develop projects, or become passionate about a certain project or an idea that they may spend a long time and money trying to make, when the reality is that it's very unlikely that anyone is ever going to watch it.

Buckingham, 2011

Buckingham's motivation is clear. In one sense the lack of business awareness of British filmmakers leads to films being made that would not reach a large enough audience to recoup their costs. As the UKFC relied on recoupment to fund future productions, the research reinforced their policy of securing box office success (UKFC, 2003 p. 42). There is also a paternalistic attitude about not 'allowing' misguided filmmakers to waste resources which may be used to underline the UKFC strategy even if critical success, rather than commercial success, was the core motivation.

To understand the scope and breadth of Buckingham's presentation, I will now outline some of the context and key points of the presentation before analysing the filmmakers' reactions and attitudes in order to explore the lack of fit between the training objectives and the eventual impact it actually had on the filmmakers' behaviour.

Buckingham's provocative masterclass

Buckingham's presentation was entitled *What Do We Look For In a Film? UK Audiences and Indicators of Commercial Viability*. I will describe some of the salient points as they were part of the convincing and persuasive presentation that had a profound influence on the

filmmakers and exposed Buckingham's central thesis. A full copy of the presentation can be found in Appendix 5.

The presentation started by introducing a summary of UKFC research, which included statistics such as the main cinema going demographic (and, therefore, the audience to aim for): 15 to 24 year olds. They represent 40 per cent of the cinema audience and have a high frequency of visits to the cinema whereas 55+ year olds represent only 20 per cent of the cinema audience. Also the 'upmarket' ABC1s (a socio-demographic label that includes people in professions, middle management and white collar employment) represent 60 per cent of the cinema audience. Buckingham also identified multiplex audience segments or clusters with titles such as 'Film Fanatics' who are male aged 24-55, review led and who pre-plan their trip), 'Impressionable Socialites', 'Modern Families', 'Fun Lovers' (who are not film literate and generally big TV and DVD consumers), 'Hero Seekers', 'Impulsive Materialists', and 'Youth of Today' (who see films as soon as they are released). These clusters were all used to position mainstream films, to design their marketing to target efficiently the spend on specific audience segments. However, these segments did not feature the 'Avid' segments defined by other research (UKFC, 2007 p. 3) who are film literate, as this was arguably not the market that iFeatures wanted to aim for as they were potentially too 'art house'.

Buckingham also identified the important drivers and barriers to audiences which underpinned his argument. He explained that drivers for film selection by audiences could be generally defined as familiar elements which included 'personally preferred' genres, well-known actors or directors and positive word-of-mouth. Barriers to audiences selecting a film included an imprecise genre, unrecognisable actors and limited discussion of the film on

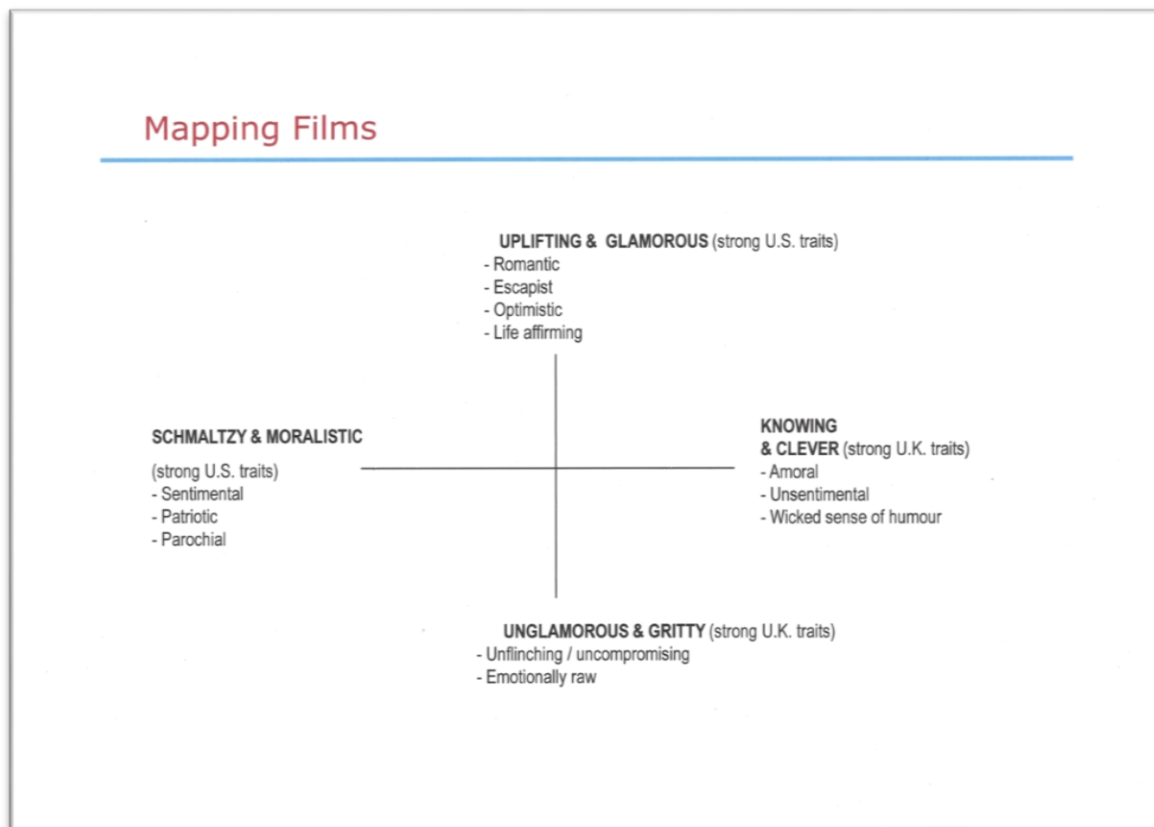
social networks. Research also identified genres that appealed to male or female audiences. Romance and period films were most popular with female audiences, while men were categorised as being attracted to action and sci-fi genres. In other words, this section of the presentation suggested to the filmmakers that within the iFeatures scheme the films that would be commissioned would be aimed at a mainstream audience which sought entertainment with conventional narrative structures rather than films that challenged audience expectations or that were 'social realist' in nature.

As Buckingham's presentation continued, the central thesis encouraged the iFeatures filmmakers to make films that would be popular with audiences rather than be popular with critics. Or to put it another way, to make films based on an industrial rather than cultural notion of British cinema. The presented research highlighted why US films were popular with British audiences. It was argued that what people liked about Hollywood films was that they were generally epic in scale, exhilarating, glamorous and escapist. However, US films were also regarded by British audiences as moralistic, unrealistic, schmaltzy and patriotic. By contrast, British films were positively appreciated by British audiences for their strong characters, identifiable British narratives, high quality actors, unique British humour, authenticity, intelligence, freshness, and lack of sentimentality, but with amorality and daring. The negative aspects of British films included reusing a limited number of actors, depressing locations and stories, reliance on heritage, being un-cinematic and lacking scale, being moralising, worthy, and predictable, and having poor emotional engagement.

To drive home his point, Buckingham then put four dimensions on to a matrix as shown in Figure 3. On the matrix, Buckingham placed the positive and negative aspects of US film in different sections namely: in positive terms 'uplifting and glamorous', and in negative terms

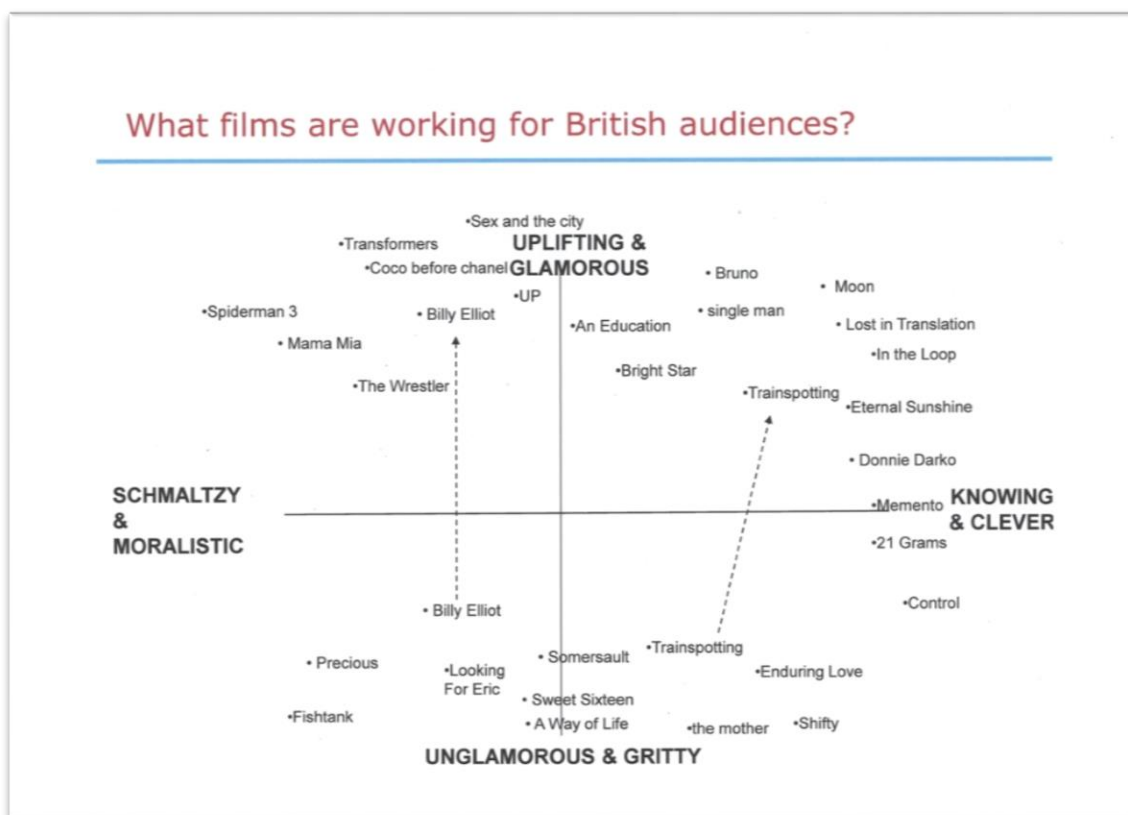
'schmaltzy and moralistic'. He placed against these qualities the positive qualities of UK film as 'knowing and clever' and their negative attributes of 'unglamorous and gritty'.

Figure 3: 'Mapping films', slide 20, Buckingham, 2010. Used with permission of the author.



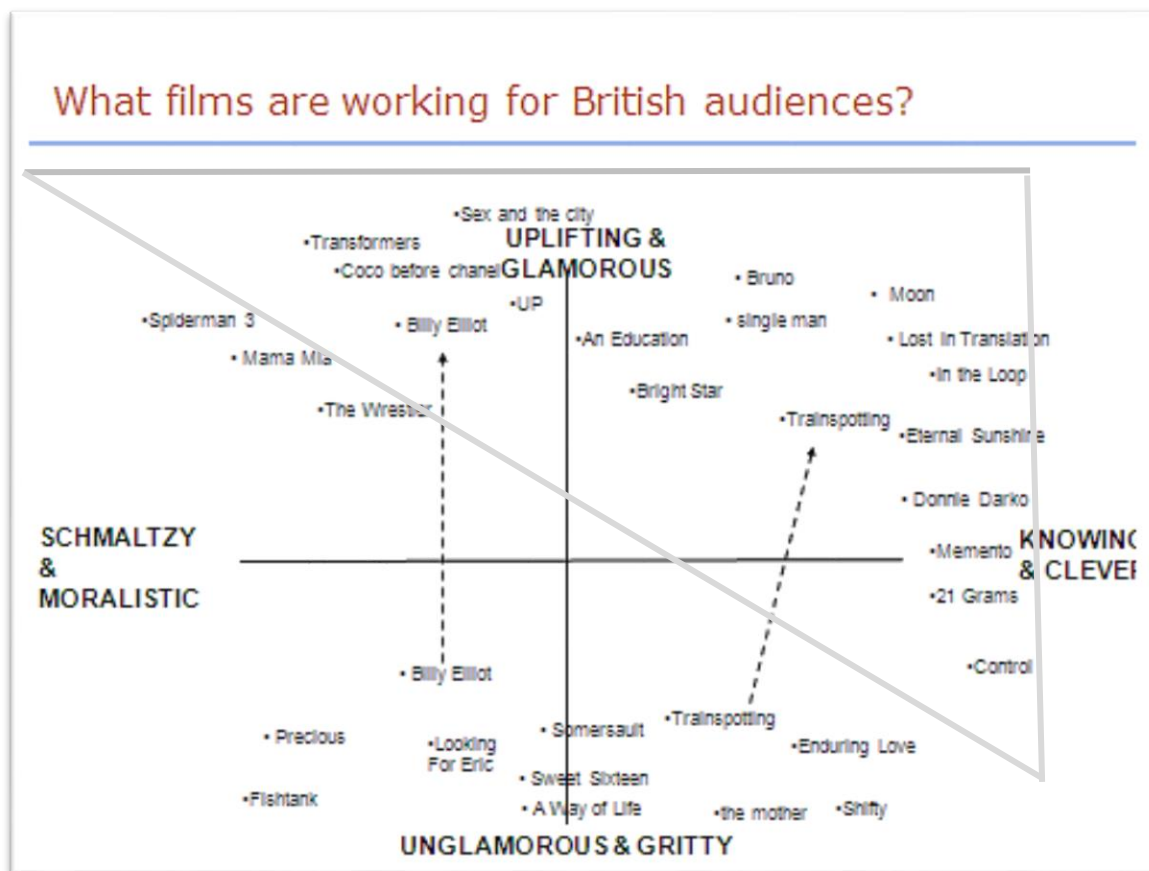
Buckingham then placed various contemporary British and American films on the matrix (Figure 4). It is interesting to note that Buckingham acknowledged that his selection and placement of the films at the bottom of the matrix in the 'unglamorous and gritty' section included many award-winning and highly respected British films such as *Fish Tank* (Arnold, 2009), *Looking for Eric* (Loach, 2009) and *Shifty* (Creevy, 2010). Buckingham asserted that *Trainspotting* and *Billy Elliot* both moved away from the 'unglamorous and gritty' sections due to the creative strengths of their directors, Daldry and Boyle respectively (as indicated by the dotted arrows).

Figure 4: 'What films are working for British Audiences?', slide 21, Buckingham, 2010. Used with permission of the author.



Controversially and provocatively, Buckingham then superimposed a grey triangle over the matrix (Figure 5) to show where films should be aiming to position themselves, namely in the 'uplifting and glamorous' / 'knowing and clever' section of the matrix and avoiding the 'schmaltsy and moralistic' and 'unglamorous and gritty' sections. He said this was because although many British films not in this triangle had been successful critically, they had not been successful financially as they had not recouped their production investment. In the same way that Moll had stated that iFeatures was a scheme where the films would be able to compete internationally, Buckingham was positioning iFeatures in competition with US indie films: in short, taking on the US industry in its own territory.

Figure 5: 'What films are working for British audiences', Slide 22, Buckingham (2010) with adapted triangle to improve legibility. Used with permission of the author.



Buckingham’s presentation brought to the fore almost 100 years of tensions between industrial or cultural purposes of British film (see the previous chapter for further discussion of this tension). There is evidence that this tension was still being played out in the reactions and attitudes of the filmmakers to the commercial aspirations of iFeatures.

Buckingham continued his presentation with a checklist of elements for a financially successful film. He produced a table of what he described as ‘critical success factors’ (figure 6) such as clear genre, well-known cast, well-known source, potential buzz, a hook or a twist and an innovative element. Buckingham indicated that a film needed to have two or three

criteria to motivate 'word of mouth/media hype', which would increase the likelihood of increasing audiences. The clear lesson from this table was to design films from the outset which appealed to what audiences said attracted them to the cinema and particular films and therefore could lead to increased box office. For example, *8 Minutes Idle* ticked many of these boxes and was regarded as the great commercial hope for some of the funders (Collins, 2011 and Thomas, 2011) due to its slacker/rom-com genre, based on an award winning book. However, this was not conceived by the creative team as a commercial project but as an artistically driven one which 'accidentally' (Hewis, 2012) contained commercial elements. We shall see later how this caused tension between the different stakeholders and the teams.

If anyone doubted the importance of the research and the UKFC's business approach, Buckingham finished with some key data. Between 2003 and 2006, 535 UK films were produced, of which only 236, or approximately 44 per cent, were released theatrically within two years of completion. This meant that these films had passed the criteria of the market 'gate keepers', and found their first audience – the distributors – and could go on to be tested in the market with the second audience – the general public.

Although Buckingham did not furnish results of how many of these distributed films recouped even their production investment, he said provocatively; '47% have NEVER been released' (Buckingham, 2010 slide 26 in Appendix 5) which represented a huge waste of talent, time and money. The implication was that films that did not follow the Buckingham/UKFC thesis were destined to fail to find a distributor and fail to be a commercial success – the UKFC's definition of success. The iFeatures teams were still developing their projects prior to another selection panel on 18 and 19 March 2010 where

Figure 6: 'Critical success factors' Slide 31, Buckingham, 2010. Used with permission of the author.

Critical Success factors....your turn.....

| TITLE | CLEAR GENRE? | ACTORS WELL CAST?/ WELL KNOWN 'PRODUCE RS'? | KNOWN SOURCE? | POTENTIAL BUZZ? | HOOK/ TWIST? | NEW/ DIFFERENT? |
|------------|--------------|---|---------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| A NEW FILM | ✓✓ ✓✓✓ | ✓ | | | ✓✓ ✓✓ | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

If the genre is not obvious there needs to be an appealing hook to compensate eg 'Ballet Star in a macho mining community'. If neither the genre and the hook are clear or motivating the film will struggle to be selected. If 2 or 3 of the criteria are satisfied then word of mouth/media hype can be optimally achieved. Soundtracks are also increasingly important these days.

half of the projects would be culled from the scheme. Participants clearly interpreted this to be an instruction on what they should deliver to pass successfully through to the next stage of the scheme (McCormack, 2011).

Understanding the characteristics of low budget feature film cultural production

Introduction

Before analysing specific responses to the Buckingham lecture by the iFeatures stakeholders, I will now introduce Bourdieu's schema as the theoretical framework. In a similar fashion to Buckingham's claim that his research answered the question 'why, not

what' in terms of audiences, this section seeks to offer a conceptual model to answer why filmmakers reacted as they did to marketing in the iFeatures scheme. Later I will use this conceptual model to explore the stakeholder's dispositions through the examination of in-depth interviews with the author.

Like Hesmondhalgh, who wrote when researching the media industry: 'I was constantly struck by the familiarity of the worlds [Bourdieu] described...' (2006, p. 217), I too noticed the relevance of Bourdieu's theories after I started the in-depth interviews. In this analysis I focus the discussion on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital and how these impact on the attitudes and practices, or what Bourdieu termed 'dispositions', of low budget filmmakers working in the cultural field of production.

The relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual framework

Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002) was a French sociologist and a prolific and highly influential writer on cultural sociology. There have been other sociological approaches to the formation of art such as Danto (1964), Becker (1982), Di Maggio (1982), and Baumann (2001), but what was distinctive about Bourdieu was that he developed a general theory which placed culture, and the knowledge to decipher the codes of culture, as a stratifying device in society. In the 1990s, Bourdieu became regarded as the 'the world's most eminent sociologist' (Silva and Warde, 2010 p. 1) possibly due to his empirical, rather than purely theoretical studies (ibid., p. 3) but it is Bourdieu's general theory that has become the most influential in recent years due to its ability to be applied to new contexts and especially, in this thesis, to film (Heise and Tudor, 2007 p. 166).

Bourdieu's analysis identified culture as a powerful asset that had been used to stratify society and reproduce power relations within society (Bennet et al., 2009 p. 10). Art, music and literature were regarded by Bourdieu as social agents used by those who prized these arts to justify their continued entitlement to their place in society. The role of the arts therefore:

legitimizes the transmission of the cultural heritage. In doing so it is performing a confidence trick. Apart from enabling the elite to justify being what it is, the ideology of giftedness, the cornerstone of the educational and social system, helps to enclose the under privileged classes in the roles which society has given them by making them see as natural inability things which are only a result of inferior social status.

Bourdieu, 1986 p. 42

Although at first Bourdieu's theories, as seen in his seminal work *Distinction* (1986), focused on the formation of 'taste' and how that determines demand for culture in different sections of society, his later work explored how cultural work was produced. Although taste formation is important for the reception of the films, at this stage of the thesis I will focus on what Bourdieu called the *fields of cultural production* as this chapter is concerned with attitudes to marketing during the production of the films within the iFeatures scheme.

Bourdieu wrote extensively about the cultural production of literature in two books, *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *The Rules of Art* (1996); other researchers have applied the general theory to media. Heise and Tudor (2007), Tudor (2005), Hesmondhalgh (2006) and Hill (2004) have developed a strong theoretical platform,

which I will build upon and apply to the iFeatures scheme, the stakeholders and their attitudes to marketing. These writers have raised some questions about the relevance of Bourdieu's analysis to contemporary culture, as he never wrote extensively on cinema and media, and his analysis is not 'fully attuned to the complexities of mass production' (Hill, 2004 p. 30) and was too rigidly focused on fine art, literature, and the social sciences (Hesmondhalgh, 2006 p. 211), and not on popular cultural forms (Heise and Tudor, 2007 p. 166). However, Bourdieu did write later, polemically, on the impact of commercialism on culture, which is highly significant to this thesis. He wrote specifically about the homogenising effect of the market on television production and Hollywood films:

Far from promoting diversity, competition breeds homogeneity. The pursuit of audience ratings leads producers to look for omnibus products that can be consumed by audiences of all backgrounds, in all countries because they are weakly differentiated and differentiating.

Bourdieu, 2003 p. 68

Bourdieu went on to criticise how vertical integration of large communications corporations leads to preferential treatment of their own products and censorship through market forces of competitors' products so that avant-garde cinema fails to gain the traction in the marketplace that could otherwise be expected (*ibid.*, p72). These positions seem to describe very accurately the mature oligarchy of the American studio system and their domination of national cinemas, including Britain, as explored in Chapter 3. Bourdieu could not have anticipated the disruptive influence of the Internet to film distribution, which occurred at the end of his life. However, this research intends to explore whether the low budget commercially orientated feature films, as defined by iFeatures, could find niche

audiences by their teams using digital marketing techniques and how Bourdieu's conceptual framework aids this analysis.

Bourdieu's field of cultural production

In this section I will bring together Bourdieu's concepts as discussed above using a diagram (see figure 7) from Bourdieu's *Rules of Art* (1996 p. 124). The diagram is useful for this discussion as it visually allows the foundational concepts to be mapped onto the motivations of the filmmakers and in some sense to 'expose the workings of the field'. But first, I need to explain some key concepts in Bourdieu's schema to understand the reception of iFeatures training. I will briefly outline Bourdieu's main concepts of habitus, field, and capital (including social and symbolic) and indicate how they relate to each other and form a coherent framework to aid the analysis of the primary data.

Habitus

Bourdieu's work attempted to navigate between the competing theoretical orthodoxies of subjectivism and objectivism. As Brubaker (1985) argues, whereas subjectivists such as the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre put an emphasis on an individual's creativity, freedom and power of choice, objectivists such as the anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss had an emphasis on the structural institutions that operated independently on the consciousness of agents. Bourdieu regarded these as individually inadequate, and developed a conceptual space that defined class as not directly related to the means of production, but as a product of social relations 'produced by differential conditioning in different endowments of power or

capital' (Brubaker, 1985 p. 761). These conditions of existence and the dispositions they produced are what Bourdieu called habitus and is Bourdieu's foundational principle that extends the concept of class. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu argued that the habitus is:

a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general transposable disposition which carries out a systematic universal application - beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt - the necessity inherent in the learning conditions.

(Bourdieu, 2010 p. 166)

Therefore, the habitus of an individual will influence the production and reception of all cultural work through a web of reproducible dispositions, or attitudes, and 'affinities' that influence their practices. Thus dispositions and lifestyles are systematic products of habitus or, in other words, sign systems that are socially qualified and can influence which forms of cultural production are viewed in the social space as 'distinguished' or 'vulgar' (Bourdieu, 2010 p. 161). They act and react in a mediated manner between social structures and practical outcomes (Brubaker 1985 p. 758). Thus the habitus should be regarded as a powerful and durable set of beliefs, methods of working and aspirations, but it should also be acknowledged that 'it is not a destiny' (Fowler, 2006 p. 100) and that agents retain powers to alter or amend their disposition. Park argues that habitus and the creation of media making is a product of past experience enabled by structural arrangements and the 'strategic orientation of those whose labour is directly tied up with making media content' (Park, 2009 p. 3).

Bourdieu was aware that dispositions, created out of one set of social conditions, could find themselves out of sync with new social conditions. This time delay or dispositional lag was labelled by Bourdieu as the 'hysteresis effect' (Brubaker, 1985 p. 759). The training offered by iFeatures aimed to overcome some deep rooted dispositions about commercial filmmaking

and to minimise the lag. I will argue that iFeatures was attempting to ask filmmakers to work in new commercial areas against their dispositions towards personal expression, and the training was an attempt to speed up this transition.

The Field

Whereas the habitus can be described as an agent's 'modus operandi', the field is an area where agents, with dispositions derived from the habitus, compete against each other for symbolic capital, that is to say, accumulated prestige and honour (Heise and Tudor, 2007 p. 168 and Hesmondhalgh, 2006 p. 215). Each field has 'a separate social universe having its own laws that functions independent of those of politics and economy' (Bourdieu 1993 p. 162). The fields are sites of struggle for the accumulation of power and control, which depended on the degree of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) that each agent in the field possessed, with the goal of being able to define characteristics of the field and its output. Bourdieu argued that:

for the interpretation of works, this autonomous social universe functions somewhat like a prison which *refracts* every external determination: demographic, economic or political events are always re-translated according to the specific logic of the field, and it is by this intermediary that they act on the logic of the development of works.

(Ibid., p. 164 original emphasis)

This way of understanding the nature of the social relations of production is important as it suggests that the strength of the existing field is to a large degree self-sustaining and reactionary. The refraction or 'translation' of external influences can be seen in this case in the attempts by iFeatures to reframe the focus of the filmmakers' previously solely creative ambitions toward commercial success. Regev has argued that agents can exist simultaneously in multiple fields: 'They occupy positions in more than one field, each field

with its own specific forms of capital and habitus, with its own hierarchies, structures and schemas.' (Regev, 2007 p. 130). Fields can be resilient to change as the importance of symbolic and social capital (high prestige and connections) may be more highly valued than commercial success.

The importance of Cultural Capital

The position occupied by different agents in the field depends on the relative amounts of capital that they have acquired to interpret or enjoy a cultural artefact (Bourdieu 1986 p. 17). For each agent, his or her ability to understand the codes of art practice is their 'cultural capital' and it is linked to their habitus and socialisation. Bourdieu developed the concept of cultural capital as a way of accounting for the differences in academic performance of students which can be attributed to different economic, and importantly, cultural practices (Bourdieu, 2000 p 2). Cultural goods, unlike material goods, can only be consumed if their extra meaning can be deciphered. Thus cultural goods combined with the cultural capital required to understand or consume them give these cultural goods value above their use value (Brubaker, 1985 p. 757). In relation to the consumption of films:

Where some only see 'a western starring Burt Lancaster', others 'discover an early John Sturges' or 'the latest Sam Peckinpah'. In identifying it is worthy of being seen and the right way to see it, they are aided by the whole social group (which guides remind them with its 'have you seen...?' and 'you must see...') and by the whole corporation of critics mandated by the group to produce legitimate classifications and the discourse necessarily accompanying any artistic enjoyment worthy of the name.

Bourdieu, 2010 p. 20

Status is therefore not defined by the market and high box office figures but by appreciation of audiences and peers with the same aspirations who are influenced by their habitus, operating in the same field and with the same levels of cultural capital.

Symbolic capital is accumulated 'prestige or honour' in contrast to cultural capital which includes knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions (Hesmondhalgh, 2006 p. 215). Further more, 'symbolic capital is to be understood as economic or political capital that is a 'credit' which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees 'economic' profits.' (Bourdieu, 1993 p. 75). Cultural and symbolic capital needs to be recognised by people with the same dispositions, concerns, and aspirations. And as Garnham and Ingles suggest, these symbolic systems therefore reinforce the class relations internalised within the habitus (Garnham and Inglis, 1990 p. 77). This suggests that low budget filmmakers in Britain, who follow a commercial paradigm but fail, risk foregoing symbolic capital and a long term economic investment. In the context of an industry dominated by the US industry, a critically acclaimed film would be more likely to allow the filmmaker the power to consecrate objects and to receive economic profit at a later date. Recognition by peers is the key for Bourdieu (1989 p. 20).

This recognition is conceptualised as social capital which is 'contacts and group memberships which, through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources' (Bourdieu, 1993a p. 143). It is a disguised value, and benefit, that allows agents the ability to identify new hierarchies and the new structures that offer the chance of a profit (Bourdieu, 1993 p. 68). Although these exchanges are informal with unspecified outcomes, Morrow argues that the lack of transparency disguises the true nature and power of social capital (2001, p. 41).

The field of cultural production

In figure 7, Bourdieu's diagram identifies the whole social space, the field of power, and the field of cultural production, which is split into subfields of large-scale or small-scale production. The orientation of each of these fields depends on the relative amounts of cultural capital and economic capital. At the bottom of the rectangle, according to Bourdieu, there is no cultural production as it offers only low economic and cultural capital and so would not be an attractive position in which to produce work. At the top of the rectangle is the field of power, which is a composite of the economic and political fields (Hesmondhalgh, 2006 p. 212) where the tensions between cultural and economic capital are more apparent. Here production will take place due to the economic rewards even if it holds little prestige in the form of symbolic capital (ibid., p. 215). The field of cultural production is itself split between large-scale production and small-scale production. In Bourdieu's model, large-scale production included vaudeville theatre, serial fiction and journalism, which have a low level of creative autonomy and symbolic capital but a high level of economic capital. Work produced in the subfield of large-scale production would have been heteronomous in character, produced for the market with defined 'external' audiences. Alternatively, the field of small-scale production is characterised by an 'art for art's sake' ethos which includes avant-garde production produced with a higher level of creative autonomy, a low level of economic capital but with high levels of symbolic capital.

This would lead to 'consecration' by the field cementing the producer's status which would eventually bring economic rewards on the producer's terms rather than the terms of the market.

Within the field there is a battle for legitimacy for an art work or artist. To become valued and later revered is determined by the positions the actors take within the field, which depends on the levels of symbolic capital which they possess or can acquire (Heise and Tudor, 2007 p. 167).

Power over the field allows agents to influence which form of cultural production is used and which producers will be respected, or consecrated, as a valued art or artist. The struggle that Bourdieu describes in the field relies on understanding the interplay between 'autonomous' and 'heteronomous' production.

In autonomous production, a producer's sole consumers are their competitors who could have been able to have made the development in question (Bourdieu, 2003 p. 61), the laws that 'are proper to them and at variance with the laws of the surrounding social world, particularly in the economic level' (Bourdieu, 2003 p. 67). This would lead to 'consecration' by the field cementing the producer's status which would eventually bring economic rewards on the producer's terms rather than the terms of the market.

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at variance with the laws of the surrounding social world, particularly in the economic level' (Bourdieu, 2003 p. 67).

Autonomous production is therefore a major part of the process of hierarchisation (Hesmondhalgh, 2006 p. 215) and is characterised as being production akin to cultural filmmaking and external to the influence of the market or commercial considerations. It is without the requirement to attract sufficient audience to cover the production investment and is 'consecrated', and by inference not accessible to mass audiences. It requires knowledge to understand the 'codes' of its form, the cultural capital acquired through family, schooling and socialisation to understand and appreciate. Autonomous production is therefore 'central to Bourdieu's account of the development of modern culture-making. The aim is to show that the autonomy of [cultural production] is not a transcendent and universal condition and was actively produced in the 19th century.' (ibid., 2006 p. 214).

Tension between heteronomous and autonomous paradigms

In the field of cultural production, the struggle within the fields to define the characteristics and the preferred output is also referred to as a struggle of hierarchisation between two opposing principles. The heteronomous principle, a term used to describe an orientation towards the commercial market, is favoured by those who dominate the field economically and politically but have limited cultural awareness and authority. Those that follow the autonomous principle identify with a degree of independence from the economy and regard commercial success as a sign of compromise. Indeed, as Bourdieu stated:

The opposition between the 'commercial' and the 'non-commercial' reappears everywhere. It is the generative principle of most of the

judgements which, in the theatre, cinema, painting or literature, claimed to establish the frontier between what is, and what is not, art.

Bourdieu, 1993b p. 82

It seems as though the creators of the iFeatures scheme were not aware of the distance between the two paradigms. iFeatures was attempting to produce large shifts within a very short time span in the dispositions of the filmmakers that were recruited from the autonomous paradigm to work within a commercial, or heteronomous paradigm. Whether this strategy could be successful depends on the tensions that exist in the field of cultural production within which the iFeatures scheme was positioned. Later in this chapter I will also argue that the training resources were inadequate, confusing and contradictory.

Filmmaking as a field

In relation to film, Heise and Tudor position the film-as-art field as traditionally 'profoundly caught up in the rhetoric of anti-commercialism. To minimise this difficulty, the film-as-art movements routinely took refuge in an anti-Hollywood position' (2007, p. 182). But fields are dynamic spaces with agents losing and acquiring symbolic capital, which led to American cinema and Hollywood being re-evaluated in the 1970s onwards as culturally significant with some 'auteur' films being labelled as autonomous, even though they were produced in a commercial system. The inherited view of film-as-art as represented by the work of European directors such as Antonioni, Bergman and Resnais had become the new orthodoxy (Tudor, 2005 p. 135). Therefore the degree of heteronomy or autonomy and high or low levels of consecration was important. 'Over time, of course, positions on this 'map' will

alter, elements will appear and disappear, and evaluations will change. .. such relations can be plotted, and, thereby, the 'logic of the field' is exposed'. (Heise and Tudor, 2007 p. 168)

This is a central concept in this thesis. The responses of the participants in the iFeatures scheme, I will argue, exposed the demands of the field. They were ambivalent about marketing and acquiring economic capital because they preferred to acquire the peer approval from those already established in the field and prestige of producing a film-as-art work of creative vision. In Bourdieu's terms peer approval is symbolic capital which is 'the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition... *Symbolic power is a power of consecration or revelation.*' (Bourdieu, 1989 pp. 20-23, italics in original).

iFeatures was attempting to place the filmmakers in the 'subfield of large-scale production', which in this case I am interpreting as an area in which the values of large scale production are transferred to small scale production to conform to the UKFC's defined film policy where the end product would appeal to large mainstream audiences. However, the filmmakers placed themselves in the 'subfield of small-scale production' where their audiences were limited to small but influential groups of people usually within their field. As interviews with the participants will show in the next section, many of them sought to produce autonomously preferring to ignore the commercial aspirations of the iFeatures scheme and the UKFC.

Exploring the tensions between the commercial and cultural objectives of the iFeatures stakeholders.

I think in the iFeatures scheme there was a really odd tension, which started from Pete Buckingham's talk. People were very attracted to it and at the same time

repelled. Nobody wants to be told that they've got to conform to some sort of formula to produce a completely "commercial" project. And what is that anyway within a low-budget context?

Abigail Davies, 2011

Introduction

Abigail Davies, producer of *Our Own Shadows*, one of the five final films in contention, exemplifies the tension within the iFeatures participants. Davies has over 20 years experience in the television industry as a producer and script editor while also being a senior lecturer at the University of the West of England in filmmaking. Davies specifically identified Buckingham's talk as the starting point of this tension, which continued throughout the scheme, between making films 'for the marketplace, of the marketplace' (ibid., 2011), and for autonomous production. Bound up in the commercial/cultural tensions, with its conflict between the acquisition of economic capital or symbolic capital, were competing forces which the filmmakers and stakeholders needed to navigate such as their dispositions, the objectives of the iFeatures scheme, the agendas of the stakeholders and responses to the training in digital marketing.

In this section I will explore how the filmmakers reacted to the commercial and cultural tensions described above through selected interviews, which exemplified the recurring themes.

Creative teams

Dispositions to art and commerce

One of the filmmakers who exemplifies the tension between the production of film as art or industry is Katarzyna Klimkiewicz, an award-winning director from Poland and graduate of Lodz Film School. Her short film *Hanoi Warsaw* (2009) won several awards in Europe including European Film Academy Short Film in 2009. She was recruited by Alison Sterling to be the director of *Flying Blind*, as Sterling anticipated that her cultural capital in terms of filmmaking studies and symbolic capital in terms of her success would be attractive to the scheme's commissioning panel - a view which was later supported in the interviews with panel members Chris Collins, from the UKFC, and Steve Jenkins from the BBC.

Klimkiewicz's reaction to Buckingham's lecture was interesting as she grew up in a post-Soviet bloc country where the filmmaking industry was still adapting to commercial considerations. Klimkiewicz claimed that in Poland the concept of commercial genres was not understood or discussed within their industry or educational sectors. Klimkiewicz's interview made explicit her attitude to the market and marketing:

As much as I want to work with the financiers and deliver what they want, I think I want to make a challenging film, not an entertaining film. I think these films will have some success, [but] they will not be blockbusters... and art house is [for me] a positive thing. For funders art house is something slow, boring and nobody is really going to see it.

Klimkiewicz, 2011

The heteronomous requirements debase the opportunity for self-expression via autonomous production and she regards the commercial hopes pinned onto the iFeatures

films as not realistic, and that the films would not break out from their low-budget origins to attract mainstream audiences.

Klimkiewicz sees art house as the primary style of filmmaking and appears to understand and navigate the tensions nimbly. Her art house disposition and tension in the cultural fields became an issue when Sterling took Klimkiewicz to see funder Nigel Thomas at Matador Pictures where the selection of the film editor was discussed:

We really, really liked [the film editor] and I think Kasia [Klimkiewicz] said “Oh she’s great, she’s done these ‘art house’ features”. At which point Nigel [Thomas] sat bolt upright and said “But this isn’t an art house film, is it?” You see, to a commercial producer, art house just means “does not sell”.

Sterling, 2011

Thomas’s reaction exposes further the meaning of ‘commercial’ to the film industry. For in the high production budget sector of the industry, art house film, although empirically it has attracted audiences and repaid production investment, was regarded as a riskier investment than high budget films aimed at the mainstream multiplex market. The risk factors include the lack of known actors, slow plot development, fewer art house cinemas and the knowledge that these films attract small audiences (Buckingham, 2011 and Melling, 2011). As a result, these films are a niche product and not an easy sell for sales agents at film markets.

However, some stakeholders inhabited different positions at different times within the process. Lucy Catherine, *ITDN*’s scriptwriter, had television scriptwriting credits and was very clear about the creative process and the motivation of creatives. Although she engages with commercial criteria, she fundamentally disagreed with the notion that creativity can be developed in parallel with marketing tactics. Catherine positions her own work as having to

be developed autonomously and in her terms, 'authentically'. In response to Buckingham's lecture she stated:

It's the complete opposite of where you come from as a creative person. Basically anything that's good has got to come from somewhere truthful, it's got to have a heart to it. And you can't do that cynically. The things that are successful and break through, do so because they've got a bit of magic about them. Actually, I don't think those sort of people should be allowed to talk to creative people.

Catherine, 2011

Catherine was not solely concerned with working outside market concerns; the *timing* of interventions was important. Catherine was saying that the 'cynical' commercial objectives should not happen at the beginning of the process but can be applied later when the idea or script is at an advanced stage. However, Catherine's argument is nuanced; she understood the financial and business pressures. In a different part of the interview she admitted that when the script was complete she offered to rewrite or remove any scenes or elements that were too expensive to film, but her offer was never taken up by the director or producer of *In the Dark Half*.

This section showed that understanding the filmmakers' habitus, and the dispositions that it produces, is essential in any attempt to mediate the tension between art and commerce.

The investment in symbolic capital

The acquisition of symbolic capital, the accumulated prestige acquired from more established peers, and the role it plays in the beliefs, methods of working and aspirations of filmmakers, is essential to understanding the field of feature film production. The research described in this section demonstrates the importance of symbolic capital to filmmakers who were actively managing their careers alongside the commercial paradigm of feature film production.

Sarah Cox was the producer of *8MI* and has high levels of cultural and symbolic capital having lectured in universities in the UK and USA in animation. She is Creative Director and CEO of her company (ArthurCox) which has won awards for making 'left field' commercials with animated sequences; she has also won awards as a director and producer of television programmes. Cox is unusual as she participates in two distinct sub-fields and her habitus encompasses both autonomous and heteronomous paradigms.

8MI became one of the favourite films from the slate for the stakeholders due to what they perceived as its potential recoupment potential (Blackburn, 2011 and Malhoutra, 2011 and Thomas, 2011 and Collins, 2011). This was due to the commercial nature of the project with its slacker/rom-com genre, the commercial background of the team, the creativity of the award-winning director, Mark Hewis, and, at least on the surface, their ability to engage with the commercial objectives of the scheme. However, the interviews revealed that the project was not conceived as a commercial project but was an artistically driven one which 'accidentally' (Hewis, 2012) contained commercial elements.

When asked about what training Cox remembered from the scheme when the film was still being edited she replied:

I suppose all the stuff about the marketing and distribution. I think there was a lot done in the training to keep us in the real world. However, I think the main focus should be on making a good film. Because otherwise you're going to have to market a shit film [laughter], so there's no point in that. I wanted a critical success more than I wanted it to be a commercial success.

Cox, 2011

Cox's motivation, having run a successful company, was for maintaining their creative

reputation, using the film as a stepping stone to further investment in symbolic development. Although iFeatures awarded £300 – 350,000 for the production budget, the producer, director and writers paid themselves nominal amounts of £6-7,000 for what became 18 to 24 months work (Hewis, 2012 and Cox, 2011 and Catherine, 2011). Without good remuneration, the value of participation in iFeatures was part of a business development strategy, and an investment in the future which would allow them to pitch for other more profitable work:

I suppose I took a kind of realistic view that there are very few low budget films that can compete on a kind of Hollywood or big budget films and be a commercial success. Our best chance of doing it is making something that is really authentic, and unique. If it's a critical success it would lead to commercial success in the future for our team.

Cox, 2011

Cox has extended the discussion of Buckingham's thesis here, and rejected a key part of the presentation. Whereas Buckingham equates 'commercial' as being the same as the mainstream with the ability to compete against mid-budget genres, Cox recognised the value of a slacker-romantic comedy but with an unusual tone, provided by Hewis, to create a surprising film that had the ability to break out of its niche audience. This fits with Bourdieu's definitions of autonomous production and rejects the proposed heteronomous production paradigm of iFeatures. If *8 Minutes Idle* was consecrated in the field by critics and peers, then the opportunities to produce a second or third film at a profit would be more likely.

Stakeholders' attitudes

The UKFC

Peter Buckingham had a more nuanced approach than offered in his master class. As outlined below, if this had been explored in further training sessions with the iFeatures participants, it might have reduced their antagonism to the marketing process and helped iFeatures reach its objectives. He said during interview:

I think on the lower budget you should be freer to play around with stuff, experiment and to be bolder and to take risks ... And therefore you could be more experimental about style, type, storytelling, script, all sorts of things. I think that would be justifiable in low budget schemes. But if you understand what audiences are looking for you might be able to connect with them. And sometimes that means you reduce the budget right down because the return is actually very limited.

Buckingham, 2011

Buckingham understood that the filmmakers might want to make a calling card to announce their arrival to peers in the sub-field of low budget feature filmmakers. They should 'use the system first time around - the public funders and [production schemes], and you make something grim and depressing where somebody cries all the time but you get your nominations. Away you go.' (Buckingham, 2011) Buckingham reveals he is actually in sync with the iFeatures applicants and underpins that the lecture was intended as a provocation that backfired spectacularly.

Chris Collins, Head of the Film Fund at the UKFC, also revealed tension between his personal approach and the iFeatures objectives and training. Collins, when asked about the role filmmakers should have in marketing the films, revealed his own disposition towards art versus commerce by saying 'I am personally not sure [directors] should play any role in the

publicity campaign. I think producers should really be aware of it. The best directors to me are the ones who really know what their audience is' (Collins, 2011).

Collins was clearly supporting directors who intrinsically understood the audience from a creative, not business, perspective. Directors have a specific role to tell the story creatively to their audience. Collins saw that the directors' responsibility ended with the delivery of the film and was not involved in marketing. The distinction that occurs between art/commerce and autonomous/ heteronomous production was societal:

We have a very divided culture. Maybe it is to do with class. I am no sociologist but there are some deep rooted things. I think it is partly historical in the UK as well because public funding has always been very small, or was, until relatively recently. So the classic distinction would be between a high production movie versus a particular kind of niche experimental art house film.

Collins, 2011

Collins went on to describe filmmakers such as John Maybury who broke into major Hollywood film production by making award-winning pop promos for musicians such as Sinead O'Connor. He also made low budget features such as *Love Is The Devil* (1998) which was critically and commercially successful. So for those British filmmakers who did not accept Buckingham's thesis, and who were able to develop a distinct style or aesthetic, they could have the opportunity to have their work 'consecrated' by the field and to dominate that particular field of cultural production.

I don't think we have yet created an audience who will expect to be entertained in the same way by American independent films. In Britain we are very constrained by a particular approach to drama, often social realist drama, as that is easiest to make at low budgets and often critics respond to it. So you might get some festival life out of it, you might get some kudos from it. But that is still playing to a very small, dedicated audience.

Ibid., 2011

Here Collins echoes what were Moll's implicit intentions: to replicate some of the successes of American independent filmmaking while rejecting, for good reasons, strengths in British filmmaking.

Distributors and trainers

Although DIY digital marketing was promoted by the iFeatures scheme, Ed Fletcher, Managing Director of Soda Distribution, who subsequently licensed the rights to distribute *Flying Blind*, was forthright in his criticism of expecting filmmakers to engage in marketing, a job that was usually reserved for film distributors and the specialists they employ:

What's the point of filmmakers thinking about marketing? It's such a trendy idea, you know, the filmmakers should cut a trailer for their film. Why? We [distributors] don't do that, I don't sit around cutting trailers. I use a trailer agency who cut trailers all the time. Why would you do it? It's nuts.

Fletcher, 2011

Fletcher uncovers the illogical conceit in iFeatures distribution and marketing strategy as he was questioning whether filmmakers had the skills to produce marketing assets when they should focus on production issues such as 'script, cast, genre. That's when they should think about audiences' (Fletcher, 2011).

Dan Simmons, acting Head of Film at Creative SkillSet, supported Fletcher's argument. Skillset is the Creative Industries' Sector Skills Council for television, film, radio and other media. Its aim is to support productivity, competitiveness through training and education, and to influence government policy (Creative SkillSet, 2012). Creative SkillSet funded the training for the *iFeatures* scheme at an approximate cost of £100,000 (Simmons, 2011).

Simmons echoed Fletcher's approach by making a distinction between the marketing campaign and the wider process of marketing:

I don't think it's thinking about the marketing. It's thinking about the audience. So it's not about writing to fit the audience. It's about thinking who the audience is for your story. And then you ask "How am I going to reach those people?"

Simmons, 2011

In Bourdieu's terms, Simmons was saying filmmakers would increase their symbolic and social capital by engaging with audiences and therefore potentially securing a better position in the field. As a result, iFeatures' reference to 'marketing' should have actually been described as 'audience engagement' to the cohort whose dispositions did not facilitate engagement with the marketing process in the traditional sense. Had this been the ethos that was developed with subsequent training after the Buckingham lecture then, I would argue, much of the antagonism felt by the participants would have abated.

Funders

It became clear that the selection panels were not selecting the projects according to iFeatures' objectives or a single commercial strategy. For example, Steve Jenkins, Head of Acquisitions at BBC Films was one of the main panel members as he voted at each selection panel. As a funder, the BBC invested approximately £250-300,000 (Jenkins, 2011) for the UK 'free to air' television rights. Jenkins' agenda was in opposition to iFeatures commercial objectives:

I think the idea that there isn't a market should not be the ultimate kind of selection criteria. I am not saying we dismiss these concerns in any way. If something gets critical acclaim, and wins festival awards, but doesn't achieve theatrical success, there is a chance that success is achieved in terms of profile development.

Jenkins, 2011

This reveals his habitus at the BBC as a public service organisation where, although they are required to make decisions to maximise efficient spending for licence-fee payers, they also see themselves as de facto custodians of British film culture (Jenkins, 2011). Jenkins was also aware that the scheme's recruitment process might detract from the ultimate success of the films due to the reduction of a unique 'autonomous' vision. He used the example of the emergence of Ben Wheatley, a micro-budget feature film director, who first came to Jenkins' attention with *Down Terrace* (2009) which he self-funded for approximately £30,000:

It felt like it came out of nowhere. That was the appealing thing, rather than it having come through a scheme. It might be a downside to the whole panel process. Maybe we have homogenized things to some degree. I think it is a danger you have to avoid.

Jenkins, 2011

Bourdieu wrote about the homogenisation effect of the commercial paradigm (Bourdieu, 2003 p. 68) which surfaced in selection and feedback processes. It could be argued that the effect of having 'too many cooks' with different agendas produced 'omnibus products' that were creatively compromised (Melling, 2011).

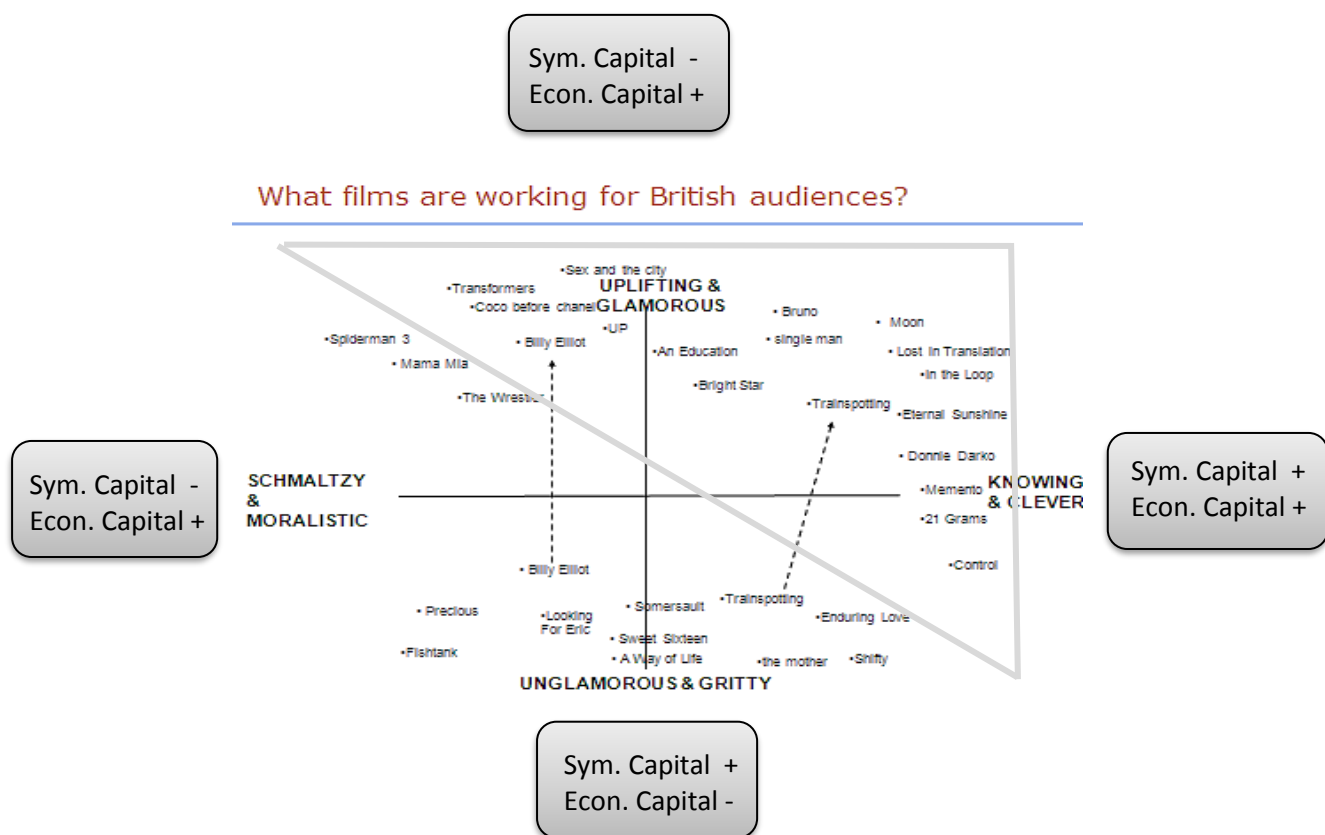
What this section has shown is that the dispositions of the stakeholders produced an absence of a single unifying commercial and creative strategy for iFeatures, which meant that the films were compromised. It seems that the potential for the scheme to effect a change in the behavior of British filmmakers to approach filmmaking as a business was undermined by stronger dispositions to support film-as-culture not only amongst the participants but also in some members of the panel.

iFeatures' holy grail? Helping filmmakers understand the marketing process.

In the previous sections, I identified iFeatures' strategy for training and illustrated why the tensions between the stakeholders indicated that this was not likely to succeed. In this section I apply these ideas to Buckingham's presentation to illustrate the deep rooted negative attitudes to marketing and heteronomous production among the filmmakers by identifying where the filmmakers would see their productions on Buckingham's slide. I do this by combining elements of Bourdieu's diagram of 'The field of cultural production' (Bourdieu 1996 p. 124) with Buckingham's matrix. To recap, the matrix offers contrasting characteristics of both US and UK films which are appreciated, or criticised, by UK audiences.

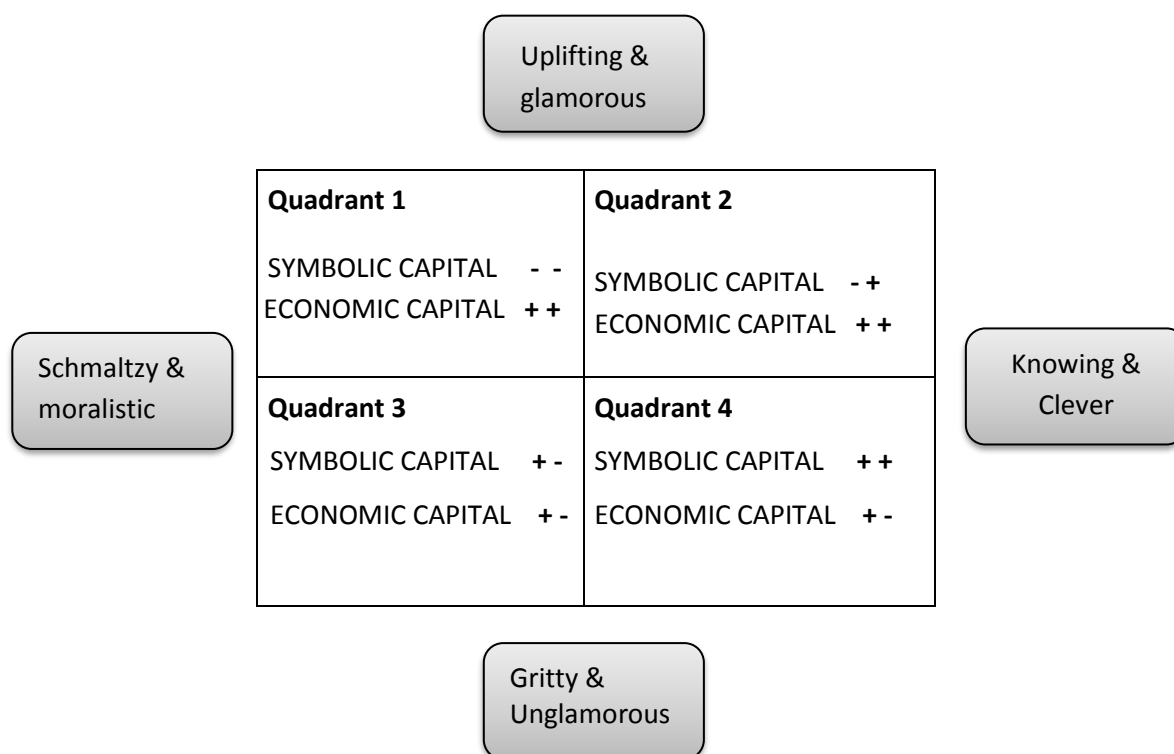
As seen in figure 8, by overlaying the relative levels of economic and symbolic capital derived for a production in each area, Buckingham's grey triangle represented the optimum area for commercial recoupment but this did not necessarily coincide with areas of high symbolic capital.

Figure 8: The capital derived from low budget feature film production combining elements from Buckingham's presentation (2010) and Bourdieu (1996 p. 124). Used with permission of the author.



Importantly, none of the filmmakers expressed a negative attitude to obtaining economic capital per se. It was just that symbolic capital was more valuable to them. This can be more clearly observed with the matrix below. The two values (pluses or minuses) are determined by the values of the capital in the neighbouring areas. For example, in quadrant 1, between 'Glamorous & Uplifting' and 'Schmaltzy and Moralistic' both have values of minus symbolic capital (- -) which suggests this sector is not attractive to filmmakers with autonomous dispositions as seen in figure 9.

Figure 9: Indicating the levels of capital in each of the quadrants based on Buckingham's presentation (2010) and Bourdieu (1996 p. 124). Used with permission of the author.



This indicates that Buckingham's presentation was entirely consistent with seeking to produce films within the areas which would have the likelihood of the highest economic capital (Quadrant 1 and 2). However, for the filmmakers, there was only one quadrant which offers maximum potential symbolic capital which is quadrant 4.

This throws light on why the iFeatures' filmmakers showed resistance to producing films within these other quadrants as they valued the prestige of making films for critical acknowledgement rather than commercial gain. It also highlights some contradictions in Buckingham's model. The area of Buckingham's matrix which had areas of high symbolic capital is indicated with the grey dotted triangle area (figure 10). This is in keeping with

feelings expressed by the filmmakers to produce films of prestige within the 'knowing and clever' and 'gritty and unglamorous' sections of the matrix.

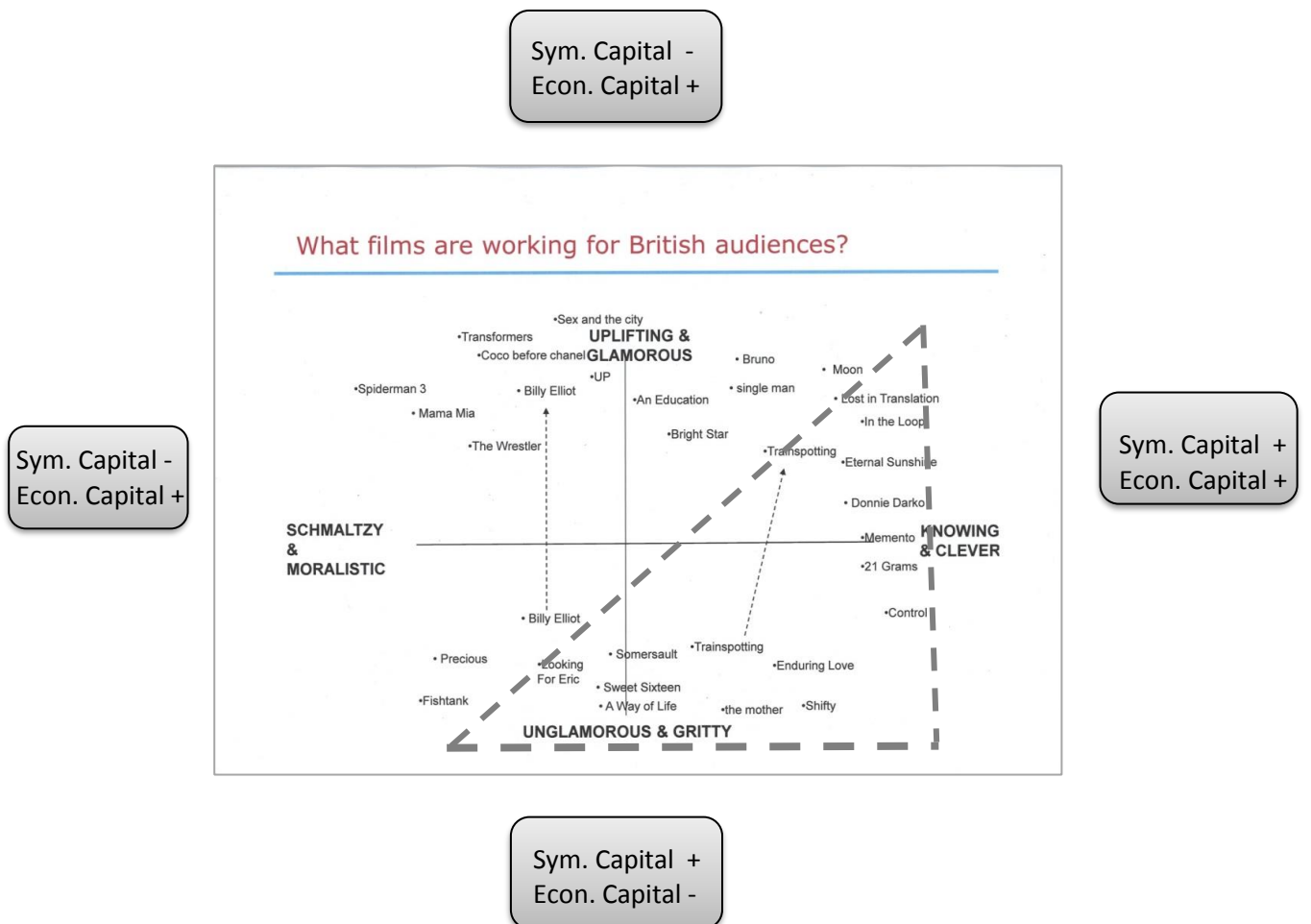
Although this is a blunt tool, it offers an indication to why UK low budget filmmaking congregated around the 'unglamorous and gritty' area. These films were generally castigated by Buckingham as the location of unprofitable films yet, he admitted, that included critically respected films such as *Fishtank* (Arnold, 2009), *Sweet Sixteen* (Loach, 2002) and *Shifty* (Creevy, 2008). In all these cases, the critical reception has been sufficient to maintain the careers in the instance of Arnold, Loach, and Creevy and allowed them to continue to make challenging films. This career-building outcome was known to the participants, and the iFeatures recruitment panels, due to the repeated reference to *Fishtank* as a source of inspiration for their proposal, script and application to *iFeatures*.

Buckingham's placement of the films on his matrix also contributed to the resistance of the filmmakers to his lecture. Buckingham admitted in his presentation that the placement of the films on this matrix was based on his own 'feelings' or in other words, disposition. In the same way, *Fishtank* was positioned by Buckingham towards 'Smaltzy and Moralistic', whereas most of the filmmakers, who openly admired the film and its director Andrea Arnold, would have moved it more firmly within the 'Gritty and Unglamorous' and possibly into the realms of 'Knowing and Clever'.

Through their interviews, it was clear that the *iFeatures* filmmakers would have produced their films in the 'knowing and clever' area if they felt their films could have achieved the same kudos (symbolic capital) as films such as *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* (2004), *Donnie Darko* (2001) and *Memento* (2000). However, all the films mentioned above had

much higher production budgets than the iFeatures films, and had major backing by distributors and studios.

Figure 10: The disposition of filmmakers to earn symbolic capital as opposed to economic capital. Used with permission of the author.



For the filmmakers the conflict arises when they need to decide which strategy is most likely to offer the greatest long-term rewards. As I have argued above, this is based on the acquisition of symbolic capital. As opposed to Buckingham’s triangle, this is now shown as an inverted dotted triangle which represents the attitudinal distance of the filmmakers to the iFeatures’ commercial model.

Conclusion

iFeatures had at its heart an objective that filmmakers would engage with the marketing process of their films. Through the marketing training, iFeatures wanted the filmmakers to develop social capital by raising awareness, promoting, and encouraging sales of cinema tickets for their film via social networks. The filmmakers were expected to use digital systems to both build awareness of the film during production and convert those followers at the release of the film into cinema patrons. Essentially the filmmakers' social capital would be converted into economic capital. To facilitate this, training was offered to introduce the concept as explored above. Although this training raised awareness of the business issues, it was inadequate as it misled them about their responsibilities and did not furnish them with the practical skills they would need to actively participate. In particular, Buckingham's lecture confused the participants due to its provocative standpoint which, instead of persuading and guiding them into understanding of fundamental marketing principles, created antagonism toward the ethos of marketing.

Conflict between the filmmaker's cultural ambitions and commercial responsibilities was also explored. One important theme that emerged was a negative reaction to the central thesis of Buckingham's lecture, which was that films should be made for audiences primarily rather than to fulfil the filmmakers' creative goals. Respondents did not want to conform to formula, reacted against second-guessing audience preferences and any encouragement to put the commercial 'cart' before their artistic 'horse'. The participants wanted to make a film with critical integrity and authenticity but which also had the *potential* for commercial success. If this idea is abstracted further, the filmmakers were collectively protecting their creative reputations, by seeking symbolic capital in the short to medium term with the

expectation, or hope, that in the long term this strategy would deliver substantial economic capital.

There was also a tension between definitions of success. Buckingham's presentation put recoupment at the centre of all success while filmmakers focused more on learning feature film production techniques and producing challenging or innovative films that would gain critical acclaim. They recognised that the scheme was a competition which encouraged a temporary alignment to the commercial objectives. But the analysis of the in-depth interviews suggests that for the filmmakers there was ultimately no conflict: no matter what the objectives of the funders or scheme, their films would be created within the autonomous paradigm even if they had to present a different ethos at the selection panels.

In terms of the sustainability of the iFeatures production and distribution model, the research showed that the training was inadequate and unable to overcome deep rooted negative dispositions towards marketing. These conclusions suggest that iFeatures, and the accelerated script and production strategy that it followed, was not sustainable with its current objectives. To educate the filmmakers with knowledge of digital marketing processes and technique, would require greater in-depth training. This was at odds with the accelerated twelve month script-to-screen format of the scheme as well as not (currently) having the time commitment from the filmmakers for these new skills to be learned and practiced. Although the training was well received, as reported by iFeatures' independent research, (Howe, 2011 and Olsberg/SPI 2010c) this chapter raises doubts about whether it was truly effective.

Finally this chapter showed that there was some hope for filmmakers to identify audiences for the films to maximise revenues, but these audiences would always be niche and limited.

The filmmakers wanted, without exception, to make a film that would increase their symbolic capital by impressing peers and critics. The commercial expectation was not, with the recruited filmmakers, a realistic goal. Although the filmmakers were not antagonistic to the market, it was simply that they doubted if the films *could* be a commercial success and thought that a critical success would be more beneficial in the long term. I argued that iFeatures' focus on commercial success had the effect of homogenising the productions, dissipating resources and conversely reducing the (already slim) opportunity for a breakout success. If filmmaking teams with more of a commercial or heteronomous ethos had been commissioned, such as the *Novikov B* team, and the stakeholders had maintained a consistent commercial disposition, then the tensions that played out in the scheme would have been different and, perhaps, iFeatures might have achieved its goal.

Chapter 5

Developing a strategy for the distribution and marketing of low budget British feature films.

How do independent producers and distributors turn fragmented audiences into buyers and evangelists? Mass-market advertising, the bloated core of the film industries' promotion strategy, is not enough to persuade consumers, in large part, because consumers do not trust business messages. The second step, then, is to stop talking *to* them, and start communicating *with* them. For many filmmakers interested in communicating with their audiences, the Internet is becoming their favourite medium because of its ability to provide instant feedback.

James Irwin, 2004 p. 13

Introduction: the optimism for digital marketing

In 1999 a film was released in the USA that had a novel marketing strategy that revolutionised film marketing. The US film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), an ultra-low budget "mockumentary" horror, used fledgling techniques for Internet based marketing. The film's financial success spawned a myriad of copycat campaigns from filmmakers hoping to break out from the niche to mainstream audiences. Five years later the quotation above indicated the hope that many commentators held in digital marketing and distribution techniques. Whereas other chapters have dealt with the historical context and development of the British film industry and the attitudes of stakeholders to marketing, this chapter outlines the theories that underpin digital marketing and the commercial realities. Space is also given to analysing the experiments and practice of other filmmakers working in the sector between 2009-14, the period of iFeatures1's development and completion.

In the UK Nicola Smith in *New Media Age* (2011) identifies how digital marketing strategies using social media were developing in the film industry. She quoted Laura Pettitt, Head of Film and Entertainment at Diffusion PR, who said:

Social media has really democratized film promotion, allowing small independent film makers to compete with the big studios with big budgets. If you have a niche production, which might be ignored by mainstream media, an intelligently targeted digital campaign can get you in front of fans of your particular film genre.

Smith, 2011, p. 20

Lord Puttnam, as chairman of the Film Distributors Association, stated that the Internet has had a transformative impact on the film industry which had changed the ways that 'films are released, promoted and consumed' (Puttnam, 2013 p. 4). The British Screen Advisory Council published a report that optimistically embraced new digital technologies enabled by the Internet as providing a route that would, potentially, bypass the structural deficits as described above of the British film industry and that would 'mitigate against [British films'] chance of success' (BSAC, 2010 p. 7). Bloore suggested that low-budget filmmakers would be able to rewrite the traditional revenue stream due to the Internet's power of 'disintermediation' or 'disruption' of traditional distribution models with the removal of organisations and services that are placed between the producers and consumers (Bloore, 2009 p. 18).

It was asserted by some researchers that while 'the hardest thing in filmmaking is finding a way for people to see the film you make' (Irwin, 2004 p. 8), there was an audience that was 'open to innovation and diversity' (ibid., p. 14) and that online or digital marketing had the ability to access audiences via influencers or 'market mavens' who were trusted more than the messages of traditional marketers. Importantly, another theory developed by Chris

Anderson (2006) - 'long tail' distribution - promised, in simplistic terms, a slow but steady revenue stream for niche feature films from small audiences over a long period of time (Simon, 2005 p. 13-16) via Internet based systems. Add to this the role of the BBC, a major stakeholder in the iFeatures scheme, which actively promoted the move to online/digital marketing from the outset of the iFeatures scheme because Jacqui Barr, marketing manager for BBC films, considered it was a 'key strategy supporting lower budget film production because there's so much marketing you can do that's cheaper' (Barr, 2011).

As digital marketing and distribution were part of the *Zeitgeist* and with such optimism for the British film industry, it is not surprising that the focus of efforts was on this new approach to film marketing. However, apart from a handful of films (see below), there has been little success and it seems little understanding of the marketing and distribution techniques and effort that is required for success.

This chapter will therefore evaluate the optimism for digital marketing and distribution in the UK, by relating this to the marketing literature and the landscape of the British film industry in the period of iFeatures 1 (2010 – 14). As commercial return was one of the four major objectives of the scheme, the strategic and tactical use of digital and traditional distribution and marketing techniques is of central importance to a discussion about whether the scheme achieved its objectives. This chapter will also serve as context for the three major case studies of the iFeatures films in subsequent chapters.

The relationship of traditional film marketing to digital marketing

A discussion about digital marketing would not be complete without comparison to what went before it - traditional marketing and distribution. In this section, I discuss relevant marketing theory that had been developed before the advent of the Internet, and discuss how traditional film marketers have adopted or rejected digital strategies and techniques.

Marketing and distribution were the fundamental business aspect of the film industry. In the early 1900s, traditional marketing of films focused on the theatrical release as it was the main source of revenue until the mid-1980s (Vogel, 2007 p. 88). Then came the VCR, later superseded by DVD players, which aided the development of an ancillary market of the rental and sale of films directly to audiences. This has again been superseded by downloads over the Internet and in this time the business model for films has changed dramatically. In 2009 Peter Bloore wrote about the independent film value chain in which he sought to show the processes and activity that were involved in bringing an independent film to market. His paper was useful for placing production, or filming and editing, which typically lasts only six months, as a small part of a film's commercial life of ten to fifteen years (Bloore, 2009). In comparison, marketing and distribution were two of the essential 'support services' that were utilised from development through to the end of consumption.

Further, the economic aspects of advertising were defined by Vogel (2007). He argued that the literature indicated that the core functions of the industry fell into different views: 'the persuasive view' made demand inelastic if able to market a film as 'must see' which therefore allowed higher than average prices to be obtained. Conversely the 'complimentary view' increased consumer awareness of competing films to consumers who were undecided. This required marketing spend to differentiate one film over another

which therefore could increase demand. This advertising was seen as an essential task for film producers although the effectiveness of such advertising could not be quantified (Vogel, 2007 pp. 48-49).

The key concepts in marketing are the 'marketability' and 'playability' of a particular film. The marketability refers to 'how easily the film's concept can be conveyed through advertising and promotion' and its playability refers to 'how well an audience reacts to the film after having seen it' and whether they recommend the film (Finney, 2010 p. 92). The marketers' objectives were therefore to increase both of these factors in the selection and development of projects. Traditionally films that have been distributed successfully have only done so by having marketing budgets, which are typically equal to 50 per cent of the production budget (Vogel, 2007 p. 132 and Barkin, 2011 p. 32). Wherever possible, the risks associated with the film industry were reduced through portfolio theory by investing in a slate of productions with different budgets and genres (Vogel, 2007, p. 136) and by investing heavily in advertising large 'tent pole' or blockbuster films (see Elberse, 2014 and later in this chapter). It has become accepted practice that Pareto's Law applies, which says 20 per cent of a company's output will produce 80 per cent of the revenues. Recent research has shown this applies to Hollywood's output (Sparviero, 2015 p. 1). However, it is always worth remembering that film marketing is not a science but an art, especially with independent distribution, as 'no one knows how the picture will perform in the marketplace' (Bob Berney, CEO of IFC Films, 2006 p. 379) and which 20 per cent of the output will be successful.

The focus on the theatrical release has been maintained simply because it has been found to be crucial to the success of the film throughout its lifetime across ancillary media. As

such, theatrical distribution is required as it is the only way to gain the attention of reviewers who are bombarded by the marketing of other projects. Once attention has been gained, positive reviews can be used to springboard a film into smaller secondary theatrical markets, and subsequently, audiences and consumers. Fourteen releases in the UK market per week has led the BFI to argue that too many are released (BFI, 2014), as cinemas have a surplus of suitable 'products' and strategically select films that will maximise their profits, through ticket sales and their concession stands (which incidentally represent 46 per cent of a cinema's profits (Young et al., 2010)). As a result:

Theatres will not hold over a movie that does not perform in its first week – really, its first weekend. There are so many competing movies being released every week (about 560 a year) that they will pull it off a screen and put another one up. To be successful, a movie has to develop a relationship with its customers fast or risk getting lost in the crowd of other films.

Barkin, 2011 p. 31

Marketers are therefore attempting to maximise the opening weekend returns so that their films have a chance to become 'ubiquitous' (ibid., 2011) as audience demand drives distribution and marketing (Krider et al., 2005 p. 642). Krider et al. found that after the initial impetus, the marketers switch their attention from the opening weekend onto post release strategies to garner positive word of mouth (WOM) or other 'pull' techniques.

Marketers seek to improve the marketability and playability of a film project by emphasising certain qualities of the film when introducing the film to the market. A distributor would seek to maximise the marketing decision variables within a paradigm of a product or goods marketing logic which used the so called 'marketing mix' (Vargo and Lusch, 2004 p. 1). It is based on McCarthy's original list of four 'P's (see McCarthy, 1960) – Product, Price, Promotion and Place – and although the concept is widely debated in the marketing

literature with alternative extensions (Kerrigan, 2010 pp. 81-102), it is useful to consider as a strategic toolkit or recipe to follow when promoting a film. The marketing mix for films has been defined by Kerrigan (2004 and 2010 and supported by Reiss, (2010a p. 81). This includes the role of the 'star' or known actor, director or producer, the quality of the project defined by the script, the genre which is linked to audience taste, a defined target audience where trailers are designed to produce feelings of 'want to see' in audiences and later substituted by positive word-of-mouth. Fostering positive critical reviews and reaching out to 'avid' or influential viewers is also essential to the success of the film.

The release strategy, which includes finding a date where a competitor film with similar attributes was not opening is important. Different genres have traditional release windows - for example family films during the summer vacation and romances near to St. Valentine's Day, which is regarded as essential to finding a film's audience. There is, conversely, a strategy to 'counter programme' (Barr, 2011) a film to 'mop up' audiences that were not catered for - such as niche horror audiences that were not interested in the traditional mainstream offerings of family films over the summer (which is explored in the case studies later). The traditional distribution industry has been very successful in controlling the release strategy of film and exhibitors, which will not show a film that has less than a sixteen week window before ancillary media are exploited, although this is under pressure to change (Shear in iFeatures, 2010a). However, low budget films using day and date release, i.e. simultaneous release over many platforms, were regarded as being most suitable for low budget British features due to the efficiency of marketing a film for a single time period rather than in stages for the theatrical, VOD and physical media (ibid.). The age rating of the film is also important for marketing and has been the site of disputes between creative teams, who felt that their work was being creatively limited, and studio executives worried

that the inclusion of, perhaps, a sexually graphic scene or even single shots restricted the potential audience and therefore the potential financial returns (de Vany and Walls, 2002, p. 427).

The optimism of low budget producers who hoped that digital marketing would 'reset' established systems to allow British features to make more of an impact seems misplaced.

The Film Distributors' Association (FDA) released a guide to distribution which acknowledged that digital and Internet advancements had changed the marketing and distribution landscape. But it firmly placed the control of the digital sector within the traditional framework of sales agents and distributors. As Lord Puttnam, President of the FDA, outlined: 'digital is reshaping the kind of entertainment centre that modern cinema can be' (FDA, 2013 p. 4).

Although the Internet's 'transformative impact' is recognised by the FDA, it is clear that the traditional gatekeepers or incumbents are now widely participating in, and potentially controlling, the digital sphere. Indeed, Finney (2010, p. 128) illustrates Hollywood's adoption of new technologies through history when the advent of 'talkies' caused disruption to market share which became known as 'Repple's Law'. After the widespread adoption of sound recording and playback, Hollywood was able to assert its previous dominance of the mainstream market. However, applying this law to digital technology, Finney argues that the established players rapidly adopted new technology so that their market position and power within the industry remained largely unaffected. The major studios' marketing power and budgets are also used to dominate the market by deploying their advertising and PR clout to make a bigger 'noise' than low budget independent producers. (Later in the chapter I outline how the \$80 million *The Hunger Games* was marketed with transmedia elements).

Vogel argues that this demonstrates that the use of large advertising budgets restricts entry into the marketplace for both medium and low budget producers. He argued that 'advertising is generally seen as a barrier to market entry to new competitors who must devote a relatively high proportion of sales to advertise merely to gain some name recognition and attention for new products' (Vogel, 2007 p. 50).

The discussion above outlines that marketing and distribution are essential to the success of a film over its lifetime. Restricted use of marketing, either through limited means or poor strategy, will limit potential returns. Marketing and distribution can be considered as tools of control that are wielded by incumbents to maintain market share and restrict competition.

Emerging marketing paradigms

The role of marketing as a strategic task is not always recognised. This is relevant to iFeatures given the reticence of the participants to engage in marketing (see chapter 4) where it was equated to 'selling'. Hayes and Roodhouse (2010), who researched the marketing of the arts industry, have argued that there was a need to reconceptualise marketing practice in the arts sector. As they argued, marketing had undergone periods of development and professionalisation in relation to the development of the creative industry. Hayes and Roodhouse argue that arts marketing from the 1970s to 2000 was 'confined to the tactical elements of the marketing mix. Rarely were [marketers] involved in strategic decision-making or in issues pertaining to the organisation's core product - the marketer was subordinate to the programming function (ibid., p. 44).

From 2000 onwards there was a period of innovation, which included the maturing of marketing strategy and processes that coincided with a change in policy, which previously valued *cultural* practice for its intrinsic values, to the *creative* industries model which valued the instrumental benefits. In this model, the economic benefits from supporting arts projects came to the fore in the UK and globally (ibid., p. 45) and this led to a greater use of marketing to achieve financial goals. In Chapter 1, and later in the case studies, I have outlined how iFeatures also set instrumental objectives for the production teams to use social networks to build audiences' awareness. But without strategic marketing knowledge, the benefit of any marketing was limited as the production teams were not even sure who their target audience was and how to reach them effectively.

Indeed influential arguments from marketing researchers, who have been writing during the last decade, have tried to change the dominant logic of marketing which focused on tangible, mainly physical products with embedded properties, to intangible services concerned with 'skills, information and knowledge, and toward interactivity and connectivity and on-going relationships' (Vargo and Lusch, 2004 p. 15). This conceptual shift is important as the iFeatures teams were encouraged to adopt a marketing paradigm which was outdated and the antithesis of their own dispositions (see chapter 4 for discussion).

Until 2000, a dominant logic in marketing centred around selling a product to large groups of mainstream consumers or 'heteronomous' production. This, it is argued, has been superseded by service dominant logic (1980 – today), which placed the consumer relationship at the heart of the marketing process (ibid., p. 5) as consumers 'engage in value creation practices ... which the established marketing logics ... cannot explain' (Anker et al., 2015 p. 533). The offer to consumers can in this new paradigm be co-created, which contributed to an enhanced value proposition that included autonomous production. This

represented a huge shift in marketing theory which iFeatures' training did not cover and potentially reduced the success of the scheme.

Marketing and distribution within the attention economy

A central function of marketing includes the practice of raising awareness of a product or service in a competitive marketplace where many alternative products and services are on offer. One conceptual framework which aids understanding of the role of digital marketing is the attention economy.

Goldhaber (1997) discussed a conception for a new economy based on attention and one which marketing and distribution sought to influence. We live in an age when information is all about us and where this information continuously distracts and overwhelms or, as Goldhaber suggests, 'enthalls'. Goldhaber argued that as economies are governed by what is scarce, the Internet has made information abundant to the extent that 'we are drowning in the stuff, yet more comes at us daily.' (ibid., p. 2). The issue, Davenport and Beck argue, is 'human bandwidth' the limit that humans have to process stimuli (Davenport and Beck, 2001 p 1). Beller (2006) positions audiences as workers who co-construct through their attention the narrative of feature films, in a similar way that workers in a production line make commodities. Therefore each worker/viewer's limited capital is spent viewing marketing within the attention economy. For both film production and marketing, the attention economy underpins the need for innovative strategies and tactics:

Since it is hard to get new attention by repeating exactly what you or someone else has done before, this new economy is based on endless originality, or at least attempts at originality. By contrast, the old industrial economy worked on the basis for making interchangeable objects in huge numbers. With the endless originality

and diversity of the attention economy, that kind of exchange is no longer possible. Even though one can loosely compare amounts of attention paid to different performances, attention does not come in precise, indistinguishable units, and neither does the illusory attention for which it is exchanged.

Goldhaber, 1997 p. 7

The importance of attention is that it can be readily converted to a physical action in that consumers can purchase a cinema ticket or DVD. Goldhaber's central thesis is that attention is mobilised and aggregated through social capital networks into 'buzz' whereas Lanham (2006) discussed the role of social capital but held back from making a concrete connection to the fledgling social networks.

Goldhaber further argues that 'when information flows one way through the Net, attention has to be flowing in the other.' (ibid. p. 4) Or, as Kevin Kelly who carried out research on the value of attention observed, 'The message to pioneers engineering new ideas in marginal markets is: Have faith. *Where attention flows, money follows*' (Kelly, 2011 npn., original emphasis). Over a fifteen year period Kelly argued that the average cost of our attention, judged by what we will spend on a media experience, has been stable at a mean of \$2.50 per hour, with TV being as low as \$0.2 per hour and a film being as high as \$5 dollars an hour (ibid.). The reason for this is that our attention cannot be accumulated and used at a later date – we have only the attention we can give to something at a single moment. The challenge for media owners, who seek to persuade consumers through marketing, is to keep their offer fresh and important enough for viewers to commit their attention and money into buying a ticket. Davenport and Beck (2001) put the attention economy into the context of buyer psychology theory by arguing ' In the economics of attention, we must not only ask how people go to achieve their goals but where their goals come from. Economics, in an

information economy, is about how choices of attention are made and, thus, about human motive' (Davenport and Beck, 2001 p. 180).

Digital marketing, when combined through social networks, unavoidably draws on social capital to aid marketing as *The Blair Witch Project* did in 1999. However, sixteen years later, the mainstream studios have reasserted their dominance over feature film marketing with huge budgets to create extensive digital campaigns that capture our attention.

Advocates of digital marketing and distribution for low budget filmmakers.

The hope that digital marketing would offer independent filmmakers a sustainable business model originated from US-based distribution experts who have criticised the power and systems that surround traditional distribution models. For instance Peter Broderick (a consultant for many independent filmmakers), and independent filmmaker Jon Reiss, and producer Ted Hope are optimistic about new opportunities that digital distribution and marketing offer low budget filmmakers. It is their orientation to marketing and distribution that iFeatures emulated in an attempt to produce commercially viable films that offered the production teams a sustainable future.

This optimism was summed up by Peter Broderick, in 'Maximising Distribution':

New distribution models are freeing [Indie filmmakers] from dependence on a traditional distribution system that has been failing them. Powerful digital distribution tools — the DVD, digital projectors and the Internet — are empowering independents to increasingly take their fate in their own hands and have a more direct relationship with their audiences. By effectively using these tools, filmmakers will be able to not only maximize the distribution opportunities for their current films, but also find investors for subsequent projects designed to reach core audiences. These tools will also enable them to build and nurture a personal audience, which could ensure a long and fulfilling career.

Broderick, 2010 npn.

For Broderick the power of gatekeepers of the traditional industry was shifting due to digital production, marketing and distribution and these tools potentially offered filmmakers a sustainable, long term production strategy. Implicit is the expectation that in the great majority of cases low budget films will not cross over into the mainstream. However, a small minority will become 'hits' such *Paranormal Activity* (Pond, 2013), which had a production budget of \$15,000 dollars, and achieved \$107 million income worldwide (IMDb, 2014). The hope was that digital marketing and distribution would allow more filmmakers to gain an income from their work which would, perhaps through the long tail, allow them to have a 'fulfilling career'.

The tools that Broderick argued have changed the digital marketing and distribution landscape are proliferating. Ted Hope, independent producer and commentator, writing in 2011, described 30 new platforms and services that could help the independent filmmaker reach his or her audience through fundraising, distribution or marketing. These included well-known corporate platforms such as *iTunes*, crowd funders like Kickstarter and Indigogo to artist distribution/players like Distrify and fansoffilm (Hope, 2011). Although the availability of such tools is important, as it allows filmmakers to access DIY distribution outside of the sphere of dominance of theatrical distributors, they are inadequate, Broderick argues, without a proactive strategy. In making a distinction between the old world distribution and new world, or Internet enabled, distribution, Broderick saw success being in terms of having an over-arching plan or vision for the creative product. He advised that filmmakers 'be strategic – in the old world most filmmakers have reactions not strategies. They choose the best offer from those they receive. It's essential to be proactive in the New World. You need a strategy to navigate it successfully' (Broderick 2008 npn.).

Typically filmmakers, including the iFeatures filmmakers, are ill-equipped to think about distribution strategically as they are either not knowledgeable about distribution or unconvinced that it is their role (see chapter three, four and the following case studies). Indeed, the iFeatures' training suggested that each production should engage audiences throughout the production via social networks as a method of increasing theatrical audiences. However, many of the teams wasted resources doing so because they did not have a coherent strategy. Indeed the realisation that many producers and teams were unaware of marketing strategies and tactics has led independent producers such as Ted Hope and Jon Reiss to propose a new role in the typical scriptwriter, director and producer triangle – a producer of marketing and distribution (PMD) – who would take on the extensive planning and workload associated with marketing and distribution that has been traditionally done by the distributor in exchange for their gross fee. Although British producers involved with iFeatures were sceptical of having the budget to pay this person (Cox, 2014), and of the potential issues of further distancing the producer from the audience (Goligher, 2012), the role has had increased in prominence recently, and in the US especially.

The role of the PMD was outlined by Jon Reiss (2011b) and it seems clear that the PMD role should be separated from the producer, because few producers had the strategic planning ability or tactical marketing knowledge. He argued: 'The responsibilities of a PMD are wide and varied. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to expect existing traditional crew categories to accomplish or even coordinate the work' (Reiss, 2011c npn). To prove the point, Reiss listed the responsibilities for distribution and marketing which started during script development. These included the identification and engagement with the audience for the film to develop a distribution and marketing strategy for the film over its lifetime.

The PMD would also need to be able to budget for these activities and have a strategy for fundraising through 'crowd-funding, organizational partnerships, sponsorships and even modified versions of traditional fundraising' (ibid., 2011). They would also be required to manage and implement the plan which could include social media, publicity, web developers, trailer editors, cinema bookers and trans-media elements. Audience research, outreach and relationship building via social media to influencers would follow, as well as making agreements with distribution partners (exhibitors and distributors) online and also seeking PR in traditional publications. The PMD would also take responsibility for deliverables (prints or digital copies), merchandise (DVDs, special packaging) and, if applicable, apps for mobile phones. Once the film was released, the marketing and distribution plan would need to remain flexible and focused on the key audiences or market and would also create and oversee events, such as Q&A sessions at festivals. Finally, the PMD would be expected to '*ramp –up*' the marketing (ibid., 2011, my emphasis), if the role was not complex enough, to coincide with the film's release including organising social media activities, special screenings, contacting the press and producing seeding trailers. In short, the PMD is responsible for all aspects of 'audience engagement' (Reiss, 2011). (For a full list of PMD responsibilities see Reiss, 2011c). Clearly the role requires aptitudes which are not in the usual skillset for independent producers or directors.

This description of a PMD shows the challenge that independent producers face when planning to get their films to the audience with a DIY strategy. It is difficult to imagine that production teams have any of these skills in place, and the training required to learn and apply them far exceeds the resources in time and training budgets of schemes such as iFeatures, even when SkillSet was investing approximately £100,000 in the scheme. Ted

Hope, although an advocate of PMDs, was also aware of key issues which made the development of this role hard to imagine:

Fees for indie producing have consistently dropped over the last five years, requiring working producers to take on more jobs and commit less time in the process. The focus on marketing is something those in the indie world simply cannot afford to do. So what is to be done? I could be wrong, but I think pure economics prevents a PMD sector from developing naturally in the indie world.

Ted Hope, 2011b npn.

For Hope, the lack of a budget, or the 'pure economics', for marketing limits the development of the PMD role and the traditional structural issues needed to be overcome within the sector even before the specific issues of developing a marketing strategy were confronted.

Strategy, viral marketing and *The Blair Witch Project*

The Blair Witch Project was innovative in the way it strategically planned its marketing campaign. However, it is important to realise that the myth of *The Blair Witch Project* being wholly driven by 'buzz' or viral digital marketing does not stand up to scrutiny. To achieve its \$249 million worldwide revenues, the distributor Artisan Entertainment invested \$20 million in a traditional advertising campaign (Young et al., 2010).

The single most strategic development in the marketing campaign for *The Blair Witch Project* was the use of viral marketing through fledgling Internet devices. The filmmakers had a strategy of creating a 'buzz' for the film from August 1997 – two years before it opened in July 1999. On its theatrical release, it played at twenty-seven screens and

averaged \$56,000 per screen compared to *Eyes Wide Shut* (Kubrick, 1999) with an average of \$9,000 per screen (Carvell, 1999 p. 1). The level of buzz was maintained by using a traditional technique of limiting the screens it played on. So when cinemas began to sell out, the excitement on blogs and message boards, a precursor to social media platforms, increased.

McCarthy's analysis showed that the 'buzz' for *The Blair Witch Project* was developed with the Internet, and specifically fansites, to drive 'buzz', as the primary marketing tool rather than other traditional marketing pathways. Michael Wolf, author of *Entertainment Economy* and business consultant, argued that 'marketing on the web is not a sure-fire tactic for success. But it is becoming a necessary element in the marketing of any motion picture' (McCarthy, 1999 p. 2). The success of the film made it clear to marketing strategists that digital marketing connected with film audiences. It forced a shift in the use of the Internet from just another publicity channel, or what has been called Web 1.0, to the use of the web as a communication tool and method of *interacting* with potential audiences in what became known as the Web 2.0 approach. However, what appeared to be lost was that *The Blair Witch Project's* assets were innovative and copycat strategies or tactics were unlikely to work as effectively.

Dye (2000) indicated the power of 'buzz', 'viral' or 'word of mouth' in marketing was driven by customer hype and the power was, in 1999, underestimated by marketing managers. The term 'viral marketing' was first applied in 1996 to the marketing strategy of the free email service Hotmail (Bampo et al., 2008 p. 273). Dye, a business consultant at McKinsey, defined buzz as a phenomenon of 'explosive self-generating demand' (Dye, 2000 p. 140), although it has also been defined as the 'amplification of initial marketing efforts by third parties

through passive or active influence' (Mohr, 2007 p. 398) whose impact can be predicted and evolves to defined parameters. 'Buzz' marketing is powerful because the process reduces 'redundancy' of a message as the sender passes a message on and targets their own network to people who find it of interest due to its provenance. These messages have a high conversion rate and, as the message is not adapted as it is re-sent, it has a high degree of message integrity. It also has the ability, through personal recommendation and creative freedoms, to reach niche portions of consumers who are typically 'hard to get' or communicate with (ibid., p. 274). Dye's research showed that 66 per cent of the US economy was affected by 'buzz', with 1 per cent of the US economy largely driven by 'buzz' (see also Mohr, 2007 p. 396) and was specifically important to audiences of motion pictures, broadcasting, and recreation (ibid. p. 140) due to the social aspects of leisure.

Dellarocus and Narayan (2006) identified three metrics of digital word-of-mouth, which are volume, valence and dispersion. Volume indicated the number of online messages posted on a topic and the number that appeared on online message boards was a good indicator of movie success. Valence referred to the mix of positive and negative messages and that the positive ratings were, unsurprisingly, 'the most important predictor of that movie's revenue trajectory in subsequent weeks' (p. 278). Dispersion across multiple platforms and communities also had a 'positive correlation with the evolution of viewership'. Dellarocus and Narayan also added a fourth metric, density, which was defined as the number of people, or ratio, who bought the product and posted about it on an online community within the same time period. This was analogous with click-through rates being used to evaluate the effectiveness of online ads. They concluded that online word-of-mouth can be positive but also negative: 'extreme (dis)satisfaction, controversy, advertising and product

exclusivity all seem to correlate with higher propensity to discuss a product online (ibid., p. 284).

This view is also shared by Karniouchine (2011 p. 64). Hence low-budget British films that are attempting to compete with high budget films within the international market are likely to attract negative publicity due their limited production values, and that impacts on positive audience feedback and revenue potential.

Piracy and viral marketing

Although piracy is not a central theme in this thesis, it does have an impact on the distribution strategy of low-budget filmmaking. There is research that suggests that piracy contributes to critical and commercial success. Textual poaching (Jenkins, 1992) can be used by fans of anime, music or software (Peitz and Waelbrock, 2006 p. 465) to manipulate and borrow textual properties which makes wider populations of consumers aware of, and therefore market, the original programme or genre. One example is the reworking of a scene featuring Hitler in *Downfall* (2004 and see <http://www.downfallparodies.net/>). The positive effect is that this 'poaching' reduces marketing costs and increases profits (Peitz & Waelbrock, 2005 np). Also file sharers are major consumers of legal media and the community believes their sharing is beneficial to the industry by encouraging experimentation leading to legal sales (Crisp, 2011 pp. 66- 70). Duan et al. found that that increased awareness, not the valence of comments, was a key factor in a film's commercial success (2008a and 2008b). Therefore there are some strong arguments that piracy could aid filmmakers in the longer term.

On the other hand, the hope that a pirate will be transformed into an advocate or avid consumer of low budget British films was not supported by other research. Smith and Telang report that the US industry lost \$1.3 billion revenue in 2004 because file sharing acts 'as a substitute where a copy is freely available ... and thereby hurts the interests of original copyright holders' (Smith and Telang, 2010 p. 292 and see Vogel, 2007 p. 90). In music downloading, 'only 7% of students increased their purchases due to their [illegal] downloading activities' (Coyle et al., 2009 p. 1033) and that unsurprisingly illegal downloading appealed to younger people (Cox et al., 2010 p. 301), which is also the main audience for cinema going. Also the DVD 'ripping' download sites were not part of fan communities, but a commercial activity that marketed to downloaders. In addition, the positive effects suggested above were strongest in emerging markets, not in the UK (Minniti and Vergari, 2010 p. 387).

Therefore although illegal file sharing could improve awareness, and the amount of online posts were small, on balance, the negative impact of piracy on the recoupment outweighed the benefit to *Flying Blind* and the iFeatures slate. If a sequel to *Flying Blind* were made, the argument that piracy was beneficial may have some resonance. There is an expectation that any theatrical distribution should be regarded as a 'loss leader' and the return to investors will come through sales in ancillary media such as VOD. Therefore piracy and posts relating to the illegal downloading of the film were ultimately regarded as detrimental to the film's commercial potential and had implications for the type of marketing and distribution strategy that low budget British filmmakers needed to deploy.

The long tail distribution and blockbuster strategy

The theory of the long tail (Anderson, 2006) is routinely touted as an opportunity for low budget films to be distributed to niche customers over the long term and to eventually repay their investors. Proponents argue that due to new methods of digital marketing, storage and retrieval, combined with new digital distribution channels, the future prosperity of independent small-scale filmmakers will be assured if they learned how to utilise the Internet:

Forget [the Web] as a marketplace of products, and instead think of it as a marketplace of opinion. It's the great leveller of marketing. It allows for niche products to get global attention. Most products will be sold offline, much as they always were. But in the years to come, more and more products will be *marketed* online, taking advantage of the ability of Web methods to fine-slice consumer groups and influence word of mouth more effectively than ever before in history.

Anderson, 2006 p. 245

In this section I will argue this theory, even within its own parameters, benefits not the filmmakers but the aggregators of films, and in doing so replicates similar structural issues that have beset the British film industry for the last century.

First, it is important to summarise the theory of the long tail. Anderson built on existing economic principles and used emerging Internet companies with new business models, such as Amazon, where the 'efficient economics of online retail aggregate a large inventory of relatively low sellers' (Anderson, 2006 p. 13). Simply put, the traditional retailers with products on shelves which customers could see, select and purchase within conveniently located stores, meant that each square foot of store floor area had to generate a certain proportion of revenue. With only enough physical space for approximately 3,000 titles, managers would select only those films where they could sell enough units to be profitable.

Therefore the strategy of the retailers was to stock more popular items, or 'hits', that would sell well, and that by definition had a mainstream, rather than niche, appeal. With the growth of online purchasing, and the ability to move away from the limited self-space of physical 'bricks and mortar' stores meant that companies like Netflix could have an inventory of 55,000 titles.

Importantly, for Anderson's argument, a fifth of sales came from niche titles that would not have been carried by traditional stores (Anderson, 2006 p. 23). This effect occurred because online distribution reduced both 'transaction costs' of rent, inventory and staff costs and simultaneously lowered 'search costs' for consumers to find particular films. For Anderson, the outcome of this was clear: 'if the 20th century entertainment industry was about *hits*, the 21st will be equally about *niches*' (Anderson, 2006 p. 16). Consumers would seek out products that catered to their particular tastes, rather than a mass produced 'one size fits all' product. This theory was grasped by low budget filmmakers and other non-mainstream creatives who argued that, finally, there was a business model for their output. Digital distribution offered a sustainable business model which allowed them to find investment to produce their work as there now appeared to be a method for finding audiences, and revenues and by-passing the theatrical gatekeepers.

However, closer examination of the theory by business scholars has questioned whether low budget film financiers also see the long tail as financially viable. Elberse, reprising her 2008 article, (Elberse, 2008 and 2014) recently published a counter-argument which used US sales data to show that film (and other entertainment industries) should focus not on the long tail but gamble on finding mainstream hits or blockbusters or, in other words, continue with its current business model and reject the long tail theory. Elberse's argument centres

on findings about the psychology of consumers and sales data which refutes Anderson's claims. William McPhee's findings based on US data in *Formal Theories of Mass Behaviour* showed that:

a disproportionately large share of the audience for popular products consists of relatively light consumers (those who buy a particular type of product infrequently), while a disproportionately large share of the audience from skewing products consists of relatively heavy consumers (those who buy that type of product often).

Elberse, 2014 p. 164

When related to the long tail, this means that audiences for niche film titles are cinephiles who are aware of, and consume, many mainstream and alternative titles whereas infrequent audiences tended to select the most popular films. McPhee also saw that audiences showed less enjoyment of niche products than they did popular products, thereby these niche products had a reduced playability. Elberse also analysed which budget films were most profitable to Warner Bros, one of the main Hollywood studios. Building on the knowledge that the average cinema goer will only see five or six films a year, Warner Bros followed a blockbuster, or tent pole, strategy successfully. Its top ten titles in 2008 accounted for 34 per cent of costs, but 42 per cent of worldwide box office sales and delivered 46 per cent of its surplus, or profits, whereas 'the bottom 10% movies had virtually no impact on sales.' (ibid., p. 23). This was also mirrored in P&A costs which were proportionately lower for films with higher production costs (ibid., p. 25).

Using US music sales data, Elberse convincingly demonstrated the economic reality of the long tail. In 2011, of eight million unique digital tracks sold, 34 per cent of titles sold less than one unit in the year. This represents the opposite of what Anderson claimed.

Anderson espoused that the long tail would over time, and as downloads became more

ubiquitous, aid niche musicians. For Elberse, the long tail business model does not stack up against the evidence: 'The picture is clear: as the market for digital tracks grows, the share of titles that sell far too few copies to be lucrative investments is growing as well. More and more tracks sell next to nothing' (ibid., p. 160).

And this raises the question of who benefits from long tail commerce? For new filmmakers of niche films that manage to arrange distribution on online distribution companies such as Netflix, the promise of revenue streams stretching out into the future underpins their hopes to produce a second, third, fourth and fifth feature. However, the small amounts of revenue that they are likely to receive would not make a sustainable business to fund future development or production. Therefore the long tail only benefits the companies that inspired Anderson in the first place; content aggregators such as Amazon and Netflix are able to aggregate the revenues from multiple niche sales into substantial revenues.

These infinite shelf-space businesses have effectively learned a lesson in new math: a very, very big number (the products in the tail) multiplied by a relatively small number (the sales of each) is still equal to a very, very big number. And, again, that very, very big number is only getting bigger.

Anderson, 2006 p. 24

Filmmakers with products in the tail should, according to Anderson, be interested in all the benefits they can accrue other than financial reward, such as reputation. 'Measured by the amount of attention a product tracks, reputation can be converted into other things of value: jobs, tenure, audiences and lucrative offers of all sorts' (ibid., p. 74). This turns on its head the central argument of the long tail - that of economic reward over the long term – and that the best the filmmakers can hope for is increased social and symbolic capital. And

as Chapter 4 shows most filmmakers rejected iFeatures' commercial objectives and were already actively attempting to increase their reputational, or social, capital.

Algorithms, digital distribution platforms and the use of metadata

The major platforms for distribution are not actively aiding low budget filmmakers. Netflix's ability to use metadata (data about data) has allowed it to influence the attention of subscribers. With attention being a finite commodity, consumers increasingly rely on gatekeepers that have earned high levels of trust to help them target their attention.

Netflix does this automatically and categorises every film on its platform into one of 80,000 genres so that it can recommend and market films to (almost) individual subscribers and their particular tastes. Netflix developed short descriptors such as 'feelgood foreign comedies for hopeless romantics' and 'steamy mind-game movies', as well as being able to select a film based on key creative personnel; 'a database of American cinematic predilections' (Madrigal, 2014 npn). Also Netflix targets small audiences through a variety of tools such as personal viewing history, most popular and trending, return to/continue watching, similarity and search (Gomez-Uribe and Hunt, 2015 pp. 2-5). Or as Hallinan and Striphos argue, over the bid Netflix made for *House of Cards* with an 'A' list director and cast attached:

This "low hanging fruit" differs from the more frequent articulations of mass media as appealing to the "lowest common denominator" in the size and specificity of the intended audience, with Netflix moving away from an undifferentiated mass toward an aggregation of highly differentiated micro-audiences.

Hallinan and Striphos, 2016 p. 128

This allows Netflix to recommend films from their library to subscribers that they are more likely to enjoy with high levels of 'playability' and will therefore retain subscribers as they see continued value in the service. However, if the use of metadata is deemed positive there is a downside for culture where the industry metrics forego the intrinsic cultural values of a film for instrumental economic values as defined by Netflix's algorithms:

The production decisions behind *Orange is the New Black* suggest expressible materials now find themselves addressing computers... [which is like] a court of algorithmic appeal in which objects, ideas, and practices are heard, cross-examined and judged independently, in part, of human beings.

Hallinan and Striphas, 2016 p. 129

Netflix could capture the attention with 'pushed' recommendations to subscribers who like art house or low budget film, but the default style of film is mainstream. However, it must be noted that these systems are not predictive; they work by cataloguing past behaviours and offering options based on that. Therefore the systems do not increase plurality of tastes but distil and limit choice. The control of the 'channel' works against low budget producers, as the platform is aimed at the mainstream so low budget producers are unlikely to make any significant revenue from having their film on the platform (Goligher, 2012). Madrigal was more negative about Netflix's algorithms, arguing they were designed to favour mainstream tastes and present them to subscribers:

Suddenly, we found ourselves staring at the extant movie-production logic of the Hollywood studios. Basically: endless recombination of the same key themes. Classic action movies, family friendly westerns, buddy period pieces. That's the Hollywood button.

Madrigal, 2014 npn

Case studies: experiments in digital marketing and distribution

The BFI's *Statistical Yearbook 2014* offered a sobering picture of the commercial viability of low-budget British feature films. In a market worth £1,186 million, eleven US distributors dominated the UK releases in 2014 with 94 per cent share of the market, with Optimum / Studio Canal, an Anglo French company, having 3 per cent and an annual turnover of £24 million. Independent British films made £77 million from 123 releases. UK distributors, Verve, which distributed *ITDH*, had a turnover of £700,000 from six films and Dogwoof £300,000 from three films (BFI, 2014 pp. 94-97). Between 2007 and 2010, 74 feature films were released with budgets of under £500,000. The median box office was only £4,000 (BFI, 2014 p. 94). The mean estimated cost of a theatrical release for 10-49 screens was approx. £30,000 (*ibid.*, p. 103). These statistics show that US distributors continue to dominate traditional theatrical channels (Iordanova, 2012 p. 5).

As a result, the film agencies and UK distributors which handle British low budget films have a vested interest in finding innovative marketing strategies and routes to market. During the run-up to the launch of the iFeatures scheme in 2009, the UKFC announced a scheme to investigate the online and digital distribution of UK features. The *Digital Innovation in Distribution* (DIID) scheme was to fund campaigns that used new online tools and channels to reach larger audiences and then to share data and intelligence from those campaigns for the benefit of the UK film industry. Distributors were able to apply for one of twelve £30,000 grants. The resultant case studies on films such as *Monsters*, *The Infidel* and *The Disappearance of Alice Creed* were published in 2011 (UKFC, 2009) when the iFeatures films were nearing completion or release. The DIID scheme resulted in various conclusions which are useful to this discussion. Using popular social media platforms such as Facebook was

essential, but an over-reliance on purely digital tactics without traditional or physical marketing assets did not convert into box office. Nor did failing to identify a clear, definable audience that could be contacted easily or underestimating the amount of time the production team would need to commit to market the film. The main conclusion from DIID shows the adoption of digital is not a panacea for the structural problems of the British film industry.

With this background, this section identifies two previously unreported case studies. The social media marketing for *Norwegian Wood* confirms some of the issues above, while the case study for *Weekend* proposes that a hybrid distribution strategy can be used effectively.

Using social media to market low budget features: *Norwegian Wood*.

Distributor Soda Pictures and the UKFC commissioned research into the benefits of social media marketing on the UK release of the independent Japanese film *Norwegian Wood* (Hung, 2010) in March 2011. This case study has not been released to any other researcher and represents a unique piece of data on the social media campaign by TruffleNet, a research company with expertise in the real-time online sentiment analysis of social media posts (TruffleNet, 2011a).

This process of social media research threw up some surprising results. TruffleNet was also able to identify key audience targets and to minimise activities which had insufficient influence. Because *Norwegian Wood* was based on the famous book by Japanese author Haruki Murakami, book clubs and fans of Japanese culture would be clear targets. However, research into social media communities by TruffleNet discovered that these audiences

would not be influential or large enough to warrant a marketing investment (ibid., p. 5). The agency identified the most effective digital channels were Facebook, YouTube and *The Guardian's* digital sister sites, *Guardian Online*, with which to engage major influencers based on their evaluation of the anticipated audience. Interestingly, Twitter was not regarded as having a strong engagement with cinemagoers as the campaign lacked the 'breaking news' criteria that motivates tweets (ibid., p. 3).

TruffleNet claimed to be able to use its monitoring tools to analyse and define a target audience and then build a strategy with associated tactics. Although the film's composer, Jonny Greenwood, who was better known as a musician in *Radiohead*, had a large UK recognition with 275,000 fans, they were seventy per cent male. Also, because men tend not to go to the cinema alone, success of the film would depend on increasing female appeal. To encourage greater box office, TruffleNet identified marketing themes that would encourage women to see the film which included romance, design and Japanese culture (ibid., p. 10). As a result, three events were planned for the campaign. The first was a competition to design a poster for the film; the second was to leave special copies of the book in central locations in key cities to foster social media traffic. Although these are traditional tactics, they had digital characteristics as the poster designs were intended to be shared among networks, and the book drop included a competition on Facebook and Twitter to urge cinephiles to locate them. The third event was the release of Greenwood's soundtrack.

The results showed that TruffleNet's strategy was generally not effective. The poster competition had an impact but it did not maintain the 'buzz' on social media due to the time required to design the posters. It received only 400 entries and was responsible for just

twenty-eight per cent of all social media conversations. The 'book drop' had little impact on the campaign as only six per cent of the social media mentioned any reference to the original book. It was the launch of the sound track that had the largest impact with 3,500 people talking about the release one hour after the original tweet was issued. The subject 'trended' on Twitter for four hours in London and globally for two hours. There was also a film launch party which targeted heavy social media users in the week preceding the release; seven per cent of all mentions reported the party.

However, TruffleNet concluded that a drawback with this campaign was that the tactical elements were not thought through adequately which undermined the strategic objective. The poster competition rules focused on the artistic interpretation of the story and did not stipulate the need to include the release date or cinemas showing the film, thereby limiting the free marketing which should have resulted when the posters circulated around networks. The book drop was not focused on social media and the interactions did not actively encourage anyone searching to encourage friends and contacts to purchase tickets. Also the soundtrack's ability to drive ticket sales was undermined by the audiences' confusion when searching the film's title which was the same as a famous *Beatles* song. Had these marketing tactics been fully worked out and integrated into a unified strategy for the film, these activities would have been more powerful, persuasive and potentially, profitable.

Analysis by TruffleNet revealed that although the strategy employed was faulty, the power of digital networks to disseminate marketing messages was potentially strong (ibid., p. 27). Its analysis of the social network traffic illustrated that Facebook traffic was mainly due to the *Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph* newspaper reviews of the film and there were 1,035 mentions in total, with 58 per cent being positive. Furthermore, it showed that 34 per cent

of people were planning to see the film during the opening weekend and seventeen per cent of people stated they wanted to see the film in the future. The impact of positive digital word-of-mouth was huge due to the network effect. TruffleNet calculated that each person positively influenced by the marketing strategy had on average 500 followers, which meant that 286,333 people would have been touched by the 'buzz' surrounding the film.

TruffleNet's calculation of the sentiment of the audience who had seen the film showed that positive word of mouth was strong with 73 per cent of posts either 'loving' or 'liking' the film (TruffleNet, 2011b p. 3). The financial returns replicate this data: the film had a strong opening with the box office over the first weekend totalling £92,344 with an average £2,798 over 33 screens (BFI, 2011).

The findings for this film show that there is evidence that social media marketing can be effective and produce results for a specific film, but these results cannot simply be repeated or applied to other films, as the next section demonstrates.

Hybrid Direct Distribution and *Weekend*: the best of both worlds?

So far this thesis has developed an absolute dichotomy between traditional and digital, where a film producer would either work with distributors and trust that they would actively market a film, or work with the myriad of specialist agencies with expertise in particular functions. But there is a hybrid approach for what has been called 'Direct Distribution' as identified by the BFI (BFI, 2014 p. 2). This approach was taken by the filmmaking team behind *Weekend* (2011) and it received commercial and critical success. It was produced by Tristan Goligher, who was subsequently recruited to be the executive producer of iFeatures 2.

In an interview with Goligher, it was clear that *Weekend* owed part of its success to an established marketing and distribution strategy but without adopting a traditional business model. The film, which can be loosely described as a gay love drama, was developed by director Andrew Haigh and Goligher over two years with script development taking eighteen months. Based on the strength of the script, Goligher got a 'letter of interest' from Peccadillo Pictures, a specialist distributor for gay themed feature films. With this recommendation from the industry, they raised £54,000 from screen agency EM Media with the remainder coming from Screen Scotland, and the tax credit. Goligher, and director Andrew Haigh, started production with a budget of £80,000 with the shoot lasting seventeen days. Based on the rough cut of the film, they were accepted into competition at the influential film festival South by South West (SXSW) and received post-production funds of £40,000 from a film finance company, The Bureau, to finish the film.

During the festival, the distributor IFC showed interest in the US rights. After the film won an audience prize, Goligher decided to go with IFC, rather than niche gay distributors, because they thought that IFC's distribution model would be best for the film in the US. The standard IFC low budget model was used for *Weekend*. The release strategy was to open at one screen at the IFC's cinema in New York to build word-of-mouth (Hilderbrand, 2010 p. 24). During the second week this expanded to seven screens and *Weekend* was also available on VOD and other cable outlets, which meant that PR spend and any 'buzz' generated could be used to reach audiences in cities for theatrical screenings as well as television based sales. At one point the film was playing at 40 screens simultaneously and played in over 80 cinemas in the US. Goligher praised IFC's strategy of releasing into key cities to generate interest before using positive reviews, the lynch pin of traditional

marketing, to launch into smaller cities. IFC spent \$250,000 on P&A in the US, which earned a box office \$500,000 with \$100,000 coming from VOD sales.

IFC had also identified potential audiences. The core audience was, unsurprisingly, urban gay men but the secondary audience was female 35+ years, which allowed the film to 'break out' from its niche audience and to earn substantial revenue. In the UK, Peccadillo Pictures had a P&A of £65,000 and achieved a box office of £250,000, which Goligher said was 'pretty spectacular' (Goligher, 2012). Due to the fees of up to 70 per cent for exhibitors on films, and the distributors' fees of 30 per cent of the remainder, the film had, at the time of the interview, not broken even in both the US and UK although Goligher was confident that the theatrical phase had developed enough 'buzz' to carry through into ancillary revenues such as TV sales that would push the film into profit in these two major markets.

Goligher decided early on in the production not to use the traditional sales agent route as 'the idea of making a film for £120,000 and not see anything for it, seemed crazy' (Goligher, 2012). He perceived the business model of sales agents whose expenses would equate 'to between 25 to 50 per cent of the film's production budget' (ibid.) was not sustainable for low budget production. However, Goligher did not feel that Haigh or himself had the experience to sell the film globally so they collaborated with The Film Collaborative for international theatrical and festival sales. This organisation has contacts in global markets and experience to negotiate contracts in different territories and will do this for a fee and does not take over the rights to the film for 10-15 years as a distributor would typically negotiate. As part of this model, Goligher had to complete the legal paperwork and was responsible for getting the deliverables (print, trailer and poster, etc.) to the distributor in each territory. Importantly, it is Goligher who then pays The Film Collaborative a fee on the

results of their work from the returns and this 'incentivises' the filmmaker to think in a 'proactive business sense' and keeps a connection between the filmmaker and the final audience (ibid.). Goligher had also sold the film to digital distribution companies such as Netflix USA although on non-exclusive deals.

With regard to digital DIY marketing, Goligher was dismissive of its impact on the final revenues of the film. He was convinced that the focus of the producer and director should be on making a film that impresses the core audience and should not be distracted from this fundamental responsibility. He believed that digital marketing was labour-intensive and at lower budget levels relied on the producer and director doing this important work for free. They probably did not have the skills, time and commitment to what was a huge investment of creative energy. The focus on producing a good film first and thinking about marketing second was shared by an iFeatures' producer Sarah Cox.

Hollywood's contemporary use of digital marketing techniques

Although *The Blair Witch Project* broke new territory in marketing strategy and technique, the Hollywood industry was slow to recognise the power of digital marketing but now dominates it. One campaign that has been widely acknowledged as being successful was *The Hunger Games* franchise, which was based on a successful series of books that had already sold 24 million copies and had developed a huge fan-base. Although the first film in this franchise (2012) had a large marketing budget, and cannot therefore be compared to any of the low-budget feature films described in this thesis, a short overview of the digital marketing including the strategic and creative goals is included to show how the major

studios have been using digital marketing effectively to deliver audiences. It also demonstrates how Hollywood now dominates the digital marketing sphere making it more difficult for films with limited marketing budgets to make an impact with potential audiences.

The Hunger Games was produced for \$80 million (The Numbers, 2014) and, as Barnes reported, was marketed by Lionsgate's in-house team of twenty-one people 'working with a relatively tiny budget of about \$45 million' using traditional PR elements (Barnes, 2012 npn). Although \$45 million is, of course, a huge sum, it illustrates the investment Hollywood puts into marketing its output and the challenge for low budget British films without any budget for marketing. These included fifteen 'amazing' (ibid.) magazine cover stories, as well as 3,000 billboards and also giving away 80,000 posters. However in the digital sphere, the 'campaign's centrepiece [was] a phased, year-long digital effort built around the content platforms cherished by young audiences: a constant use of Facebook and Twitter, a YouTube channel, a Tumblr blog, iPhone games and live video streaming' (ibid.). Marketing efforts strategically used the narrative of the film so that elements extended the story world of the film. The film was set in the dystopian story world of 'Panem', and the metropolis 'Capitol' was extended through the marketing assets. For instance, the film's costume style appeared in editorial articles in fashion magazines, where 'real world' brands sought to gain credence with young audiences in the real world. On Tumblr, a blog was created called *Capitol Couture*, which was dedicated to the distinctive fashion of the costume design in the film. Fans of the film could also find links on Twitter to make digital ID cards as if they lived in Panem. The campaign embraced user-generated content (UGC) including homemade posters, cover versions of official songs and celebrity photographs (Cheng, 2012 npn.). Whereas Lucas Films has been criticised for preventing fans from showing their engagement

with the story world of the *Star Wars* franchise (Jenkins, 2008 pp. 148-152) Lionsgate used UGC to maintain the momentum of the campaign and also to create 'lifelong brand ambassadors' that would supply positive word-of-mouth. The campaign also used Getglue, a smartphone-based social network using geographical location to link people, similar to FourSquare, where fans were rewarded when participants 'checked in' to different online areas. This was used to generate 'buzz' in a crowded marketing environment. The success of this campaign was due to various factors:

If you consider your target audience first and structure your digital marketing around them you have the best chance of resonating with them and ensuring you do not waste your time to try to push your marketing message on them. Good content should always engage with your target audience regardless of its purpose. If you find you are simply not getting any traction with your audience, consider going back to the planning phase and look at where and how you are considering your customers.

Cheng, 2012 npn.

Or in other words, re-evaluate the marketing strategy. The marketing strategy was regarded as fundamental to the success of any campaign and that the tactics were designed in the service of the overarching strategy.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that whereas digital marketing had been a powerful tool in the early 2000s, by the onset of iFeatures, the focus on digital marketing was out of date, simplistic and naïve. This chapter, as well as others in this thesis, demonstrates that digital marketing is not of itself the answer to the British film industry's woes. The powerful organisations that make up Hollywood have engaged with big budget digital media campaigns such as *The Hunger Games* which used its massive marketing budget of \$45 million across traditional

and digital assets to offer potential audiences engaging and innovative experiences which they shared within their networks (Barnes, 2012 and Cheng, 2012). This offers little optimism for low budget independent films to make the same impact that *The Blair Witch Project* did seventeen years ago when digital marketing was in its infancy.

Equally the optimism in the long tail distribution, and DIY marketing with a PMD was discussed and shown to be out of step with the realities of the film industry in the twenty first century. The long tail's limited economic rewards destroyed the case for digital distribution seeking commercial success. These findings underpin the filmmakers' decision to largely ignore iFeatures' commercial objectives and focus their energy on achieving a project that rewards them with critical success and peer approval in an autonomous mode of production as outlined in Chapter 3. The benefits of the long tail favoured the aggregators which tended to be large US multinational corporations such as Netflix, Amazon and Apple's iTunes, which replicated the dominance of US film distributors from 1905 to 2005.

The chapter has shown that a strong marketing strategy is fundamental to success. Understanding the overarching mission of any marketing effort was essential. This required in-depth understanding of principles of marketing including emerging paradigms and logics that have altered the rules of engaging consumers. Also understanding the affordances of viral marketing through digital systems, and its limitations, is important to success. The case studies showed that a lack of strategy contributed to marketing budgets that were squandered through a focus on innovative but wasteful digital tactics. Films that followed the tried and tested or traditional marketing strategies had greater success whereas films with less precise plans had difficulties in finding an audience. As the case studies that were

published by the UKFC during the timeframe of iFeatures productions clearly showed, that social media marketing for low budget films was not able to raise awareness in isolation or in the absence of traditional media spending.

This chapter raises questions over iFeatures' hopes and strategic focus on digital marketing and distribution. To recap, iFeatures hoped that the films could bypass or overcome the structural issues in the industry as described in chapter 3. The following chapters are case studies of the three individual iFeatures films and their individual marketing and distribution strategies and tactics. They will offer substantial detail from primary research which will explore how each of the approaches taken to the marketing and distribution of the three iFeatures low budget feature films offers filmmakers of the future strategies or tactics to adopt or reject.

Chapter 6

Case study: *In the Dark Half*

Introduction

As described in chapter 4, iFeatures had an objective of training production teams to market their films creatively using digital marketing with a focus on social media to help bring the films to the attention of distributors, and subsequently, audiences. The marketing and distribution strategy of *In the Dark Half* (*ITDH*) exemplified the typical problem of British low budget features where marketing and distribution were not given the priority required. *ITDH* got a distribution deal but did not, in the end, execute a digital marketing strategy. The focus in the teams was on production issues; primarily to deliver the film within the budget, but there was no clear strategy about how the film would reach its particular audience.

ITDH therefore offers a good starting point for the case studies and a point of comparison to the marketing strategy of other films in the slate. For example, *Flying Blind* was able to invest in traditional and digital marketing with some limited impact but did get an innovative distribution deal. Therefore *ITDH's* marketing and distribution represents an opportunity to explore how British low budget feature films, even with innovations around traditional marketing, fare in the crowded marketplace at this particular time. Without a substantial digital marketing strategy, *ITDH* highlights whether the traditional problems of marketing and distribution within the British film industry (as outlined in chapter 3) continue to beset the industry in the 2010s. Therefore this case study will contribute to the thesis by showing how a feature film without a digital marketing strategy was restricted in its ability

to find its audience. It will also help to answer whether films without digital marketing and distribution can help to construct or facilitate a sustainable infrastructure in terms of creative staff, networks and techniques for regional filmmaking in the UK.

The core production team and the development of the project

In iFeatures, the core production team of a project was usually made up of only the director and the writer who had developed the project jointly from the outset. The strengths of the director Alistair Siddons were demonstrated by a feature length documentary on Beat Boy dancing called *Turn it Loose* (2009) as well as pop promos. The screenwriter, Lucy Catherine, had developed television drama and written episodes for the BBC vampire series *Being Human* (2009) and had been writer-in-residence at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre.

As the project developed three producers were attached to it. The project started during the development phase of iFeatures with Abigail Davies attached as producer. Davies had proposed another project to the scheme, which was not commissioned but she was regarded as an emerging talent by iFeatures and South West Screen and was attached to the project. However, creative differences emerged quickly which meant that she left *ITDH* and joined another short-listed team called *Our Own Shadows*. The second producers were Tracy Brimm and Kate Myers whose company Forward Films had had recent success with the critically acclaimed low budget *Skeletons* (2010). They believed that the script required further development although this was disputed by both the iFeatures management team and the core production team (Catherine, 2011 and Siddons, 2011). These 'creative differences' (Matheson, 2013 and Blackburn, 2011), and other projects in Forward Films'

slate, which then required their full attention, caused them to withdraw. The third producer, Margaret Matheson of Bard Entertainment, was introduced to the team by iFeatures for two reasons. Matheson was a very experienced British producer of low budget films. She had started in television in the 1970s with credits to her name including a *Screen One* for BBC, and the multiple award-winning *Lost for Words* (1998). She had continued to produce and executive produce thirteen middle to low budget films through to the present day such as *Skin* (Fabian, 2010) and the award winning documentary *Sleep Furiously* (Koppel, 2008). The recruitment of Matheson was also fundamental to the scheme's success:

I was brought on to see if the film can be made for the money, and brought on to help pull together the finance, which was not in place at the time, and to make the film happen.

Matheson, Producer *ITDH*, 2013

Therefore without Matheson's production experience and contacts, it would have been necessary to find the production funds elsewhere and to demonstrate that the scheme and its ambitions were viable.

The selection of *ITDH* and the stakeholders' expectations

The stakeholders did not have a single conception of the film or one united objective. Chris Collins, Head of the UKFC's Film Fund, speaking after the completion of the film, was clear that he thought the core production team had undermined *ITDH*. 'It is very difficult to work in the horror genre unless you absolutely have it in your DNA ... The problem with *In the*

Dark Half was that the director didn't elevate the film beyond the flaws in the script' (Collins, 2011).

The impact of this was that the UKFC did not invest in the project as it seemed recoument was unlikely (Collins, 2011 and Siddons, 2011). One of the reasons for this was that *ITDH* was not constructed as a typical horror film as the core production team saw the iFeatures scheme as an opportunity for creative freedom. The film was planned by the writer and director as an aesthetic mixture of British social realism combined with the psychological horror of *Don't Look Now* (Roeg, 1973). The core horror audience of 16 to 24 year old males was therefore not the director's and writer's intended audience. Nigel Thomas from Matador Pictures and executive producer on the iFeatures scheme regarded the final version of the film as too complex for mainstream audiences. The rule of thumb for the film industry is that, for marketability, a film should be able to be summed up in a single sentence – and *ITDH* could not be. This indicated that the film would, therefore, be difficult to sell to an audience with the limited marketing available (Siddons, 2011). As Matheson stated about the commissioned project:

It was never going to be mainstream – Lucy was very clear that this was not a horror film. She wanted it to be a supernatural film and she had important supernatural films that were references for her. She very clearly saw it as something that sat in the art house world, not a teen flick which might get some solid commercial distribution. And Alistair would agree with that. It seems obvious as the script was not a teen horror 'fright fest'.

Matheson, 2013

Matheson saw potential deficiencies from the outset which the recruitment process had not rectified. Lucy Catherine applied to the scheme to get more creative freedom than in her commercial work. She resisted attempts by the producers from Forward Films to make the

script rigidly comply with genre conventions. She thought that the mix of supernatural and social realist genres was an innovative approach for a British feature film, while accepting that the core audience was likely to change from mainstream to niche. The audience therefore became 'a middle-class audience who like art films, and who are a certain age. They are the type of people who go to the Watershed [Cinema in Bristol] and so I don't think it has wide commercial appeal at all' (Catherine, 2011).

The lack of a clear genre had a profound impact on how the film could be marketed and what its label, or 'announcement' as Matheson called it, should be. A clear unambiguous genre was important for low budget indie films because 'what is most likely to be profitable is usually a recognisable genre such as sci-fi, or something that has a rack in a DVD store' (Matheson, 2012). Stakeholders were concerned with the clarity of the genre as they recognised it was an important part of marketing and that this must be solved to attract audiences:

It was clear to [the stakeholders] there was an issue with its genre announcement. I said you can't call it a horror because it is not a horror. The nearest genre is 'ghost story' but there is no DVD genre section for that. I thought it was a big mistake to call it a psychological thriller because it wasn't written like a thriller. The planned announcement wasn't very helpful but I was able have that changed.

Matheson, 2013

However, the confusion over the genre was shared by audiences, reviewers and even stakeholders through to its marketing but the genesis of the issue had started during the commissioning process.

The timetable for the release of *ITDH*

In September 2010 the iFeatures slate was announced when the production funding for the slate had been put in place with Matador Films and Content International providing the last tranche of the scheme's budget. Although the two other projects received extensive script development for up to eighteen months, *ITDH* was considered ready to go into production. *ITDH* started shooting in November 2010 due to the need to film the exteriors 'in the dark half' of the year, i.e. in autumn. Editing starting in January and continued through to April 2011. The film received its world premiere at the Raindance Film Festival on 3 October 2011. Although many horror films are released before Halloween as it is a time when audiences are encouraged to think about the supernatural, the film was released by Verve Pictures in the height of the summer holiday season, starting on 12 August 2012. It later played for a week in Dublin, and a week at the Watershed in Bristol where 82 people purchased tickets. It continued to get limited screenings until Halloween 2012, but the additional box office results are not available. The DVD was released on 8 October 2012 with limited VOD. By July 2014 the film had only made total revenues of £8,888, which Toby Melling, the sales agent, assumed represented its total lifetime earnings (Melling, 2014).

The synopsis

The film is set on the edge of the city near the open countryside. Marie, played by Jessica Barden, lives with her mother, Kathy, (Lyndsey Marshall) in a house which backs on to dominating hills and woodland. A neighbour called Filthy (Tony Curran), who is the local poacher and who has a six year old son, Sean, occasionally gets Marie to babysit. One

evening when Marie is babysitting, and after Sean reacts to the woodland 'spirits', the boy dies of an unexplained cause. Filthy, grief-stricken, tries to rationalise what may have caused Sean's death by initially blaming Marie. Marie believes that the death of Sean had been caused by the spirits of the woodland which Filthy had angered by his hunting. Marie attempts to pacify the spirits by burying Filthy's snared animals and by making a shrine in her den, an old army pill-box, of Sean's belongings to allow him to pass into the afterlife. Filthy finally accepts Marie's interpretation but decides that he cannot bear life without his son, and plans to commit suicide so that he and Sean can pass together into the afterlife. Before slipping into unconsciousness from an overdose, Filthy urges Marie to forgive her father, and this suddenly reveals a 'twist' in the narrative; that Marie has not come to terms with the suicide of her own mother. The conversations she had with her mother throughout the film were in fact with her father, and she had superimposed her mother on top of her father's actions. The film ends with Marie able, finally, to grieve and accept her mother's death.

Identifying the marketing assets and issues

The script's lack of clear genre was an issue for marketing. As the synopsis above shows, Matheson's definition of the film was accurate as thriller elements were not present. The director also admitted that he was not knowledgeable about mainstream horror or European horror films. The script combined supernatural, ghost story and social realist themes, due to the poverty of the protagonists. The puzzling aspect is that the panels did not regard this as an issue during the commissioning process. It is interesting to reiterate from other chapters that Moll, the architect of the iFeatures scheme, had said in training sessions that iFeatures was not interested in the social realist aesthetic and had invited

participants to find other styles of storytelling. But as this case study shows, this guideline was not consistently applied.

The impact was that the film did not comply with iFeatures' objectives of being attractive to mainstream audiences. The synthesis by the scriptwriter of the horror/supernatural with social realist genres within *ITDH* represented an innovative evolution but with an impact on potential audiences which has been discussed in chapter 5. The story's themes of a malevolent countryside, spirits passing to the underworld, and grief offered the potential of a complex narrative, which could have been attractive to an emotionally mature audience. Combined with the mixed genre, this positioned the film squarely within the 'specialist', or niche, category for distribution. As Matheson stated:

I would say it's pretty obvious it is not a teen flick. It is not aiming at a broad teen or young twenties audience. It's aiming at a more sophisticated art house audience. In the end, whether it's the script, direction or production - the finished film was not as effective as it needed to be to be selected for 'A' list film festivals. And that is how you promote a film of this nature.

Matheson, 2013

The casting decisions were crucial for marketing. The final cast included three actors who are all well-known supporting actors in films or television. Filthy was played by Tony Curran who had been in 33 features in mainly supporting roles although he played the lead in *Red Road* (Arnold, 2006). Marie was played by Jessica Barden, who had come to notice through *Coronation Street* in 2007, and her role as Jody Long in *Tamara Drew* (Frears, 2010). Kathy, Marie's mother, was played by Lyndsey Marshall, whose career has been dominated by substantial roles in television mini-series such as *Garrow's Law*, (2011) and television films. The casting decisions can be characterised as selecting actors who, although not well known enough in their own right to attract audiences, were respected for their acting skills. Jacqui

Barr, marketing executive for BBC Films, emphasised that the casting was a key marketing decision:

In the Dark Half, because it's a drama and it's quite slow paced, is a tricky 'sell' at the moment. Although I think the cast great, with Tony [Curran] and Jessica [Barden], but then they are not so well-known that they can pull people into the cinema. It is important that casting is good and appropriate, because so much is done off the back of that. The cast stills, your poster campaign - if you haven't got faces that people are interested in at all, then it is quite difficult to promote. If it's all unknowns, that's quite tricky, and even with our bigger budgeted films we find that to be a problem.

Barr, 2012

The locations for a film are also important for marketing. *ITDH* was set in Hartcliff/Dundry in south Bristol on the boundary between the city and the greenbelt countryside. The film was set in a housing estate that was built in the 1950s where the gardens of the houses still backed onto open fields and woods. Although this location was credible for the story, this could have been partly responsible for some reports that focused on the social realist or 'kitchen sink' aesthetic. The usual image of Bristol with its Victorian suspension bridge, Georgian architecture, waterways in the city centre, and rows of multi-coloured Victorian terraced housing, was replaced by a part of the city that has never been part of the Bristol tourist's trail with vistas that were largely run-down and unappealing.

The planned strategy for marketing and distribution

ITDH planned to have a dual marketing and distribution strategy. The first objective was to gain attention with distributors through strong festival showings and then to launch the film through a limited theatrical release with limited marketing. The reviews that they

generated and the hoped for positive word of mouth (WOM) publicity would then generate enough customers to keep it on screens. These reviews and WOM would then have driven ancillary sales in the UK and abroad. The first challenge for the sales agent was to get a UK distributor. According to the BBC's marketing department, the initial phase of *ITDH's* marketing and distribution was designed by stakeholders to promote the horror genre as the major attraction to a well-defined and active audience of festival goers and invited industry professionals made up of bloggers, distributors and foreign sales agents (Barr, 2012). The film premiered at the Raindance Film Festival in October 2011 where the director, two actresses and Chris Moll gave a Q&A session. However, it was not successful in gaining a distributor and this was due in part to the failure, according to Matheson, of the sales agents to promote the film actively to potential distributors:

After Content International [the Sales Agents] had *Dark Half* for quite some time and were unable to find a distributor, I asked Chris [Moll] if I might talk to Verve [Pictures] about it . . . I was initially thinking I would get advice on a minimal self-release to get the reviews and credibility and to position the DVD release. In fact, Colin Birch liked the film so much he took it on. But only for £10, 000 P&A and that really is just a showcase - not a release as such - a few cinema bookings just to underpin a DVD plan.

Matheson, 2013

Matheson was critical of Content International as Verve had not seen the film and yet, with Matheson's reputation and intervention, had been persuaded to take the film on.

Matheson further added that with UK distribution 'you have a much better chance for foreign distribution and, for that strategic reason alone, Content International should have made more effort' (ibid., 2013). It is interesting to note the different approaches of distributors. As will be shown in the case study on *Flying Blind*, Soda Pictures, through their New British Cinema Quarterly scheme, also invested £10,000 in the P&A as a minimal

release for a specialised film, but for Verve this was regarded as a proper release for a low budget British film.

The marketing strategy and tactics

The marketing campaign of *ITDH* ended up using traditional techniques and strategies although that was not what was intended. There were different phases where various strategies were prepared but then abandoned as they were not felt to be appropriate or the funding was not available. The narrative of the distribution and marketing of *ITDH* illustrated the fragility of the UK film production sector, which typically produced films without enough script development and with confused marketing and distribution strategies.

Phase one: 2010 to 2011

iFeatures had negotiated £15,000 of funding through iNETs to facilitate digital marketing for each of the films through its *INNOVATE* scheme. The aim of the scheme was to match digital agencies with the newly trained and commercially savvy producers within the iFeatures scheme 'to connect with their target audience and to build awareness for the projects much earlier on in the filmmaking process'. However, it was recognised that few of the independent filmmakers had the necessary time, resources and expertise to devote to such activity. (iFeatures, 2010b p. 2). iFeatures was clear that they intended to produce 'a test bed' in the hope that some of the outcomes would be generalisable to other projects. They explicitly requested that they wanted agencies that could 'find novel ways of adapting free or low-cost digital tools and services and be practical about working within this budget [of

£15,000]’ (ibid., p. 2). The proposed campaigns would focus on business to business marketing, before marketing to consumers as they hoped this would: ‘enhance the commercial positioning of each film with potential distributors and that, ultimately, will deepen wider audience engagement’ (ibid., p5). The objectives for the digital campaign indicated that iFeature’s primary marketing strategy was designed to make the slate more commercially viable for distributors, with the ability to connect directly to audiences becoming a secondary concern.

The agency that won the iINNOVATE tender was Mobile Pie, a Bristol-based agency which pitched an unconventional campaign. Mobile Pie planned a digital strategy for *ITDH* that utilised a social game, an emerging form of video game to be played by groups of friends on social media platforms with smart phones. The game would have introduced the film’s themes and planned to develop an audience of 20,000 players who could become advocates for the film. The intention was that users of the game would be attracted to a film that covered the same territory and be primed to purchase tickets. The plot would have required players to overcome evil and supernatural elements that would be created in the geographical area of the user. The game would have utilised the game play and user experience of FourSquare, a social marketing/social networking platform, and by using their existing infrastructure and assets which reward users of venues in cities.

Richard Wilson, one of the designers, speaking during the early development of the game and prior to filming, described how they planned the game as an aid to the theatrical release of the film. Mobile Pie defined the audience as 16-24 horror film fanatics. In the iINNOVATE tender document the target audience was not given an age bracket but defined as ‘Fans of supernatural/ psychological horror (*The Orphanage, Don’t Look Now, Let the*

Right One in, The Others). Male/Female,' (iFeatures, 2010b, p. 6). The game was to have been launched a month before Halloween when the film would ideally be released. Mobile Pie would be working with another specialist PR agency partnering company with expertise in raising the profile of social games so that up to 20,000 players could download the game and their metadata used to market the film. The plan was to 'capture their email or mobile details during the download process so that when the film is released they can be contacted directly. But 20,000 I think is quite conservative, as we had 50,000 players for another game' (Wilson, 2011). Wilson identified Halloween as the key theatrical release window for a supernatural/horror themed film which would piggyback on the 'event' of Halloween and the marketing of other films in this genre being released at this time.

Although the use of the social game was always part of the iINNOVATE application, it was not wholeheartedly supported. Matheson questioned the strategy and redirected the funds towards traditional marketing:

I think the game was always what the grant was intended for. I must say I had grave misgivings because this film always seemed to be something that would have to be marketed as indie art house and not as a mainstream film as it didn't have a cast or the production value or, frankly, the genre for that. Therefore it seemed a bit of a mismatch using a game which was targeted at younger people as a means of raising awareness of the film.

Matheson, 2013

Nigel Thomas at Matador (Thomas, 2011) and Toby Melling (Melling, 2011) at Content International also had misgivings as both believed that the audience for *ITDH* was not the classic horror audience of 16 to 24 years old men, but was going to be very different: 35+ years of age and women. There seemed to be a consensus that the digital strategy that was adopted for *ITDH* was fundamentally flawed and imposed on the project. The film was

aiming at a section of the audience which was not familiar nor potentially interested with social gaming. As a result, the digital campaign was dropped after the initial development phase and costs of £5,000.

Phase 2 – 2011 – the theatrical distribution of *ITDH*

The distribution strategy of *ITDH* was traditional in tactics and tone. As explained above, any marketing or awareness raising over digital networks was limited in scope and largely perfunctory. The distribution of the film was traditional because it relied on raising awareness through buzz generated at festivals to gain distribution through the specialist distribution channels as a loss leader. It was thought that the main income would come through ancillary channels (Matheson, 2013 and Thomas, 2011). The remainder of the iNNOVATE grant (approximately £10,000) was redistributed to Verve Pictures for a traditional marketing and distribution release (Matheson, 2013).

Feedback from advance screenings

The distributor of *ITDH*, Verve Pictures, arranged for two screenings for reviewers for bloggers, press and freelance journalists. They then collated the feedback which they used to define the marketing strategy and shared it with the creative team (Verve, 2012 npn). Out of sixteen responses, only four were defined as positive by Verve with phrases such as ‘hauntingly memorable. An incredible achievement.’ (Harries, Eye for Film, 2012) and ‘powerful and honest, they avoided all the horror clichés.’ (Georgina, Filmland Empire, 2012). There were three negative reviews with phrases such as ‘I was bored and restless and unimpressed’ (Jones, independent reviewer, 2012) and with reference to the plot

similarities of *The Sixth Sense* (1999, M Night Shyamalan) ‘a slight plot with a revelation that is so overfamiliar that it’s a wonder anyone would dare pull this trick again’ (Empire Magazine, 2012). However, the distributors also identified three ‘mixed positive’ reviews where a positive statement was tempered by a negative comment such as ‘superb performances [but] the core plot never quite makes sense’ (Mild Concern, 2012) or ‘a bit uneven but I liked it’ (Film Juice, 2012). The six ‘mixed’ responses, although negative when taken as a whole, included phrases like ‘a curious little film, I’m wondering exactly which audience it will appeal to.’ (McCleod, independent reviewer, 2012) and ‘the film isn’t the questioning ghost story it attempts to be’ (Nwosu, *The Detour*, 2012). This feedback was used to gauge critics’ understanding and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the film. It was also used to limit the distributor’s expenditure on marketing as the film did not have the potential to ‘break out’ to wider audiences.

Simultaneously the distribution strategy aimed to get the film into major festivals. Thomas reported that they had put pressure on the sales company, Content International, to put *ITDH* into the Sundance Film Festival, although some stakeholders questioned whether the film would have got a good reception at that particular festival (Thomas, 2011). In the end, the film was premiered at the Raindance Film Festival in London on 3 October 2011 and later at the Chichester Film Festival on 15 August 2012. For Jacqui Barr, marketing executive of BBC films, the festival was an excellent way of attracting positive word of mouth by piggy-backing on the excitement and reputation of the Festival. Barr used the Raindance Festival to promote the film with film bloggers such as *Little White Lies* who she thought on previous experience would respond positively to the film (Barr, 2011) although unfortunately this backfired. The blogger was unimpressed by the film for being ‘militantly undramatic’ and ‘a confused homage to *Don’t Look Now* [Roeg, 1973]’ (Jenkins, *Little White Lies*, 2012). Barr,

speaking on the day of the film's premiere at Raindance, also went on to mention that in her opinion *ITDH* would be the most difficult to market of the three iFeatures films:

In the Dark Half is a perfect example of the film that should get a positive reception – it's a good audience film. I'd like to see it picked up for distribution because I think it is the trickiest one and I think, if it does [get distribution], that's a success in itself if we can get it onto UK screens rather than it being a video release.

Barr, 2011

Therefore the Festival was an opportunity to initially market within the industry as potential distributors had an opportunity to see the film being played in front of a paying audience and could gauge their reaction. It also indicated the limited ambition for the films produced at this budget level where 'a video release' was possible and how crucial the marketing of these films to reviewers was to their eventual distribution.

Another issue that distributors needed to ascertain was the best release window for the film. The genre of film suggested that the film should be released during Halloween, as confirmed by Richard Wilson at Mobile pie although Barr was not convinced:

That's the trouble with Halloween. This year exhibitors have been complaining that they haven't got a Halloween offering. So it might pick up some of that Halloween weekend trade, which will be good because it will keep it on screens for a few weeks. But I would say you are still competing with higher budget films. So any other time, *other than the summer* which is not good for horror films, unless the distributor is 'counter programming' in which case we got to have a distributor that's really confident that they can pull in an audience in this window.

Barr, 2011 (*my emphasis*)

To reiterate, the film was released in August 2012. As Barr indicated *ITDH* would not usually play well in the summer, and the caveat that the distributor could 'counter program' did not

seem plausible in this instance especially when considering the evidence above and the actual box office returns.

However, there was a lot of hope for the film theatrically. Chris Moll's summary of the distribution strategy said: 'I would hope, with a good wind, that we may end up with 15 – 20 screens overall. DVD and VOD will follow in early October in time for autumn proper' (Moll, 2012).

The theatrical release

The following information is taken from the BFI's summary of the UK box office data from 10-12 and 17-19 August 2012. Although the film was on release beyond these dates the BFI's summaries do not give figures for films that do not have a continuous theatrical release. The summaries also identify the top 15 films that have the highest box office takings from British productions or British co- productions.

ITDH was released into theatres in the same week as *Dark Night Rises*, *Ted*, and *Step Up 4: Miami Heat* which had the best box office results with £6,051,267 from 1475 screens. In the middle of the school summer holidays there were seven films aimed at children including Disney's *Brave* and Aardman's *The Pirates! In An Adventure with Scientists*. There were three feature documentaries including *Searching for the Sugarman*, two re-releases of British Classics films including Hitchcock's early film *The Lodger* and the Olympic drama *Chariots of Fire*. There were two UK/USA films from major distributors which were aimed at the older arts audience with major distributors' backing: *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* and *The Best Marigold Hotel*. Other UK films that could be seen to be competing directly with *ITDH* due to their budget were *The Offender*, a gangster tale set in a young offenders institution; *I Against I*, a revenge gangster film; and *Fast Girls*, a film about female athletes

from different sides of the social tracks which aimed to piggy back on the interest in the 2012 London Olympics. *ITDH* was the only film listed in the horror/supernatural genre.

As the only horror/supernatural film on release, *ITDH* failed to attract the core audience of the genre for various reasons. The reviews (discussed in detail in the next section) on blogs and in newspapers may have put audiences off. The counter programming /timing of release, during the summer did not work. Jacqui Barr stated that release of *ITDH* could work anytime 'other than summer' as it is where films are placed against strong blockbusters.

This implies that the distributors did not have confidence in the film. This is further reinforced by the film not being submitted for a specialist film festival dedicated to horror films (Fright Fest 2011) in late August. It could be argued that the film was not placed in this festival due to its hybrid supernatural/social realist genre, which would not have attracted the key audience. It could also be said that by being on release immediately before the festival gave negative marketing about the film and increased competition for horror audiences who would have focused their purchasing power on attending the festival.

However, this lack of optimism translated into poor returns even though it played at thirteen different cinemas. The film was initially released on two screens from 10 August 2012, at the Empire Leicester Square for two weeks, and where it played for 31 screenings in a 30 seat cinema for the first week. In the second week, the film was screened for fourteen performances in a sixteen seat cinema (Empire Leicester Square, 2012). At the Brixton Ritzy it also opened on 10 August but for a week with only seven during the period (Ritzy Cinema, 2012). At those two cinemas it made £1,193, with a site average of £281 for the first week, and £135 for the second week (BFI, 2012). The film played for a limited time in Birmingham, Builth Wells, Cardiff, Chichester, Dartington and Gloucester between August

and October 2012. It also played for a week at the Irish Film Institute in Dublin, although the contribution to the box office revenues was minimal.

The sentiment analysis of digital marketing

In this section, I analyse the online marketing of *ITDH* through data collected via the Brandwatch software package. However, it is important to reiterate that *ITDH* did not have a dedicated digital strategy or even a dedicated Facebook page during production or distribution of the film. The Brandwatch software collated 202 mentions on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as other platforms such as blogs, news and forums. After data cleaning, of the 202 original mentions, 171 referred to *ITDH* with 156 (91 per cent) were positive and 15 negative (9 per cent). For example,

ITDFilm @ITDFilm 9 Aug 12

'In the Dark Half' out next Friday. Total Film say '...comparisons with *The Sixth Sense* aren't out of the question': <http://bit.ly/N3cSjI>

The linked report had the full quotation which said 'despite the slack pacing, comparisons with *The Sixth Sense* aren't out of the question.' (Total Film, 2012) However, had the Twitter feed been read in isolation without the linked report, it would have given a positive impression about the film and this quote was prominently used on the film's poster and other marketing materials. However, other positive tweets were more self-contained in their support for the film:

Wesley L. @WesleyL 28 Jan

'I haven't recommended anything on Netflix for ages. "In the Dark Half" is a creepy little film set in working class England'.

Negative sentiment was, in most cases, more overt:

Audrey Matthews (@AudreyMatthews) 21 Jan

'I'm watching a British horror film called *In the Dark Half*. It's fucking awful'.

However for longer reviews in blogs, the sentiment of the whole post was analysed and assessed. For instance, Cine Vue finished their review of the film with this negative paragraph:

A suburban ghost story of sorts which explores the nature of grief and adolescent depression, *In the Dark Half* tackles some lofty subject matter, yet never feels like its dark brooding sentiment is contrived. However, a weak script and the sense Siddons is attempting to punch above his budget leaves this intriguing film feeling like little more than a platform from which to launch both Siddons's and Barden's careers.

Cine Vue, 2012 npn

Hence, this review was regarded as negative. Although the posts generally attempted to balance negative and positive phrases, I would argue that the reader's opinion of *ITDH* would have mainly been left with a negative impression or 'take away' from the last point of the paragraph.

Overall Verdict: The film is certainly eerie and atmospheric with lots of creepy winds, but perhaps if the script was tighter, we could have cared more. Instead of being suspenseful, the film just plods along.

Stephen Sclater, 2012

The positive 'eerie and atmospheric' was undermined at best or irrelevant at worst by the following terms such as 'if the script was tighter' and 'the film just plods along'.

Evaluating the impact of *ITDH*'s digital marketing

By far the most popular platform for social media was Twitter with 97 mentions, or 57 per cent of the total responses. There were only seven negative posts with the following being typical:

Gabrielle Green@pinkgreen94 Ever find yourself about to watch 'in the dark half' don't bother, it's a baddd film. #stupidplot #wasteof4quid

The hashtags of '#stupidplot' and '#wasteof4quid' suggest that Gabrielle Green posts into aggregator sites which would have had the impact of amplifying the negativity of her tweet and reducing demand for this film.

Of the positive tweets that could have overcome these negative effects, 55 were professional, i.e. from people who were connected to the production scheme and had a professional and/or financial stake in its success. Mark Cosgrove, film programmer at the Watershed cinema, tweeted on the date of release:

Mark Cosgrove@markc15 2 Aug 12

'A striking debut. The final twist is so good comparisons with *The Sixth Sense* aren't out of the question' Total Film – In The Dark Half

The other professional tweets were made from organisations with Twitter accounts like Film England, iFeatures2, Rabbit Publicity and from individuals within organisations such as Creative England's Head of Talent and iFeatures' architect Chris Moll and Lisa Howe, Head of training for iFeatures. None of the professional tweets offered personal views but were

either retweets of a press release or, like Cosgrove's tweet above, an edited quote of positive statement from negative blog reviews. As a result, these tweets were evaluated to have limited authority and persuasiveness. However, these tweets may have added to the marketing buzz around the film and would have contributed to the awareness of the film.

Facebook only had nine (or five per cent) of mentions. All these posts were characterised by being positive and five were from professional sources such as Rabbit Publicity, or people connected to the production as either cast or crew.

The other main categories of digital marketing were from forums with 22 mentions. Eleven were repeated posts over the weeks before release which repeated a very positive review from the blog Film Juice:

Eerie. It's rare these days for a film to be eerie. To be mysterious. To withhold information, be ambiguous, create an atmosphere of creeping dread . . . Low-key, scary and unsettling, *In the Dark Half* is a haunting little Brit flick that deserves a wider audience than it'll get. Seek it out.

David Watson, 2012

Of the seventeen blog sites, five were negative, and twelve positive. The five negative sites were long-term reviewers but also they had low MozRank scores. This would have reduced their impact if there were many posts but with the low overall number of mentions a simple search would have turned up the negative posts. Pages earn a MozRank by the number and 'quality' of pages that link to them although how it assesses 'quality' is not defined.

Therefore, the 'higher the quality' of the incoming links, the higher the MozRank. They are scored on a logarithmic scale between 0 and 10. Thus, it's much easier to improve from a MozRank of 3 to 4 than it is to improve from 8 to 9. An "average" MozRank of what most people think of as a normal page on the Internet is around 3. (Mozrank, 2013) The highest

MozRank of sites that reviewed *ITDH* was 4.57 for Cinevue (which is quoted above) although the second top Mozrank score was from a blog called *Mild Concern* with a MozRank of 2.13. They stated 'Ugh. Lots of talent goes to waste in a film with a confused plot and horribly redundant twist. I wish I could forget it, but sadly I had to review it' (Mild Concern, 2012).

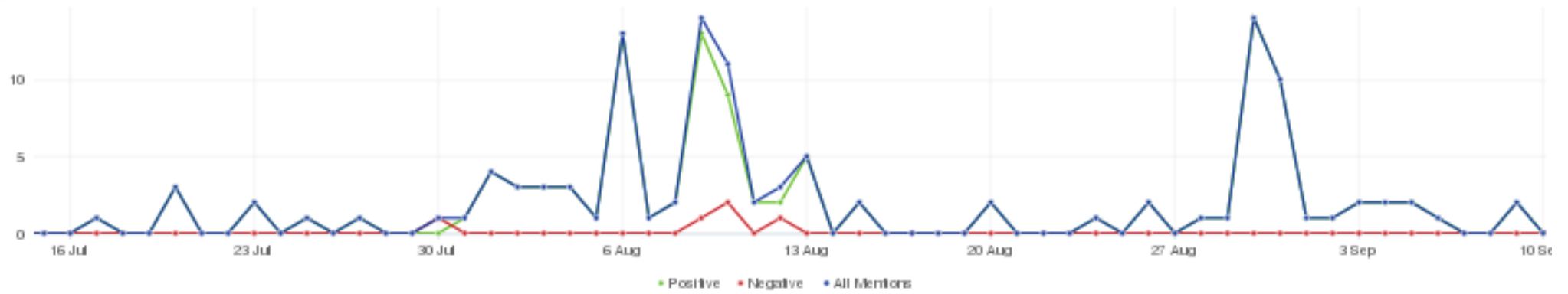
Evaluating the impact of professional tweets: the timeline

The first digital marketing post was a tweet from iFeatures, which appeared on 17 July 2012 in preparation for the release of the film on 10 August. Over the next two weeks there were further 'professional' tweets until 1 August when online magazines such as *Aesthetica* published reviews. On 6 August there was a spike in traffic with a concerted campaign which centred on the PR company, Rabbit Publicity, making five of the thirteen tweets with other organisations such as British Council Film, Creative England and iFeatures who made another five tweets with the remaining three Tweets coming from non-professional sources. There was another spike of activity on 9 August, the day before the theatrical release, with only two being directly from Rabbit Publicity with the rest being from online blogs or forums. On the day of release, three posts were from the same 'professional' sources such as Rabbit Publicity and iFeatures, while the others were from blogs and forums. After the first weekend there was a medium-size spike of five posts from professional sources in a post release campaign which attempted to maintain interest and any buzz generated after the first weekend. There were only two negative posts from the same blog, Mild Concern, as quoted above. The number of mentions then reduced until the lead up to the theatrical release at the Watershed Cinema on 30 August 2012. There were fourteen posts on the day before, and ten posts on the actual day of release. Seven were retweets from Creative

England, and four were retweets from Bristol Culture, a website celebrating cultural activity in Bristol. As you can see from the diagram below, there were very few negative mentions (four) in the timeframe shown but the majority of Tweets came from professional sources. It is important to recognise that neither the distributors nor the filmmakers contributed financially or through effort to the digital marketing in any meaningful way - the exception being the tweets from Rabbit Publicity.

The DVD was released on 8 October 2012 with almost no digital activity being captured by the Brandwatch software. On 1 October there was one forum post from moneysavingexpert.com offering the DVD as a prize, one blog announcement on 6 October, and another on the day of release from a website called Movie Muser. There was a peak in announcements on 13 October with five announcements from news sites due to a roundup of DVD releases contained in the same article that was syndicated through a series of local newspapers. Although there were no tweets from stakeholder sources specifically about the DVD release, there was activity announcing the next three films commissioned for iFeatures2, the second iteration of the scheme. It seemed that after a disappointing theatrical release of the film, the main professional sources were not focusing on the ancillary sales for *ITDH* but had turned their attention to the potential success of the three films in the forthcoming second release of the slate from the iFeatures 2 iteration of the scheme.

Figure 11: Output from Brandwatch showing internet buzz for *In the Dark Half* July-Sept 2011



In terms of piracy, there were 27 sites offering the film as a digital download. This included Pirate Bay, Vodly, DVDrip, and Ourrelease, all pirate sites offering free downloads of the DVD version of the film. Interestingly, in the UK the film was available on iTunes legally. But if searching on Google under the film's title, the pirate sites came up first with iTunes relegated to the fifteenth result on the second page, which required more active and comprehensive searching. This meant that the pirate sites were using sophisticated search engine optimisation techniques to make their sites easier to find and to maximise traffic. The impact of this was to reduce the legal revenue returned to the investors and producers of the film.

In summary, the digital marketing of *ITDH* was generally positive but at a very low level and does not seem to have had an impact on the success of the film. 91 per cent of the digital marketing captured by Brandwatch was positive but this seems to have hidden a central issue. It appeared that the digital marketing by professional sources was not following a single strategy and so the outcome was only functional rather than contributing to one persuasive message. In other words, the digital platforms were utilised by organisations for the purpose of merely being 'seen', and so the impact of marketing messages was severely limited.

Survey analysis

ITDH played in Bristol between 31 August and 6 September 2012 at the Watershed Cinema, a regional arts cinema that usually presents independent films within the specialist distribution category (see chapter 2 for details). In that time 69 surveys were completed,

although there were an estimated 103 cinemagoers. From the surveys that were completed, the audience was made up of a near equal mix of male and female. The largest group of cinema goers (29 per cent) was 26 to 35 years old, and the second largest group (23 per cent) were aged over 51 years of age. A statistical analysis with SPSS was carried out using cross tabulations but the results were not statistically significant with age and gender.

Figure 12: Distribution of age of cinema goers to *In the Dark Half*

| Age range | Number of responses | Percentage of responses |
|-----------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 15-20 | 10 | 14% |
| 21-25 | 10 | 14% |
| 26-35 | 20 | 29% |
| 36-50 | 13 | 19% |
| 51+ | 16 | 23% |
| Total | 69 | 100% |

The survey revealed that word-of-mouth from family and friends was the most frequent method for cinemagoers to find out about the film with almost half of the responses (see table 14). The next most frequent was the cinema brochure (both online and in print) with 35 per cent. The web trailer attracted 16 per cent of people and cinema trailer 11 per cent. It is interesting, in terms of digital marketing and consistent with the results above, that

Figure 13: Most persuasive marketing media for *In the Dark Half*

| Marketing source | Response | Percentage |
|------------------------|----------|------------|
| Cinema Brochure | 14 | 26% |
| Family/Friends | 26 | 49% |
| YouTube | 0 | 0% |
| Web Ad Banner | 0 | 0% |
| Twitter | 0 | 0% |
| Cinema Poster | 2 | 4% |
| Work contact | 0 | 0% |
| Web Trailer | 5 | 9% |
| Newspaper / Mag review | 5 | 9% |
| Facebook | 0 | 0% |
| Blog review | 1 | 2% |
| Myspace | 0 | 0% |
| Cinema Trailer | 1 | 2% |

Facebook and blog reviews raised awareness in only two per cent, (one person each) of respondents. Twitter was not mentioned by any respondents as raising their awareness positively about the film in any way which is consistent with conclusions about the impact of 'professional' tweets. However, the survey also included a question at the end which was designed to understand general attitudes to the use of social media in spreading word of mouth and arranging cinema going. This question showed that 43 per cent had used social media to arrange cinema going in the past and so marketing over appropriate social media channels should not be ignored in the future. In the survey, respondents were asked about the most influential source of marketing. The most influential was word of mouth by family and friends (49 per cent) followed by the cinema brochure (26 per cent). Third place was shared by the web trailer, newspaper or magazine review (9 per cent).

The survey also asked respondents to identify the three most important features of the film that had persuaded them to go to the cinema (see figure 15). Out of a possible 223 responses, the most important (37) was that *ITDH* used Bristol as a location. The next most important with 30 responses was that the story appealed to the audience. The third most important was that the film was British with 28 responses. These three results confirm iFeatures core objectives of producing Bristol-based narratives within a British storytelling tradition.

These results suggest that respondents knew about the film through their own personal networks and had some personal knowledge of the film. Therefore, for the audience surveyed, paid-for traditional or digital marketing would not have influenced the numbers attending the cinema. In other words the audience which came to the cinema would have

Figure 14: Reasons for seeing *In the Dark Half*

| Question | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | Responses |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----------|
| The story appealed to me | 15 | 4 | 11 | 30 |
| I was interested in the production scheme | 5 | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| I like the members of the cast | 14 | 3 | 2 | 19 |
| I like the genre / type of film | 6 | 8 | 7 | 21 |
| It is a British film | 7 | 11 | 10 | 28 |
| I was asked to come along by a friend / partner | 6 | 12 | 2 | 20 |
| The critics rated the film | 2 | 2 | 5 | 9 |
| I liked the trailer | 5 | 1 | 4 | 10 |
| I like horror films | 2 | 3 | 2 | 7 |
| It was shot in Bristol | 17 | 14 | 6 | 37 |
| I liked the film poster | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| I know some of the production team | 4 | 0 | 6 | 10 |
| My friends are talking about it online | 1 | 1 | 6 | 8 |
| I like films in this budget range | 3 | 3 | 3 | 9 |

come anyway due to their trust in the Watershed cinema’s brand and therefore these results do not represent a generalizable result. The film had also gained a substantial reputation within the city due to the scheme, its location and local cast and this had driven demand for tickets. It is unlikely, therefore, that these results would be duplicated in other cities in Britain.

The financial returns

Figure 15: The gross sales and costs for *ITDH* at 30 September 2014

| Gross sales | Deductions (Fees, commissions and expenses) | Recouped | Profit/Loss |
|---------------|---|----------|---------------|
| £8,888 | 11,646 | nil | -3,667 |

The marketing of *ITDH* represents a mixture of issues that are present within the production of low budget film making. It was sold to Netflix in the USA for £3,030 for two years, and to five other territories made up of Turkey for Pay TV, VOD, Internet and Catch-up for £2,424 for 12 months, Asia for £909 for VOD , New Zealand £1,515 and Portugal mainly for Pay-TV for £1,156 (Melling, 2014 and Sterling, 2015). There was a second licence to Gravitass Ventures on a revenue share agreement but this had not recorded any sales and so no income has been received. The value of sales for this film were reported to be £8,888 to 30 September 2014 and this was thought to represent most of the film’s potential income by the sales agent, Toby Melling.

The costs attributed to the film make the over-all position even worse. Expenses incurred by the sales agent were in the region of £11,646 including commission deductions of £1,323. As a result the film had made a loss as at 30 September 2014 of £3,667 (Melling, 2015). Margaret Matheson summed *ITDH* financial success rather tellingly:

Commercially *ITDH* was a disaster but it gained UK distribution, achieved a profile, a proper released DVD and a surprisingly good range of reviews. I don't see the foreign territories' sales statements but they are virtually zero as it's not played at an international festival. I know it didn't make anything significant. I'm not saying it's rubbish - it's just not one that stands out in the great pantheon of features. So the objectives [of schemes] must be centred on training to have any value.

Margaret Matheson, Producer *ITDH*, 2013

However, as a training vehicle, the film has had mixed outcomes for the crew and production team. Out of the crew and cast, nine staff members were 'imported' into the area, with many technicians 'acting' up into new roles and gaining experience that would have not otherwise been possible. There were more mixed outcomes for the core team, which I refer to later in the conclusion to the thesis.

Conclusion

The *ITDH* case study illustrates the issues facing a typically produced subsidised film within the British film industry. The focus of the team was in getting the film made and the lack of clear marketing assets was not given the necessary importance. Without a clear genre, *ITDH*'s financial and critical success was likely to be hampered. The dispositions of the writer to make an innovative film within the autonomous paradigm to increase symbolic capital (as described in chapter 4) contributed to the film's poor box office because the offer of a

supernatural horror, pleased neither the distinct horror or social realist fans. In the same way, the flaws in the realisation, and overused plot limited the critical success and access to film festivals.

Although an innovative method of marketing was planned with use of the social game, once that was rejected, for good reasons, there was no alternative innovative digital strategy created. The social game was commissioned, as it offered an innovative tactic, but one that was inappropriate to the overall strategy and unlikely to reach consumers. It appears that the social game was an experiment and was commissioned without thinking through the needs of the film project.

The digital marketing that was carried out was ineffective due to the perfunctory use of digital platforms. Although retweeting can increase awareness of a film, I would argue that this case study showed that 'professional' digital actions did not offer a persuasive testimonial that encouraged cinemagoers to see *ITDH*. Professional tweets had little or no effect when applied in the absence of a concerted campaign targeting influencers or market mavens. Retweets could improve the 'buzz' surrounding a project, this was only if a critical mass of mentions had been reached. For *ITDH* this level would need thousands of mentions but the actual number for the film (202) demonstrated that use of the digital techniques in the absence of a clear strategy was more likely to fail. It is important to recognise that although digital marketing was perfunctory, the exit surveys showed that it did have the potential to connect with specialist film audiences.

The use of traditional marketing for low budget films can also be evaluated. The counter programming strategy did not make the film stand out and appeared to have the reverse effect making it disappear amongst the Hollywood offerings. However, the production

values of the film made it a hard sell to the core and the wider audience. Traditional marketing does not enable low budget features to be visible in the market, forcing them to be 'also ran' films, which are used as a point of comparison by consumers for higher budgeted films. The film's value is not only to earn revenues that will be repaid to the investors but to cover the overheads of the distributors. The distributor had limited risk as the entire P&A budget of £10,000 was transferred from iNNOVATE and could have been used as the opportunity to test innovative approaches.

iFeatures objectives to develop a trained technicians and creatives to improve the infrastructure were flawed. Most of the technicians and creatives, other than the scriptwriter, were imported into the region and so would not have contributed to sustainable infrastructure.

Chapter 7

Case study: *Flying Blind*

Introduction

This case study of *Flying Blind* aims to analyse how its specific marketing and distribution strategy enabled the film to find an audience. Unlike *In the Dark Half*'s route to market as described in the last chapter, *Flying Blind* actually employed a digital strategy and then later an innovative traditional strategy that had been created specifically for low budget British films.

The case study also allows the role of digital marketing to be evaluated and the relationship between digital and traditional strategies and tactics to be understood. The assumption that traditional strategies do not have a place in low budget film marketing is questioned when the extensive financial data, audience surveys and online marketing is considered.

Key dates in *Flying Blind*'s production and distribution

Flying Blind had a convoluted production history and was commissioned for contradictory reasons. As explored in chapter 4, some stakeholders on the selection panel focused on the cultural contribution the film would make to British society, while other stakeholders with a more commercial ethos tried to select films that had the best opportunity for recoupment. The film had been selected for the iFeatures scheme in August 2010 but on the condition that script development continued to make it less 'art house' and more mainstream (Sterling, 2011) even though the director's disposition was for the former (see chapter 4).

The film was eventually 'greenlit', and the funds for production released in July 2011, but it was then suddenly taken back into development. New scriptwriters were attached at iFeatures expense, as the original scriptwriter's and director's rewrites were rejected for not developing the characterisation and not addressing genre issues sufficiently (Sterling, 2014 and see below). The film finally went into production in January 2012. *Flying Blind* was released theatrically on 12 April 2013 through Soda Pictures within their New British Cinema Quarterly scheme. This was an innovative technique to raise awareness of the film, and to build interest and publicity in order to drive sales in ancillary revenue streams such as foreign VOD and DVDs. The DVD was released in July 2013 and had a television transmission in the USA in September 2013 on a pay-TV channel.

Synopsis and commissioning of *Flying Blind*

The film had a mixed genre which influenced the marketing and distribution strategy. The protagonist of the film is Frankie, a single forty-something aerospace engineer, working on the design on a top-secret unmanned military aircraft commonly known as 'drones'. After delivering a lecture to a group of engineering students, she meets Kahil, a young French Algerian student, and a passionate affair ensues which, unexpectedly for Frankie, turns into a relationship. However, due to her sensitive work, the British security services investigate Kahil and reveal to Frankie that they have evidence he has terrorist connections. Frankie is forced to trust her feelings, rather than believe the unsubstantiated evidence, for a man she is forced to admit she knows little about. She slips 'into a nightmare world of suspicion and accusation' and risks losing the career that is central to her identity. During her investigations of Kahil's friends, the security services and her own father she does not know

whose 'truth' to believe. Eventually Frankie discovers that he is innocent. But when she goes to commit fully to their relationship, she is followed by the security services who arrest and detain Kahil. The film ends with Kahil being deported from the country and with Frankie losing, possibly, the only person she has truly loved.

The story appealed to the iFeatures stakeholders as it was a 'post-9/11 love story' which stakeholders believed could capture the imagination of mainstream audiences.

Flying Blind was a great concept, in the right hands. And because it was really challenging everyone's sort of preconceptions about what the movie should be. It's an interesting story with a lot of merit and it could get some attention - but only if it's done well.

Nigel Thomas, Executive Producer, 2011

Thomas, one of the commercial financiers of the iFeatures scheme, was focused on the box office and potential sales that publicity or 'attention' a film might develop in response to the director's treatment of the concept. The casting of Helen McCrory, a well-respected supporting actress with credits on mainstream films such as *Hugo* (Scorsese, 2011) and *Skyfall* (Mendes, 2012), was regarded as a good marketing asset by stakeholders (Buckingham, 2010 and Thomas, 2011) and predictor of financial success in some, but not all, literature (Kerrigan, 2010 p. 82 and Collin et al., 2006 p. 352). The film's producer also managed to secure shooting locations in a working commercial airliner factory in Bristol, and also a large aspirational apartment overlooking the city that helped to give the film production values of a higher budgeted film. At the same time, Thomas was also aware that television dramas such as *Spooks* (2002-2011) and *Homeland* (2011 to 2015) had also used this subject area and therefore a feature film would have to find cinematic elements that

would give extra viewing pleasures to a paying theatrical audience hence his focus on the 'right hands' doing a good job.

One of the major problems for the film was its mixed genre – as it was positioned as a love story and thriller and this was regarded as a 'harder' sell by one of the commercial stakeholders (Thomas, 2012). Christian Martin, a low budget independent producer with experience of marketing big budget studio productions, thought that it would be 'a very difficult film' to market (Martin, 2012) due to its hybrid genre. Sterling, the producer of the film, was aware that the film's genre could potentially impact on the film's box office return and for achieving iFeature's objectives.

One of the things that *Flying Blind* struggled with was that it didn't have a clear genre, which is something Chris [Moll] was very focused on. He was pushing that very, very hard. *Flying Blind* had two genres which was a problem for them. It's interesting how it has played out.

Sterling, 2013

The literature (Simonton, 2009 p. 409) does not support the stakeholders' concerns about mixed genre. The issue is more likely to be the focus on the drama genre, which Buckingham (2010) and Simonton both argue would have a negative impact on financial success although this could have supported critical success. However, there was some optimism by funders that the cross-genre storyline, rather than being a hindrance to effective marketing (as seen earlier in chapter 5 and Buckingham, 2011), had the potential to reach greater audiences. The audience for the film was defined by the producer and director from the outset as being attractive to female audiences above 35 years of age but Toby Melling, the sales agent, thought it was wider:

It's harder to sort of define the potential audience, you know. I mean obviously it's sort of a drama and it is quite female skewing, but nonetheless I think it is slightly more universal in its appeal because it touches on issues of racism, terrorism and xenophobia.

Melling, 2011

This underscores the difficulty in predicting success in features films, which is exacerbated in the low budget sector. Buckingham's research (as described in chapter 4) was the most comprehensive carried out into British film audiences and their tastes whereas Melling, as a sales agent, was connected to the international trade and so was speaking from an international perspective. Exactly what impact the genre had on the film will be discussed later. On balance, the project contained some good marketing assets which could be developed to connect with audiences but the success of the film would ultimately be influenced by the marketing strategy and campaign.

The marketing strategy, tactics and campaign for *Flying Blind*

There were two strategies covering both digital and traditional marketing techniques. It is important to state that the iFeatures films had no allowance within the budget for marketing costs. However, iFeatures had negotiated an iINNOVATE grant of £15,000 for all three films to use 'online, mobile and interactive tools to identify and connect with audiences' (iFeatures, 2010b p. 1). The grant was intended to allow the production teams to develop a social marketing strategy by commissioning local digital marketing agencies before or during production. Sterling, *Flying Blind's* producer, received very few tenders

from local digital agencies, which she attributed to the film's subject and mixed genre (Sterling, 2013). The long pre-production process, during which time the other teams had spent their grants, allowed Sterling to evaluate the effectiveness of their campaigns. For example, whereas *In the Dark Half* spent a third of the grant on a smart phone game which was regarded as an inappropriate strategy, Sterling was able to refine her strategy and target her spend on elements and expertise that were, she hoped, appropriate for the film's audience and would lead to increased financial returns. Sterling first pursued a series of digital tactics, followed by an innovative traditional distribution scheme, which she was able to enhance.

Digital Marketing

The digital marketing component used both professional agencies and amateur DIY approaches. At the beginning of the filming, Sterling was approached by one of the crew who wanted to create and run the film's Facebook and Twitter sites, and would post photographs and stories about the shoot to build interest in the project. The initial cost was just £250 and this eventually achieved 698 likes with 643 followers on Facebook, and with 1261 following on Twitter. The initial digital presence was upgraded once the film was selected for competition in the Michael Powell award at the Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF). Sterling spent £1,000 building a simple website of 3-4 pages and some management of the Facebook and Twitter feeds to build a presence for EIFF audiences and judges. Though Sterling was unsure about the effectiveness and cost efficiency of the

website, it did introduce her to a small digital marketing company called React Adapt which became her digital partner for the rest of the campaign.

With this new digital partner the strategy changed course based on React Adapt's knowledge of Facebook and its different services. React Adapt created a specific campaign using Facebook Promotions as opposed to Facebook Advertising when they released the trailer for the film. This is an important distinction as typically in friend-to-friend posts Facebook assesses the frequency, quality and content of users posts and do not consistently 're-send' every post to every contact of a user. Facebook will only redirect those posts that score highly on their criteria of users (Sterling, 2013). However, if corporate brands pay to use Facebook Promotions, they can guarantee that critical posts are sent and received by target audiences:

And so we paid to send to everyone who 'liked' us [during production] and also to everyone on their pages or contacts - so it increased exponentially. Our 500 'likes' turned into 50,000 and so the [embedded] trailer was sent to 50,000 people. But I calculated that I had paid something like 50p per person who actually watched the trailer. But how many of those people went to cinemas and bought a ticket? I don't know.

Sterling, 2013

There are two interesting elements here. Although the Facebook account captured data about potential cinemagoers, no data was available about whether their targets had played the trailer. Sterling spent approximately £4,000 on this part of the campaign including management costs but she could not quantify the efficiency of the marketing. The cost of 50p per prospective customer was far too high to be cost effective as the conversion rate for a sale from digital marketing is usually less than 1 per cent (Tapp et al., 2014 p. 364). So

although social media had been regarded as the great hope for independent film, its effectiveness in driving sales was poor.

Sterling's distributor, Soda Pictures, was also not convinced of the value of online marketing campaigns due to their own UKFC funded research. Soda's view was that the people who 'hang out' on social media are not the people who buy cinema tickets (Sterling, 2013 and see chapter 4 on the TruffleNet case study). This insight was also shared by React Adapt, which was also sceptical that the target audience would be sufficiently represented on social media. It believed that the main Facebook and Twitter audience was younger than the film's core audience and so targeted a very wide category of both sexes under 45 years old in the hope that they would capture the audience. Therefore as Sterling thought the audience was over 35 years old, the campaign was only reaching a limited section of the perceived target audience – that was women in a ten year band between 35 and 45 years old. This questions whether digital marketing should be used in all feature film marketing.

The presence of digital marketing in mainstream feature film campaigns has meant that it has now become obligatory for low budget filmmakers even if its use does not guarantee success. Although Sterling stated that she may have committed too much of her marketing spend on digital marketing, she felt that to some extent she had no choice. For film audiences it was essential that she had a presence on both Facebook and Twitter, in the same way that every film needs to have a website because 'if audiences 'Google you' and you don't have a website, you don't exist' (Sterling, 2013). Therefore having an Internet and social media presence becomes another cost which all low-budget filmmakers need to build into the budgets. However, Sterling was clear that digital marketing was not a 'catch-all'

solution to the problems of distribution for all films because digital marketing works best with specific projects aimed at younger audiences:

So I think there's an inherent contradiction with digital marketing as I think it works best with young urban audiences. *8 Minutes Idle* is the perfect product for digital marketing and *Flying Blind* really isn't.

Sterling, 2013

This assertion will be tested by analysis of social media posts that were generated for, and during, the theatrical release and subsequent release of the DVD.

Traditional Marketing

Flying Blind received only one offer of UK distribution: to become part of Soda Pictures' innovative scheme called New British Cinema Quarterly (NBCQ). This scheme selected films which had had festival success, so the nomination at Edinburgh was important for this choice. NBCQ then gives them a limited theatrical release through the Picture House circuit. The films were typically offered a week of screenings in some cinemas but this was also limited to one or two screenings on a single day. NBCQ is aimed at the British cinephile audience and so the screenings are tied together with presentations and Q&A sessions by members of the production team (Soda Pictures, 2013). Soda allocated £10,000 to the P&A (Prints and Advertising) budget of *Flying Blind*. Of this sum, £2,000 was spent on prints and shipping and £1,000 was spent on the poster design. Soda met the costs of travel and subsistence of the team to carry out the cinema talks and Q&A sessions.

Sterling used part of the iINNOVATE grant to supplement Soda's P&A budget. Public relations was done by Soda's staff and successfully won two large feature interviews with Helen McCrory, the lead actress, in the glossy supplements of the *Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers prior to release. Their readership is closely aligned with the potential audience for the film and was subsequently influential in getting people to the cinemas. Sterling added £1,000 to the PR budget by giving £1,000 to Soda's agency, EN Foundation, which then arranged press coverage in all the cities where the film was due to play. Sterling had no way to assess if the additional poster design budget improved what would have been offered but described the traditional PR spend as the 'the best money I spent' (Sterling, 2013) in the whole campaign. This was due to the coverage of the film in the local press of every cinema where the film was booked and as the agency were able to provide evidence for their activity. An extra £1,500 (in addition to the £1,000 from Soda) was given for poster design which allowed her to choose from ten poster designs rather than three.

The final poster helped in reinforcing some of the key marketing assets. The poster presented a drama within the central love story while also subtly representing the thriller aspect pictorially. The testimonials made clear the offer of the film as an 'erotic drama and post 9/11 thriller' as well as promoting the film's lead actor Helen McCrory and placing potential viewers as people who would respond to 'intelligent' drama.

Sterling also spent £400 on hiring a cinema for a screening for newspaper reviewers because she was convinced that for the film to be taken seriously by the national press, the distributor and producer needed to indicate that there was marketing 'muscle' behind the film rather than sending out review copies on DVD, which is the usual strategy for NCBCQ films. However, this strategy backfired. Of the 50 media reviews, forty were positive, but

from minor regional outlets, seven were non-committal but three national reviews were dismissive. These were from the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Daily Telegraph* newspapers.

The *Daily Telegraph* review was etched, for good reason, into Sterling's mind:

It was a complete 'fuck off and die' quote; "This may be the only erotic thriller set in the Bristol aerospace industry; let's hope it's the last." If I had read what they had written, I would not have wanted to go and see the film.

Sterling, 2012

Despite these reservations in the national press, the film did have a respectable theatrical run of 20 screens in April 2012. The film got a total of five weeks of screening at cinemas in London, Cardiff and Bristol (where it played for two weeks at the Watershed, rather than the usual one). It played a single night, Soda's so called 'one night stand' strategy, in Greenwich, York, Cambridge, Oxford, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Sheffield, Brighton, Saffron Waldon and St. Albans. This created enough of a buzz for the film to gain eight further single day bookings as word-of-mouth spread. Two cinemas cancelled their bookings due to the popularity of a Ryan Gosling film called *A Place Beyond the Pines* (Cianefrance, 2012) that was on release at the same time (Sterling, 2013). The theatrical run was regarded as a loss leader – the expense and effort in marketing was regarded as a front-loaded down-payment for the subsequent windows such as television or VOD (Buckingham, 2011).

Part 2: iFeatures and social media monitoring through Brandwatch

This section of the case study investigates if the digital marketing strategy helped the film to find its audience. Although Sterling was not convinced that the digital marketing connected

with the right audiences, she admitted that she had little data to support her assertions.

This section therefore describes the process employed and evaluates what was being said online about the film which aided the marketing. Later, this data will be connected to the audience surveys which shows that the valence of digital marketing for this specific audience and film was positive.

To recap, iFeatures wanted the teams to use digital marketing starting from pre-production to help build audiences and launch the film successfully theatrically. Digital methods were perceived to be an effective and cost-effective method of marketing their films for projects that did not have large marketing budgets. This part of the case study will therefore attempt to understand if the digital strategy was successfully executed.

Methodology for investigating social media.

Brandwatch is a social media monitoring software as discussed in the methodology (see chapter 2). To recap, the proprietary software allows researchers and marketers to undertake sentiment analysis of posts on public social media. The software is simple to use with the researcher defining their focus of interest or 'query' using Boolean terms which allows operators to be used to refine a search using words such as 'and' which causes a search for the terms linked by the operator. The query for *Flying Blind* was written as:

' ("*Flying Blind*" NEAR/50 (film OR mccrory OR Klimkeiwicz OR *iFeatures*)', which translated into a search for the film's title which was also within 50 words of the terms 'film' or 'mccrory' or 'klimkeiwicz' or '*iFeatures*' this would have had the effect of narrowing down the search by making it more specific. The results from the search contained all references

to the phrase '*Flying Blind*' although the dataset needed to be cleaned before further analysis as not all mentions referred to the film. Therefore although Brandwatch is an automatic collection process, each of the references was analysed by the author and the sentiment, whether positive, negative or neutral, was allocated to each post. Although in most cases this was clear-cut for people who liked or disliked the film there were some tweets, blogs or posts which were ambivalent. Some mentions appeared to be positive in the first paragraph but if the final paragraphs were negative then the post was given a negative sentiment as the negative parts of the post were judged to have undermined any positive comments. The output of Brandwatch was then analysed to see what impact, if any, digital marketing had in encouraging audiences to go to see *Flying Blind*.

Piracy: aiding or hindering recoupment?

Another element requiring data cleaning was to do with piracy. For example, Polish

tweeters **BobbyWhiteChocolate** @TayPritchard posted:

I need make download "Flying Blind " with Helen McCrory -> HELP ME

And:

ChloeMary @LiamasPaind - Can someone tell me where can I watch "Flying Blind" with Helen McCrory?? Please help !!!!:D

Both these posts were seeking peer-to-peer illegal download sites where the film was 'ripped' or copied from the DVD and available to download at no cost. It is important to note that by January 2013 the film was licensed to rent, purchase, or download legally

(Melling, 2011). Piracy is a huge issue for all digital media, and was particularly galling to Sterling:

I did a search online when the DVD came out and I found ten sites that were illegally offering *Flying Blind* as a free download. We put a 'cease and desist order' up but they just pop up elsewhere. I even got an email from somebody who had illegally downloaded it and who wanted me to supply Portuguese subtitles - but I just told her to order it from Amazon! But then my kids don't think about piracy and they think [online content] is all free anyway so I shouldn't be surprised.

Sterling, 2013

A further discussion of piracy and whether it has a positive impact is included in chapter 5.

Analysis of social media

From a month before the theatrical release on 12 March 2013 to 7 October 2013 there were 527 mentions of *Flying Blind*. Twitter was the most popular platform with 58 per cent of mentions, 13 per cent were from news platforms and 10 per cent came from within Facebook. Seventeen per cent were negative and the remainder 78 per cent were positive.

In the period immediately before the theatrical release on April 12 there was minimal activity. It started on 4 April with five posts including one each from the Cornwall Film Festival, Creative iNETs (who organised the iNOVATE grants), Watershed and the posting of the international trailer on YouTube by Film Festival Videos. On 9 April there were seventeen posts, of which fifteen were from 'professional' sources such as BBC Films, The Picture House cinema and the Watershed cinema. By 'professional', I refer to posts made by people who were employed to raise awareness of the film within their employment and so were required to be positive.

On April 10 there were 49 positive mentions from a variety of sources but mainly non-stakeholder film reviewers. The five negative reviews included one from the influential *Time Out* magazine's online film review, which denigrated the film while supporting the leading actress; there were three mentions, based on a single source, which thought the film should have focused on the ethical issues of drone warfare, the protagonist's employment. On April 11 there were twenty positive mentions – of which sixteen were from 'professional' sources and four from fansites that follow Helen McCrory's career.

On the day of release (April 12) there were 59 mentions in all. 31 were positive mentions of which ten were simple re-tweets that used the same phrase; 'a post 9/11 thriller made and set in Bristol starring Helen McCrory, is released in cinemas today'. 21 appeared to be film review bloggers or people with a personal connection to the film. There were 28 negative mentions on the day of release; 20 of these were based on the *Daily Mail's* online review as these mentions reposted the headline 'the unconvincing plot is blind to Helen McCrory's talents'. The remaining eight were from individual sources. The *Daily Mail's* headline as quoted by Sterling above would come to dominate the postings over the next few days.

On Sunday, 15 April, there were fourteen positive mentions and seven negative mentions which was dominated by Philip French's release of his negative film review in the Saturday edition of the *Guardian*. The positive mentions were dominated by feature articles based on Helen McCrory and her marriage to actor Damian Lewis or on the sexuality of older women, with the film basking in the reflected attention but not being centre stage. After this date the number of negative mentions declined to almost nothing throughout the rest of the theatrical window on 8 July, whereas the positive mentions continued until 4 May

with a total of 102 which would have contributed to positive word of mouth through to the end of the theatrical release in June 2013.

The second release window was 15 July 2013 when the DVD was released which was characterised by professional and pirate tweets only. There were eight re-tweets from a BBC Films press release, and four from either blogs or new reviews. The impact of piracy was revealed in the tweets from a number of free-to-download piracy sites and this supports Sterling's assertions about the impact of piracy. Two days after the release of the DVD there were ten sites using Twitter, the same platform used to advertise the availability of the DVD to purchase, offering the film to download for free.

The professional and promotional tweets dropped away to nothing while the pirate tweeters sustained their campaigns with a further ten tweets re-advertising their illegal sites before dropping away to nothing after 22 July. Interestingly, the professional tweets from a strong brand like BBC Films could be interpreted as aiding the pirate sites by increasing awareness.

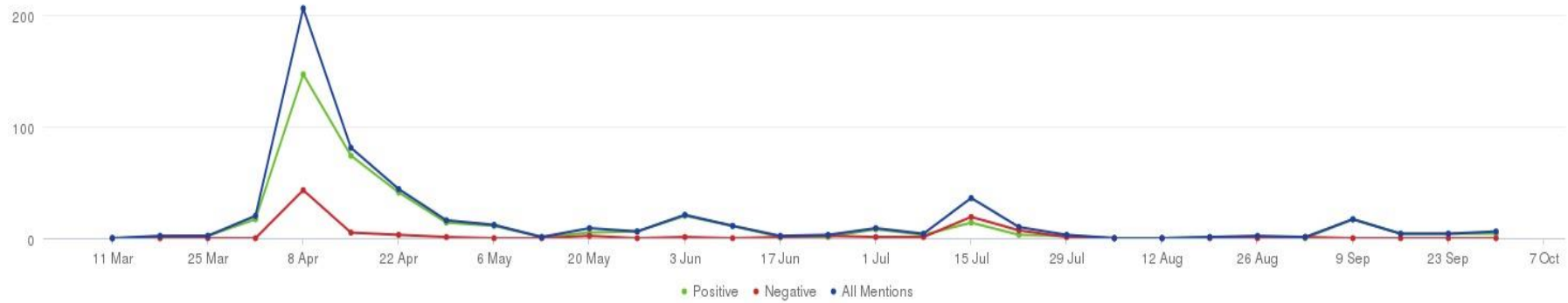
A final peak in positive social media comes on September 14 (just days after the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attack on New York) in preparation for the television screening on September 26 on US pay-tv channel Showtime. There were no negative and ten positive mentions although six of these were from a syndicated news network, and only one from an individual who re-tweeted content from another source.

In summary, Brandwatch's analysis indicated that the Twitter feed was the most popular platform. The largest number of tweets, with between 48 and 38 tweets each, were mainly from 'professional' tweeters and/or stakeholder organisations. Various organisations such

as Radio Orla (a London based Polish/English radio station), BBC Films, the Plymouth Arts Centre, Watershed, Patrick First AD, the Corner House Cinema, and a pirate free to download site collectively matched React Adapt's marketing reach that cost Sterling £4,000. What is conspicuous by its absence was Soda Pictures lack of digital presence and support although it was in keeping with their belief that digital marketing does not target consumers interested in low budget films.

The impact of negative mentions and the pirate sites is also unknown or whether they had collectively undermined the positive posts.

Figure 16: Output from Brandwatch showing Internet buzz for *Flying Blind* March-Sept 2013



The 527 mentions of *Flying Blind* were a very small number considering that Brandwatch's minimum contract was for 10,000 mentions a month and that research by Duan et al., (2008a p. 241) on online user reviews found that the valence was less important than the volume of reviews and Duan et al., (2008b, p. 1015) showed that awareness was the fundamental quality that digital WOM needed to achieve.

Survey analysis

The last part of the case study offers the opportunity to analyse why people went to see the film and which marketing was the most influential for different parts of the potential audience. It was possible to collect these insights through the use of an entrance survey, as opposed to an exit survey. Although the reasoning is fully explained in the methodology chapter, to recap, this strategy was implemented as the research questions were interested in finding out which marketing had persuaded cinema goers to buy a ticket for a film in the iFeatures slate and not what they thought about the film per se. The entrance survey would be able to capitalise on the cinemagoers who queued before the screening and the fifteen minute period while the trailers and advertisements played before the film started, a period of about 45 minutes. The author also arranged for any uncollected surveys that were left in the cinema to be collected by the ushers. As a result of this strategy, 591 surveys were completed over a two week period (excluding one day when the author was unavailable but when 23 people attended.)

The characteristics of the audience for *Flying Blind*

Of the people who completed the survey (591) 67 per cent of people came in the first week; the remaining 33 per cent came in the second week. Of the survey respondents, 41 per cent were men and 59 per cent women. The age of the cinemagoers who filled out the survey was skewed to the older age brackets with 72 per cent aged 36 years or older. Most respondents, 94 per cent, came from the Bristol area as indicated by BS postcodes.

Sterling's assertion that the New British Film Quarterly distribution model of 'one night stands' was not helpful to her film was partly borne out by the data. She believed that an audience skewed towards females over 35 years old were those who would plan a cinema outing with girlfriends. The data indicated that women outnumbered men in all but two of the screenings.

Figure 17: Age distribution of cinemagoers for *Flying Blind*

| Age Group | Response | Percentage |
|-----------|----------|------------|
| 15-20 | 7 | 1% |
| 21-25 | 35 | 6% |
| 26-35 | 125 | 21% |
| 36-50 | 156 | 27% |
| 51+ | 259 | 45% |
| Total | 582 | 100% |

Attributes of *Flying Blind* that were attractive to audiences

The survey asked respondents to rate the three most important criteria from a list of thirteen (Table 19). The range of responses set out to test whether a range of traditional or digital marketing criteria had persuaded respondents to see the film. The criteria with the highest number of total responses offered a picture of what was most important to this audience at this particular Bristol cinema, which was largely mirrored in the first choice selection as well. The criteria 'it was shot in Bristol' registered the highest number, 482, of total responses, 'the story appealed to me' received 260 total responses; 'it is a British film' 202; 'I was asked to come along by a friend/partner' 171; and 'I like the genre/type of film', 132; Surprising results include those who knew members of the cast, 69; 'I like films in this budget range', 64; 'my friends are talking about it online', 50 and equal place with 48 for 'I was interested in the production scheme' and 'critics rated the film'. What this shows is that the audience for this film was interested in British film culture, and specifically Bristol film culture contained in the narrative and production. Although the survey can only offer a snapshot of responses, the results supported Soda Pictures' contention that audiences are interested in British film with British narratives and this was also one of iFeatures objectives. Although whether this effect was due to the sparsity of Bristol-based features, and whether this could be repeated on a regular basis, requires further research.

The most persuasive form of marketing for the *Flying Blind* audience

In the survey results, which had 480 responses, traditional forms of marketing were the most influential. Word of mouth between family and friends accounted for 48 per cent of

total responses and 34 per cent for the cinema brochure. A newspaper or magazine review was third most influential with fifteen of total responses. Cross-tabulations of this data showed that by gender, 62 per cent of women were persuaded by the cinema brochure and almost the same by word of mouth influence of friends and family. Also by age, 64 per cent of survey respondents over 36 years were persuaded by word of mouth from family and friends, and 76 per cent of the same group by the cinema brochure. This gives a clear indication that for a film with an older demographic, new digital forms of marketing were not effective in persuading audiences into the cinemas although this may change in the future. Therefore in this case the commissioning of films needs to take into account the marketing strategy from the outset within iFeatures.

Of the social media forms of advertising, Twitter, Facebook and blogs accounted for only eight per cent of total responses. The number of respondents was therefore low (38 in total) and is less representative and affected by bias. However, by gender, use of social media was skewed towards female respondents with 93 per cent using Facebook and being persuaded by digital word of mouth. However, at the end of the survey another general question asks respondents if they have used social media to specifically 'recommend, discuss or make arrangements to see a film.' This question had many more responses (548) with between fifteen per cent and nineteen per cent of men and women respectively acknowledging that they have used social media to make arrangements to see a film. By age, the results showed that social media was actively used by only 23 per cent, and not used by 26 per cent, of respondents between 26 years old and 50. A low number, 37 per cent of respondents in the over 51 year old age group, did not use social media to organise

social outings to cinemas although Facebook is used by as many over 55 year olds as 18-24 year olds in 2013 (Tapp, et al., 2014 p. 256).

Figure 18: Reasons for seeing *Flying Blind*

| Question | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | Total Responses |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----------------|
| The story appealed to me | 111 | 88 | 61 | 260 |
| I was interested in the production scheme | 13 | 20 | 15 | 48 |
| I like the members of the cast | 16 | 29 | 24 | 69 |
| I like the genre/ type of film | 27 | 40 | 65 | 132 |
| It is a British film | 31 | 79 | 92 | 202 |
| I was asked to come along by a friend / partner | 78 | 52 | 41 | 171 |
| The critics rated the film | 6 | 20 | 22 | 48 |
| I liked the trailer | 4 | 10 | 16 | 30 |
| I liked the poster | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| It was shot in Bristol | 239 | 158 | 85 | 482 |
| My friends are talking about it online | 14 | 22 | 14 | 50 |
| I know someone in the production team / cast | 27 | 13 | 11 | 51 |
| I like films in this budget range | 6 | 14 | 44 | 64 |

Figure 19: Most persuasive marketing media for *Flying Blind*

| Marketing source | Response | Percentage |
|------------------------|----------|------------|
| Cinema Brochure | 161 | 34% |
| Family / Friends | 229 | 48% |
| YouTube | 6 | 1% |
| Web Ad Banner | 30 | 6% |
| Twitter | 9 | 2% |
| Cinema Poster | 27 | 6% |
| Work contact | 30 | 6% |
| Web trailer | 37 | 8% |
| Newspaper / Mag review | 73 | 15% |
| Facebook | 16 | 3% |
| Blog review | 13 | 3% |
| Filmmaker/actor | 41 | 9% |
| Cinema Trailer | 20 | 4% |

Digital marketing may not be appropriate to capture an audience that would enjoy *Flying Blind*. This data suggests that Soda's contention that the audience for low budget British

features was not on digital media was partially accurate, with at least half of respondents not being reached in this way. As only a quarter of respondents used social media and could have been targeted by its use, these results, if generalizable, suggest that social media was an inappropriate platform and that marketing resources dedicated to this tactic would have been squandered. But where digital marketing directly replaced traditional physical marketing assets, such as the Watershed’s expensively printed brochure, there were signs of good response rate with 79 respondents (13 per cent) who specifically came to see the film after reading the positive review sent by email or on the website. The survey also identified that patrons of the Watershed are highly loyal and so these insights may not transfer to other cinemas.

Sales Figures

Figure 20: Gross sales and costs for *Flying Blind* at 30 September 2014

| Gross sales | Deductions (Fees, commissions and expenses) | Recouped | Profit/Loss |
|-------------|---|--|-------------|
| £51,689 | £26,984 | £24,705 Including £7,674 to the producer | £24,705 |

The sales agent and producer of the film were convinced that the theatrical run had improved the ancillary sales in other markets. The film has had good success in Poland, the

home country of the director, where it played for week-long runs after negotiating theatrical, home rent and sales, electronic sale through, VOD, TV for ten years on a revenue split and a separate license for pay TV to HBO for a year for £10,714. Other sales include: in the Netherlands a twelve month license for Pay TV/VOD for £5,788 and in Latin American HBO Pay TV for an undisclosed period for £13,095. There were smaller deals with Malta for two PAYTV and Catch-up license for £595. There were two licensees in the US. The whole of Asia including China was agreed for £4,848. The most significant of these deals was to Showtime, the US cable television channel, for £13,395 for VOD, I-VOD, Premium Pay and Pay per view for two years. This deal was due to start at the same time as the new series of *Homeland* (2011-2015) which had similar themes and starred Damian Lewis, Helen McCrory's husband. HULU, also in the US, licensed VOD on a revenue share, which earned only £82. Soda Pictures licensed the film for all rights in the UK and Eire on a revenue share of 50:50 for eight years with no income earned as of September 2014. Both Sterling and Melling expected the earning potential of the film to be maximized after two to three years. Sterling thought it was about two years from the premier in Edinburgh or, in other words, until the end of 2014, and, therefore, did not expect the film to recoup its budget. By 30 September 2014, *Flying Blind* had total sales of £51,689 (Sterling, 2015 and Melling, 2014). The costs attributed to the film included £9,315 in sales commission, £11,162 in expenses including £2,727 for MIPTV 2012/13 and MIPCOM2012/3 and £5,450 for promotional costs for promos and trailers, £1,194 for screening rooms and £901 for publicity. Therefore the amount from the £51,689 for recoupment by funders and to enter the revenue cascade was £24,705 with £7,674 being paid to Sterling's company Ignition Films.

Sterling thought that the limited sales were due to two major reasons that may have contributed to the outcome. Angus Finney, a former film financier, sales agent and mentor to Sterling, has pointed out that because DVD sales of £14 per unit have largely been replaced by downloads of £3 per unit, the business model for low budget films, and their potential to recoup, has collapsed. Filmmakers, he claimed, 'have swapped analogue dollars for digital dimes. You are getting the same amount of viewers but the business model gives the producer just 20p of income rather than £3' (Finney quoted by Sterling, 2013). Piracy was also adding to the woes; Sterling estimated that a minimum of 5,000 people around the world downloaded the film for free which equates to about £1,000 of lost income. For Sterling, piracy substituted the legal sales but she was stoical, as was Soda Pictures, who recognised that if your potential viewers cannot legally download a film, they will find other illegal means to do it.

For Sterling, the digital and traditional processes she went through to take *Flying Blind* to market were inadequate. Specifically the digital marketing had a lack of transparency in terms of effectiveness and impact and how it contributed to the bottom line. She believed she was well served by the traditional agencies but again had no methodology to evaluate the value of their work. In future she would prefer to use a DIY approach to digital marketing and employ someone cheap, enthusiastic and young, such as a technically savvy student. She was also interested in developing a self-distribution model thereby cutting out traditional distributors and sales agents from the process [see the *Weekend* case study in chapter 5] and has formed contacts with filmmakers who are going through that process. Sterling is also critical of Soda's NBCQ scheme for a film such as *Flying Blind*:

I don't think it works. I think you can do it for a NBCQ film like *Skeletons* [Whitfield, 2010 and also distributed by Soda Pictures] because of the age demographic of the audience and the cast actively maintaining the buzz for the whole event. And they did good business for something that was only screened for short periods with the limited marketing budget. But it didn't work for my film because of the demographic and the older female audience. Once they know about a film, they want to get their friends together and plan a night to go out. The 'one night stand' model just doesn't work for older and female audiences.

Sterling, 2013

Ultimately Sterling did not have a choice as Soda Pictures was the only distributor to be interested in the film. The film did achieve at least £9,564 in theatrical box office although this is from incomplete data that was available (BFI, 2012) but it seemed that the demographic and genre of the film limited the marketing and distribution option. For Sterling the audience was not be reached through digital marketing and the only distribution strategy was not appropriate for the particular type of audience. Whereas this case study confirms some of the issues of using social media, other forms of digital media did positively influence the audience and therefore evidence that the 'one night stand' strategy was unsuccessful is not supported.

Even though the film did not achieve financial success, it could still be regarded successful on other criteria. The official website lists testimonials which are, like all dedicated film sites, glowing and positive:

SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

"An overwhelming romance", "absorbing", "unfolds with a cool poise", "McCorry shines", "Carefully surrenders its secrets whilst maintaining enough notes of ambiguity to leave viewers intrigued about the truth of the matter."

VARIETY

"A sleekly styled feature debut for award-winning director Katarzyna Klimkiewicz."

Although obviously carefully selected and edited, this demonstrates another side of the film which is not the focus of this case study and this research project. However, if the focus of this study has been the evaluation of the iFeatures slate's critical success and its training objectives, the legacy of this iteration of the scheme would not have been so negative.

Conclusion

This case study demonstrates the importance of designing and implementing a coherent and appropriate strategy. Although the *Flying Blind* producer had £15,000 from iINNOVATE and £10,000 from Soda, (taken together the £25,000 marketing budget was just under half of revenues of £51,689), the proportion of funds for digital elements did not appear to translate into substantial benefits.

Although Sterling was convinced that the NBCQ strategy was not suitable for films with the genre and audience profile of *Flying Blind*, the data does not appear to support this position. Women turned out in significant numbers, and appeared to bring their partners which helped the film to extend its booking at the Watershed cinema for one to two weeks. It also seems other factors such as the film being shot in the Bristol and the casting of Helen McCrory were also significant. The mixed genre, which worried the iFeatures management, did not appear to restrict the size of audience coming to the cinema although it also did not widen the appeal, as predicted by Thomas.

This case study clarifies why the half-hearted use of digital tactics of digital media, without a clear strategy, does not obtain the required results. Although the film's producers engaged with social media in an attempt to improve the return of the film. However the impact was limited due in part to the core audience not, as the distributor asserted, 'hanging out' on social media. Therefore, the use of Facebook promotions was also not coherent and it appeared that traditional marketing was more persuasive. Sterling's assertion that PR was the most productive element questions the notion that digital marketing is the panacea for the British film industry's woes.

The role of pirate 'rip sites' and their use digital marketing and distribution was also outlined. These sites appeared to be more successful in using social media to maintain a presence. Although it is not known the extent to which piracy cannibalised legitimate sales, the pirates arguably had more effective campaigns which showed that content producers, i.e. filmmakers, do not always make the best marketers. This case study illustrates that digital is not the panacea for the problems affecting the British film industry. Digital marketing that is not strategically and tactically coherent was not effective, and digital distribution, although it promises greater audiences, in this case reduced the potential revenue of legal sales so that it undermines the sustainability of the low budget sector.

By comparison, traditional methods were more effective. The film was picked up for distribution by Soda after being in competition at the Edinburgh International Film Festival. The casting of Helen McCorry was important in attracting a great deal of media attention, which aided the film's publicity. The PR which supported the NBCQ 'one night stands' in small cinemas was regarded by Sterling as important also in driving box office sales. There was a great deal of concern over the mixture of genres by the stakeholders. The isolation of

this particular aspect of the film is not supported by the research. For cinemagoers the film's narrative, which the genre is part of, was the second most important aspect of the marketing.

The notion of sustainability requires some clarification at this point. For Moll, sustainability follows the UKFC remit of recoupment of production investment, which allowed the production funds to be replenished and recirculated to other projects. Therefore it followed that commissioned films needed to be commercially successful to maintain the flow of funds into production. iFeatures' slate was set at £300-350,000 to increase production values and to allow the films to compete in the marketplace against film of much higher budgets. However as Ed Fletcher from Soda asserted, as reported in chapter 4, £100,000 was the budget that the market would support for a British feature, and which, with luck, would allow the recoupment. This case study supports that assertion.

Therefore the case study for *Flying Blind* shows that the development and use of competent marketing strategy within a comprehensive campaign is essential for commercial success. Digital marketing is not effective if only adopted because it is fashionable and its use needs to be more about digital presence or tactics. Traditional tools, rather than being superseded by digital, are still relevant and cost effective.

Chapter 8

Case study 3: *8 Minutes Idle*

Introduction

8 Minutes Idle (8MI) differs from the other two case studies in an important way as it had a crowd funding campaign as a central part of its marketing campaign. This allowed the impact of digital word of mouth to be evaluated and to analyse what impact this had on the audience's awareness of the film. This case study offers the opportunity to assess whether iFeatures' central marketing objective – that low budget filmmakers can create a cost-effective marketing campaign by using online social networks – could be achieved. It will also allow a discussion about whether iFeatures' regional production model for low budget British features, a model that relied on low cost digital platforms as a central part of the marketing strategy, was appropriate and should be used in future schemes.

This case study was created through various sources of data. Most important were several in-depth interviews with the main stakeholders and the producer of the project, Sarah Cox. Cox gave a great deal of detailed information about the strategy for marketing and distribution during the various stages of the process. The success of the campaign's strategy will be discussed through analysis of the online buzz that surrounded the project through its theatrical, VOD and DVD releases using Brandwatch. The motivations of cinema goers will also be analysed through the 370 entrance surveys that were taken at the Watershed Cinema in Bristol in February 2014. Therefore the relationship between online 'chatter' and

the physical purchase of tickets will give some indication of the relative power of digital marketing and whether this should be the focus of low-budget filmmakers or their agents.

Overview of *8MI* production and release timeline

8MI was greenlit in October 2010, with the five week shoot finishing on 18 April 2011. The post production was lengthy as the filmmaking team was asked to make changes by the numerous stakeholders. Post production was finished by January 2012. Distributor Revolver Entertainment picked up the film with a planned release in May 2013 although they went out of business in March 2013 after a string of disappointing releases and general cash flow issues (Pulver, 2013 npn) due to a Microwave film *Ill Manors* (Drew, 2012) not making the expected box office return. Sarah Cox applied to the BFI for distribution funds and this was rejected after lengthy negotiations, as discussed later in this chapter.

The film almost did not get a theatrical release for various reasons. *8MI* had been presold to Sky One for April 2014 for VOD which required the film to have concluded any theatrical release at least four weeks before. Also the film's genre of 'slacker rom-com' (Collins, 2011), where young people in dead-end jobs sought to establish relationships against many obstacles, defined the most appropriate release window, and with advice from distributors on the lack of potential competition from other rom-coms, the film's optimal release window would be Friday, 14 February 2014 – St. Valentine's Day. Cox realised that the film would not have a theatrical release unless they could raise a substantial marketing and distribution budget. As a result, the team launched a Kickstarter campaign in November 2013 to crowd-source a target of £20,000, which would be match-funded by Creative

England, by 20 December 2013. They reached the target, unexpectedly, by 15 December, five days early. The film was subsequently released on 14 February 2014 and the DVD was released on 26 May 2014.

Why *8MI* was commissioned?

Of the three films in the iFeatures slate, *8MI* was regarded by stakeholders as the film most likely to be successful for various reasons. Chris Collins, executive in charge of the UKFC's Film Fund, was only prepared to fund *8MI*, and not the rest of that slate, because he judged that the film would appeal to a definable audience that went to the cinema and therefore had the best chance of financial success. Speaking before the film was finished and aware of the difficulties in making a film mainly set mainly in a single location with a relatively inexperienced ensemble cast, he said 'but I think there is lots to like in *8MI*. I think it captures a certain kind of spirit of young people in Bristol. It has got music and a few laughs and it is nice to look at. I think the elements are all there' (Collins, 2011). Collins was looking for a commercial return and having rejected the other two films in the slate, there was pressure on this film to deliver.

However, Collins was not alone in his analysis of the film's ability to succeed in the market.

Jacqui Barr, Marketing Manager at BBC films, agreed:

I don't see so many problems with *8MI*, because it's more out and out kind of comedy, and I think it's got a very young attractive cast, and although they are not well known, I think they sell themselves in a lot of ways. It's quite a sort of fun, silly kind of story that a lot of people will identify with and the workplace setting of it I think is very helpful.

Barr, 2011

Barr was focused on the potential audience for the film and the ways that the film could be marketed to them. The genre was popular with younger audiences, the cast members were able to 'sell themselves', which matched Kerrigan's (2010) list of fundamental marketing assets of known actors, definable audience and clear genre which every film should possess.

Nigel Thomas from Matador Pictures also agreed with Barr:

8 Minutes Idle, potentially could appeal to a young crowd. I think again it's skewed slightly older because it's set in a workplace, and not too many 16-24 year olds have experience of working in a call centre. But the cast should help with that. I think *8 Minutes Idle* has got a shot at probably a sort of middling theatrical run, probably 10 to 20 screens. Perhaps for a couple of weeks. But again, it depends if it sort of captures the imagination, you know, if it ends up as a rom-com that people really want to go and see. It might be all right.

Thomas, 2011

Therefore, *8MI* was appealing to stakeholders because it potentially answered so many of the issues of low budget filmmaking. It appealed to a young audience who go to the cinema frequently, enjoy adolescent comedy based on relationships, used popular music and was set in a story world that would be familiar to this audience. The expectation that it would be shown on 10-20 screens showed the confidence some stakeholders had in the film.

Nevertheless, other stakeholders had concerns about the film. Thomas and Collins were offering their assessment on the script before production had started and they both recognised the pitfalls that had derailed other promising projects. Barr was precise in her concerns that would have an impact on the film's ability to cross over to a mainstream audience:

My fear for *8MI* is that it's actually very regional, because there are some jokes that are very deliberately west country jokes and I feel that, depending on the final cut of the film, I would like to see how that balances, because a

distributor might find that quite hard to handle. So we'll see. It's very definitely a Bristol story.

Barr, 2011

It was part of iFeatures' objectives to have a regional voice in the slate and it would be ironic that this might prohibit a commercial success. This sentiment was echoed by Ed Fletcher from Soda Pictures who was aware that regional films can do good business in their region as the regional audience was forgiving of low production values or storytelling skills and wanted to see the film simply because it was set in their area. However, he recognised 'there is no way [the film] can repeat that all over the country'. He asked 'is this the business model for the independent British feature industry? If it is, I think that's a bit sad' (Fletcher, 2011).

So although there was a great deal of optimism for this film, there were also realistic concerns about the viability of the commercial success. The potential conflict between objectives, the concerns about the potential treatment and the values of the project could have both positive and negative effects on the marketing and distribution and the commercial success of the film. They could also undermine the objectives of the scheme.

Synopsis of *8MI*

The film's protagonist is Dan Thomas (played by Tom Hughes) who is kicked out of a comfortable home by his mother. With nowhere to go, Dan, decides to sleep at the call-centre where he works, with his pet cat, in an underused broom cupboard. The drama that unfolds revolves around Dan attempting to take responsibility for the direction of his life

while keeping his new living arrangements secret. The film focuses on the lives of Dan's call centre team, and his attempt to court workmate Teri (Ophelia Lovibond) while fending off the sexual advances of his over-zealous line-manager Alice (Montserrat Lombard) who promotes him, against his wishes, to team leader. Dan's infatuation with Teri leads to her dismissal, just when she is also made homeless. When all hope is lost for their love to blossom, the call centre closes forcing Dan, for the first time to try to make things right for Teri and take control of his life. He does by converting the empty call centre into a rent-free home for Teri and a potential love nest for them both.

The poster features photographs of the cast to attract fans who follow this cast on television or other films, while also indicating the main love interest between Hughes' and Lovibond's characters. The cartoon elements position the quirky comic nature of the film while the sub-title '... or how not to have an office romance' introduces the potential sexual nature of the plot.

Who was the film made for?

There was some disagreement within the core team about the potential audience for the film due to the different perspectives of the team. As discussed above, *8MI* was regarded by the backers as being the most commercial proposition in the slate. The producer observed that the stakeholders thought that the film had, on paper, the most mainstream identity of all the iFeatures films.

I think they could sense some commercial value in there as it was kind of young ... and quite topical and current. It featured a young cast and we were talking

about having contemporary music and things like that. So I think they sensed that it could be the commercially viable one.

Cox, 2012

For Cox, the film's potential was enhanced by being based on an award-winning book by the same author, Matt Thorne, and the hope that the film would appeal to young audiences who would recognise the 'story world' of boring office jobs being done by the main characters who were living at the moment without any particular goals who:

Haven't got their careers sorted. And not quite reached where they want to be yet, or struggling to reach where they want to be yet. It's the under 30s who've not got married or had kids... We were thinking we'd get 16 year olds watching it. I'm not sure we will. I think it will be more people who've been through that, watching it retrospectively, rather than people who are about to go through it.

Cox, 2011

However the director, Mark Simon Hewis, had a different conception of the audience being younger; 'I've completely made this film from my point of view based on 15 to 25. I think Sarah might have been pushing more to 30, but I always made this for the seventeen year old I was' (Hewis, 2012). The gulf between the director's and producer's conceptions of the target audience's age and therefore expectations was potentially an issue, as this could have produced some of the tonal inconsistencies that reviewers were to identify and which could have spoilt positive word of mouth recommendations. For instance, not making it with the younger orientated 'gross-out' comedy of *The Inbetweeners* (2011) or the older sophistication of *When Harry Met Sally* (1989) would have meant that neither audience may have been catered for sufficiently. The lack of clarity over the audience meant that the tone and type of humour contained within the film would make a single marketing strategy ineffective. Also, this younger audience was increasingly accessing downloads (both illegal

and legal) on their computers and which were less likely to go out to the cinema for non-event or 'tent pole' films (Cox, 2014). However, tonally, the film did not attract the younger audience as will be shown later in this chapter.

The funders for the film had a different conception of the audience. They conceived the audience as somewhere between the producer's and the director's concepts, although it was nearer to the producer's. Nigel Thomas, managing director of Matador and executive producer of the slate, used *The Inbetweeners* as a point of comparison.

I think again it's skewed slightly older because it's set in a workplace, not too many 16 olds have experience of working in a call centre. I think we should be aiming it at early 20s, really. People with some experience of the world who hopefully will recognise the situations. I suppose it's not an *Inbetweeners* audience really. But it's not much older than that.

Thomas, 2011

Channel 4's *The Inbetweeners* series followed a group of male friends as they navigated their teenage years, then spun out into a successful movie, making £42 million on a budget of £3.5 million (IMDb, 2014) attributed to the existence of a ready-made audience. The audience is defined by Channel 4 as 15-24 (Channel 4, 2014) but Thomas defines it differently as late teens. The third television series had reached audiences of 2.2 million in 2010 (Plunket, 2010 npn) and so had built up a great deal of brand loyalty and awareness but also the audience was of significant interest to advertisers where the 16-24 audience is valuable in terms of their purchasing power and for building early brand allegiances.

The marketing strategy and campaign

The marketing strategy for *8MI* had three phases. The initial stage and strategy was developed through the iINNOVATE scheme which iFeatures ran, and the second stage strategy was developed initially by Revolver Entertainment and then in the third stage, adjusted by the agencies that finally took the film to market. This section will show how the strategies worked and what tactics were used.

The first stage: Using local agencies (March 2011-2012)

The first agency employed, using the £15,000 iINNOVATE grant to help to market the film was a Bristol-based company called Team Rubber. The strategy was to build up interest through the narrative of irreverent filmmakers, with a quirky off-kilter sense of humour, making a film for the first time for a young audience. The director, Mark Simon Hewis, who had worked with the agency before on other projects, was initially a fan of their approach and talents. They set up a Facebook page because it is integrated into social media, rather than create a website with added social connectivity. The Facebook page was designed to attract advocates and to show the progress of the film as it developed through production and postproduction. They created a music competition for budding composers to create music for the party scene as a method for developing advocates for the film in the hope they would be influential and drive interest in the film. However, Hewis was dismissive about this tactic as the competition compromised the creative development of the edit by forcing the release of a scene that required further editing. Team Rubber also created cast videos, shot during filming with some of the cast to post onto the Facebook site. Team

Rubber planned a 'book drop' at cinemas as a marketing tactic (similar to Soda's distribution strategy for *Norwegian Wood* as described in chapter 5), which would have attempted to create a buzz by leaving copies of the novel, with apparent film production notes, so that recipients would share the 'secret' knowledge across their social networks.

However, Team Rubber's strategy, and its tactics, was ineffective overall. The Facebook page was useful in attracting over a 1,000 'likes' and as a communication platform.

However, Hewis was not impressed by the choice of the graphic style which 'made it feel quite cheap' (Hewis, 2012). Cox summed up this part of the marketing campaign negatively:

Team Rubber set up the Facebook page and that could have been done for a couple of grand. They were great strategically but we were too small and our production dragged on and they lost impetus. There were good ideas at first but they weren't followed up.

Cox, 2014

For the production team, the iINNOVATE grant was squandered. The production issues meant that agencies' expertise was not utilised effectively as a result of the changes in the production's tone and issues that the stakeholders were having with the post production phase. Had the iINNOVATE grant been used by more experienced filmmakers or in a scheme without conflicting issues, then perhaps the effectiveness would have increased.

The second stage: selecting a distributor

Although iFeatures thought the producers in the scheme were supposed to manage the marketing and distribution phase of the film's life, the responsibility for marketing and distribution on *8MI* was confused. At first Cox approached distributors such as Soda Films

and Verve but decided that Soda's offer of a placement within the New British Film Quarterly scheme (for details see the case study for *Flying Blind* in chapter 7) was the most appropriate, believing that their experience and catalogue of films were more appropriate to *8MI*. Cox characterised their approach as 'artsy, European. It would help place Mark [and the film] with more auteur, quirky films' (Cox, 2014). However, Cox found that her creative decisions were over-ruled by Chris Moll.

He always had a vision for the film which was at odds to ours. Chris thought that this was the film that would make all the money but his vision of the film was not the same as the film we were making. He turned down Soda's offer saying it was too small. Chris was taking a very active role because he was trying to do some deals that were something to do with iFeatures 2 - he wanted to have a distribution deal in place from the beginning and so wanted to include *8MI* within an iFeatures' 'package'. I think we should have gone with Soda as our audience was much more appropriate to NBFQ.

Cox, 2014

Moll's intention to use *8MI* as a bargaining chip for future iterations of the scheme, added to his confidence in the film as the most likely success of the slate. However, these arrangements impacted on the opportunity for the film to reach the production team's preferred audience. Also this sentiment of Cox's illustrates a host of production issues that showed a conflict between the scheme's objectives of being an educational training scheme while also having commercial intention for the output.

The distributor, Revolver Entertainment, and its managing director David Shear, were well known within the iFeatures scheme having been included in the early training. Shear had taken part in some of the training days offering advice about how to select and work with distributors for low-budget projects (see chapter 4). Cox had been in contact with him

throughout the development of the project and had consulted him on initial casting choices, which included using one actor from *The Inbetweeners*. Cox was expecting an early offer which did not come. But they did finally make a deal.

The initial strategy from Revolver Entertainment was based on the story world of the script. They developed tactics to raise awareness of the film by using the themes of the film and asking target audiences to submit stories about 'bad bosses, having sex in the office and even sleeping in the office ... Tonally it was quite dirty, naughty and cheeky' (Cox, 2014). It was hoped this would be connected to an offer from a new mobile phone operating company, EE, to allow all of their call centre employees to get a free download of the film on a single day as part of a PR push. They also planned to release the film 'day and date' ie theatrical VOD and DVD simultaneously into ten to fifteen independent cinemas with a £50,000 P&A budget. However, the plan never materialised:

In hindsight, it was perhaps too good to be true. The big offices in Holland Park [in central London], and the big table with people being really enthusiastic, they really believed in the film. And then literally a week after that, Revolver had gone bust - and they must have known.

Cox, 2014

Other films on Revolver Entertainment's slate (such as thriller *The Liability*, starring Tim Roth), went to Metrodome (Wiseman, 2013 npn.) and found alternative distribution, except for *8MI* which languished for a year without distribution.

Cox applied to the BFI for £25,000 P&A funds, which she was allowed to do having already been funded in part by the UKFC /BFI. After sixteen weeks of active negotiations they eventually rejected her application. Cox was told this was due to a low budget Microwave

film *Borrowed Time* (Bishop, 2013), which had failed to recoup even its £25,000 P&A budget (BFI, 2014). Shear and Moll both advised that a Kickstarter campaign should be developed to raise £20,000 of the P&A budget and to raise awareness of the film. Moll negotiated with Creative England, which he was then working for, to provide a matched funding deal in an attempt to market the final film in the slate and, by inference, the reputation of the scheme (Cox, 2014).

However, from the ashes of Revolver Entertainment's demise came *8MI's* salvation.

Different parts of Revolver Entertainment splintered into three specialist agencies that worked on the film. David Shear created Shear Entertainment which handled the release strategy. Coffee and Cigarettes, created by designing team, handled poster and trailer design and Tonic, staffed by ex-social media experts, handled digital PR. However, there was now no P&A budget on the table and this had to be raised. A Kickstarter campaign was developed by Cox and Hewis, with the promotional video they made by the cast on a concept developed by Hewis, which centred on the crew of the film being forced to emigrate to the USA if the film did not prove to be a success in the UK. The campaign went live on 20 November 2013 for a month with a target of £20,000. This target was reached by 15 December 2013 and it exceeded the original target. In total, the P&A budget came to £49,400 with £21,577 from Kickstarter and rest was matched by Creative England.

Third Stage: targeting the audience - the proposed strategy

The new strategy that was developed built on the Revolver Entertainment campaign but included adaptations. During interviews, Cox spoke in detail about the proposed market

strategy document prepared by Coffee and Cigarettes, which built on Revolver Entertainment's original marketing plan.

The plan had a detailed definition of the target audience. The primary core audience was '21 to 34 (ABC 1 and C2), with slight female bias, "cool", innovative, discerning fans of quirky, edgy, left-field British and World cinema and independent comedies' and who were underwhelmed by their post-university experiences of office work. They would be fans of comedy television series such as *The Office* and independent British and US comedies such as *Blackball* (2003), *You, Me and Everyone We Know* (2005), *Scott Pilgrim Versus the World* (2010), and *Cemetery Junction* (2010). The secondary core audience would be 18-60 years old in key interest groups which might have a particular emotional tie to the film, its themes, setting or cast. This very broad category basically equated to Bristolians, office workers or fans of the cast.

The marketing strategy also included secondary core mass-market audiences targets being 16 to 44 (ABC1 & C2, D, E) 'heavy female bias, fans of mainstream romantic comedy films such as *Horrible Bosses*, *Bridesmaids* and *Friends with Benefits*'. Secondary mass-market target was '34 to 54 - ABC1 50:50 gender split, fans of British comedy such as *Cemetery Junction*, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and *Billy Elliot*' (Cox, 2014). Although the core groups seemed quite precise and based on market examples of similar films, the mass-market target audiences seemed undefined with such a wide demographic and unlikely to be the audience that would take the film from niche into the mainstream. The marketing plan for a secondary mass market target therefore appears to be vague and highly optimistic.

Positioning the film in the overcrowded marketplace

Cigarettes and Coffee planned various ways to position the film to the different target audiences to win their attention. The primary core audience would be targeted mainly using digital online strategies 'with innovative and engaging below-the-line activities to appeal to this audience's discerning tastes' (Cox, 2014). The agency claimed that humour would be a key tool combined with a series of 'risque publicity features, competitions and social media promotions.' (ibid., 2014) The agency also planned to develop location-based games and viral assets that could be distributed within social networks as a way of further engaging this key audience. The secondary core would be found through traditional and online marketing. The media spend would focus on Bristol and its residents while at the same time including national editorial press pieces.

The positioning of the film to the primary mass-market would be done through tweaking the copy of the reviews for the film and for the DVD. The agency pointed out that this re-positioning should not alienate the primary core audience. The secondary mass-market was to be influenced by an advertising and publicity campaign through interviews with the cast where the film would be promoted as 'the next big must-see British comedy'. Although the agency recognised that the secondary mass-market rarely went to the cinema, targeting this potential audience would be worthwhile if they came out in large numbers during the theatrical release.

Marketing tactics

While the document was confident in its definition of the target audience and positioning, the tactics that it proposed seemed out of step with the 'cool and quirky' image of the audience.

The 'above the line' strategy was to gain press coverage in the *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Time Out*, *Bristol Evening Post* and *Bristol Post*. They also proposed producing a series of character posters to give the film more of an identity with the intention that these could be used by advocates to send to their networks and therefore had the potential to go viral.

There were also 'below the line' plans to use social media to engage potential audiences around the themes in the film. These included 'social media, guerrilla marketing, celebrity interviews, news-generating publicity events ... to over-deliver awareness in comparison to budget' (Cox, 2014). To this end they intended to get user generated content about extreme real-life stories about the worst aspects of office life including office romances or even sex in the office, general bad office behaviour, embarrassing emails sent and the ultimate resignation letters. They also planned a 'gonzo/experiential journalism feature', where a journalist would be encouraged to try to replicate the main storyline and attempt to live at their place of work in secret. The key publicity event was a proposed nation-wide '*eight minutes idle*', which would encourage call centre workers via social media, an app and a website to abandon their desks for eight minutes simultaneously. The walkouts would be filmed by participants and the results would be used to publicise the film. It would be coordinated through a Facebook app, with the office or organisation getting the most 'likes'

winning the opportunity to have ‘the people’s premieré’ - a free screening of the film in their town or city.

The plans also required the development of an enhanced website, which they called the ‘digital hub’. This would not only include the usual marketing assets of trailer, artwork, cast biographies and character profiles but would also collect the social media feeds into one central location. It would also be the link to encourage participation in the ‘8M!’ event and would be a place to allow fans to interact, engage and share stories on the themes described above. This digital hub would also aid distribution by allowing viewers to register their interest to see the film at locations where the local cinema had not booked the film. They also proposed that groups of ten friends could also register their interest and that licences for one-off screenings would be issued. The hub would also be a place with extra marketing assets, which would be designed to promote the film’s particular type of humour. The agency planned to edit trailers of one to two minutes as they recognised that ‘in the case of more intelligent, slow burning comedies - the jokes require more complete “handles” for them to work’ (Cox, 2014). These trailers would be technically optimised to allow them to be easily downloaded.

The marketing strategy appeared to be sophisticated and in-depth. However, further interrogation revealed a disconnect between the strategy and the tactics that were proposed. For instance, the primary core audience which was described as ‘cool, innovative and discerning’ would possibly have been alienated in large numbers by the overt marketing of an ‘8M!’ day. This tactic was also not in keeping with the ethos of the characters’ lifestyles in the film who overtly detested authority and found ways to circumvent the management’s control of them. The other elements such as the Facebook app, the office

premiere and the digital hub (which was in effect a website), are all well-used tactics in film marketing as identified in the marketing chapter. But these tactics were not carried out due to cost and the lead time required to have a good chance of success. However, a traditional PR campaign was instigated with reviews in national and Bristol newspapers, and an interview on local BBC television news programme *Points West*.

As the film was a romantic comedy with slacker undertones, the ideal release window was identified as St. Valentine's Day by Shear Entertainment. Its research showed that there would not be a great deal of competition for rom-coms in February 2014 and so the release date was set. The new strategy for Cox was simple and based on the target audience and release period:

It was to appeal to young people. I thought it was a good 'date' movie. What we hoped for was blokes taking girls on dates, hoping it would appeal to young men not wanting to be too cheesy but also to be out to show they could be 'cool'. But it was also mainstream enough to be a 'safe' choice.

Cox, 2014

The mismatches over the stakeholders' different approaches to comedy would become important as the campaign developed especially with Tonic, the agency handling the social network public relations. Tonic emphasised the romantic aspects of the young, beautiful cast and attempted to hide the quirky humour of the film against Cox's wishes:

To their thinking, it was taking a commercial view. They wanted to get bums on seats and for them that was what they thought was the best way. They set up the 'John the cat' Twitter feed which we hated as it didn't represent the humour of the film. They promised to tweak the tone but nothing happened.

Cox, 2014

In the film, John was Dan's cat who dies through choking on his used condom and therefore the Twitter feed was part of an irreverent transmedia story extension. Cox became convinced that a 'cool' discerning audience would not think the film was for them nor would the mainstream audience believe it would give them what they wanted from a film. Therefore 'it fell between these two audience groups' (Cox, 2014) and this negatively impacted on the theatrical revenues.

Cox's criticism grew of the marketing strategy and costs of the campaign. Cox's view was that Shear Entertainment's only positive input was to book some cinemas and then not as many as were promised. Their fee was £6,000 which she felt was high for the amount of work. Also Cox felt that the strategy was not flexible enough to adapt to the initial strong site averages, as some screens earned as much as £600 per site, during the first week. Cox believed that had extra screens been booked the film had the strength and momentum to have a longer theatrical life and therefore produce better revenues. Tonic, with a fee of £9,000, mainly guided the strategy through online PR although it did decide to take the film into mainstream territory as discussed above. Coffee and Cigarettes produced the poster design and the trailer. However, the first trailer was initially rejected by Moll, with subsequent agreement of Cox, as it did not have the right tone or marketable assets and a new trailer was commissioned. This meant that the total cost for the trailer was £12,000 although, as the data will show later, it was effective in attracting the audience to the cinema. Cox also spent £9,000 on traditional press advertising. (All figures from Cox, 2014b). In the final tally, not all the budget was spent, with £2,000 remaining. However, Cox believes that the multi-agency approach wasted a great deal of the funds and estimated

that the same job could be done with approximately £30-35,000, i.e. £10,000 less than the actual costs.

Reviewers' feedback on the film

Stakeholders supported the culturally determined view that rom-coms are typically skewed towards female audiences (Collins, 2011 and Cox, 2011) as the central dramatic question in the story arc is whether the protagonists will find love. Reviewers' description of the comic tone described it as 'darkly romantic' (Watershed, 2014), 'off-kilter, deadpan' (Lowes, 2014) and 'whimsical sense of humour' (Johnson, 2014) while also criticising the film's tonal variety and for not being distinctive enough for cinema when there were successful television comedy series like Channel 4's *Peep Show* and BBC's *The Office* (Maher, 2014) occupying the same space. An influential review from the *Guardian* criticised the film for being:

a well-intentioned disappointment... the acting and direction are desperately plodding and slow. Occasionally this film looks as if it has achieved the movie equivalent of John Peel's legendary 45-played-at-33 mistake. It is a shame because there is real creative intelligence behind it.

Peter Bradshaw, 2014

The cast was regarded positively by reviewers. Tom Hughes had had lead roles in British feature films *Cemetery Junction* (Gervais and Merchant, 2011) and *Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll* (Whitecross, 2011) but was mostly known for his television performances in *Silk* (2011) and *Trinity* (2009). Ophelia Lovibond had appeared in eleven features, all in supporting roles except for *4.3.2.1* (Clarke and Davis, 2010) and eleven television series

including *The Bill* (2003-7) and *Holby City* (2006-7). There was audience awareness of both actors and most reviewers name-checked them. Interestingly, online mentions, including Twitter and Facebook, gave greater emphasis to Lovibond although the film was regarded by stakeholders as Hughes' film. Toby Melling, sales agent for the film who negotiated the BSKYB deal, referred to the eventual revenue for *8MI* being affected by the audiences not being sufficiently drawn to the film by the cast. In contrast, *Flying Blind's* wider success was due in part to the audiences' knowledge and liking for lead actress Helen McCrory (Melling, 2014). Unlike *Flying Blind*, there were no glossy newspaper stories to aid the PR and awareness raising of the film's release.

In terms of location, the film was largely filmed in a call centre set, with limited exteriors in the trendy Stokes Croft area, a Georgian street and student house, and the Thekla nightclub, but there were no scenes of Bristol's famous landmarks. However, the film did represent an aspirational image of Bristol which would be potentially attractive for young adults as it showed a thriving alternative and quirky nightlife.

The theatrical release

The film was released on St. Valentine's Day 2014. Although it was the only British rom-com released for 14 February, there was significant competition. American films such as *Endless Love* (Feste, 2014) from Universal Studios which ran in 359 cinemas and made £744,867 in its opening weekend, *Her* by indie filmmaker Spike Jonze, which opened in 200 cinemas and made £449,307 (which had an quirky storyline of a man in love with a computer) and a cast that included Joaquin Phoenix, Amy Adams and Scarlett Johansson and *That Awkward*

Moment (2014) starring Zac Efron which had been on release for three weeks and which made £2,394,172 from 222 screens. There was also a French rom-com *Love Is in the Air* (Castagnetti, 2013), which played in three cinemas and made £7,816 and a re-release of *Sleepless in Seattle* (Ephron, 1993) starring Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks, which made £19,460 from 75 screens. Taken together, these films represented significant competition to *8MI* for the rom-com audience, especially *Her* which appealed to the 'discerning' audience that Cox was aiming to attract.

In the first weekend, *8MI* made £2,412 from four screens with a site average of £603 (BFI, 2014) and after three weeks had made £4,884 from one cinema with a site average of £886. This suggests that the research that informed the strategy of the campaign, which relied on placing *8MI* into a comparative rom-com 'desert', was faulty and naïve.

Online analysis:

For this case study, the online 'buzz' surrounding the film was analysed from the two weeks before the Kickstarter campaign started, through to a month after the DVD release, to capture any of the online chatter influenced by the marketing and distribution strategy.

Although the life of the film will continue for between three to five years (Melling, 2014) this will mainly be through television deals in the minor territories earning low revenues. For the sake of this study, the release of the DVD would be the last opportunity for the film to gain substantial extra sales as the UK TV terrestrial rights had already been granted to the BBC in return for their contribution to the production funds of iFeatures. As a result, Brandwatch was used to monitor the film online using this string: ("8 minutes idle") NEAR/50 (film OR

lovibond OR hughes OR hewis OR iFeatures). This meant that the Brandwatch system would search for all mentions on digital media where the title of the film was mentioned or where the word 'film', Lovibond, Hughes, Hewis or iFeatures was mentioned within 50 words. This string followed the same pattern as the search terms for the other two films in the iFeatures slate so that the results could be compared if necessary.

The period of investigation was set from 8 November 2013, which was two weeks before the Kickstarter campaign was launched. The search ceased a month after the DVD was released, on 23 June 2014, to encompass any posts about the DVD.

There were 537 mentions within the period of investigation. These were all evaluated manually for sentiment with 456 (85 per cent) being positive and 43 (eight per cent) negative with the remainder (seven per cent) being neutral. I have analysed these in depth below. The ratio between male and female authors was 54: 46. There were three 'spikes' in mentions over the period, all in 2014. In January when the Kickstarter campaign had been a success, in February for the actual release of the film in theatres, and finally in May at the beginning of the DVD release.

The lack of a spike in mentions at the very beginning of the Kickstarter campaign is interesting as it raises the question whether the marketing impact of Kickstarter may have been exaggerated.

The influence of a Kickstarter campaign on marketing and distribution

The campaign ran for 25 days from 25 November to 20 December 2013. In the end, 287 funders promised £21,577. The main types of contribution included a major funder who offered £5,000 (revealed by Cox, 2014b to be the University of Gloucester where the

director and director of photography both work as lecturers). Four backers gave £1,000, three gave £200, 48 gave £100, 56 gave £50 pounds and 23 people gave £35. Rewards included on-screen credits, posters, DVDs, digital copies of the book, limited edition photographs, tickets to a premier screening (Kickstarter, 2014). The total costs for the rewards added up to £4,000 (which can be regarded as almost 20 per cent of the raised Kickstarter funds).

The Kickstarter campaign had some unexpected benefits. The video used on the Kickstarter website was created by the team with the narrative that the production teams would be forced to emigrate to the US if the film wasn't released. The video positioned the filmmakers and cast as the underdogs of the British film industry, whose hopes of success were dashed by the distributor going out of business, and how they were begging normal people to help make their dream come true – this was a powerful marketing asset. It was referred to by most commentators before the theatrical release and used as a proxy testimonial for the film. However, there is little evidence that the funders for the Kickstarter campaign actively turned into advocates for the film. Therefore Kickstarter had extrinsic, rather than intrinsic, benefits.

Twitter mentions

The most popular platform for mentions was Twitter with 339 posts (or 63 per cent of total posts). The interesting aspect of *8MI* is the ratio of 'professional' posts (i.e. posts from people or organisations that are stakeholders in the film) to posts from members of the public who have become advocates or critics of the film. Although the Brandwatch software

does not discriminate between these two types of posts, the author has assessed sentiment and source and found that 72 per cent were 'professional' posts to 28 per cent 'amateur' posts. This shows that although social media has been positioned as a great way to access real audiences, this research has identified that the majority of posts are from people associated with stakeholders. There were 67 Facebook posts, 43 on news forums, 35 posts on film blogs, 25 posts on forums such as Mumsnet, and 23 posts on pirate sites offering a free download of the film.

Professional posts

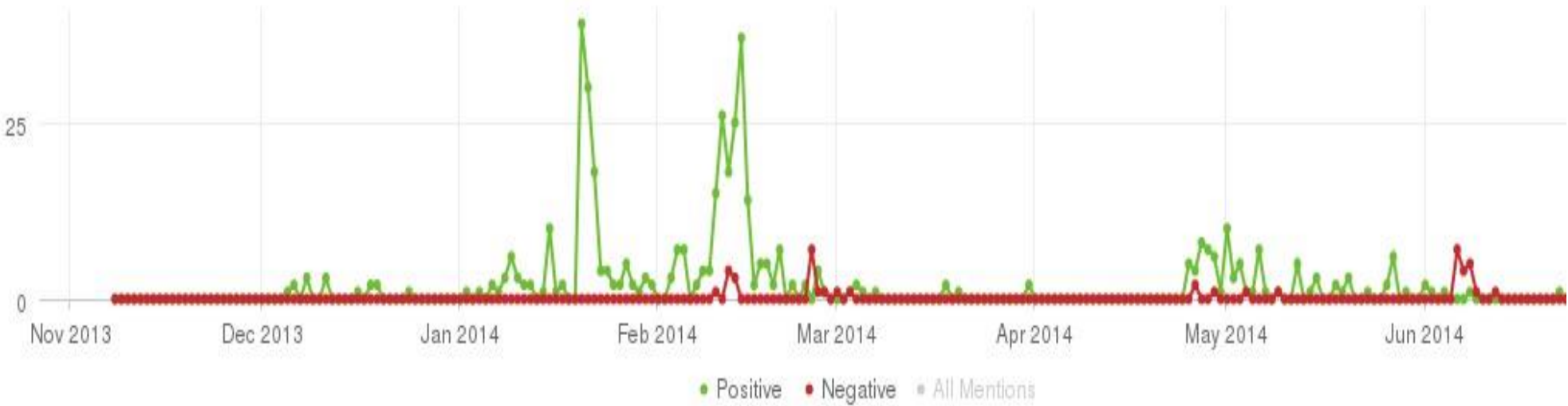
The frequency of positive posts around the film in the period from November 2013 to June 2014 was greater than for either *In the Dark Half* or *Flying Blind*. As Cox acknowledged, different members of the team mobilised support from their own networks. The writer Matt Thorne actively attempted to drive literati interest into the film by writing about the distribution issues and the need for support. A message was posted on a Facebook site called **The Library Platform**:

We've just backed British writer Matt Thorne's film 8 Minutes Idle on Kickstarter - please help get this film distributed! <http://kck.st/181MjIW>. Help us get this darkly funny comedy feature about how to survive life, love and work into cinemas across the UK.

6 Dec 2013

And another writer friend of the production team also posted, and got a reply from the *8MI* official website on the same day. This demonstrates an actively PR policy for *8MI* on monitoring and responding to tweets on a daily basis:

Figure 21: Output from Brandwatch showing Internet buzz for *8 Minutes Idle* November 2013-June 2014



5 Dec 2013 **[Liz Jensen @LizJensenWriter](#)**

Matt Thorne's wonderful novel is now a film - Check out 8 Minutes Idle
<http://kck.st/181MjIW> via [@kickstarter](#)

And the reply:

[8M/minuteside](#) [8@M/minuteside](#) Dec 5

[@LizJensenWriter](#) [@kickstarter](#) Thanks for the support, Liz. Hope you're well.

This example indicates that the active approach to social media and the casting choices produced the appearance of buzz around the film, even if the responses are to known collaborators at first. It was important to commit the time required to manage responses to build on any references in posts to the film and its marketing assets (such as its young attractive cast) with the hope that acknowledgement of the post would spawn other sympathetic posts.

As Sarah Cox the producer indicated, the cast were very active online in support of the film which helped to increase awareness amongst their followers and the connection offered a de facto or implicit testimonial about the film even if they did not directly advocate the film for its quality. Lead actors Tom Hughes posted a photograph of himself and the director at the premiere on his Twitter account *DailyTomHughes* to his 213 followers, while Ophelia Lovibond sent out to her 220 followers. Monserrat Lombard tweeted her 3,395 followers, and wrote about her previous work in a call centre in an editorial for Microsoft Network while Antonia

Thomas, who had a large following (46,300 followers) from *The Misfits* Channel 4 series, posted this:

Antonia Thomas @AntoniaThomas

Check out this review of our film 8 minutes idle which is finally coming out!
<http://m.screendaily.com/5065249.article>

15 Jan 2014

The composer for the film, Kid Carpet, and winner of the film's only award - a Royal Television Society for Best Film Composer in 2012 - also posted to his 645 followers :

Kid Carpet @KidCarpet

WordPress; 8 Minutes Idle movie trailer -
<http://www.theguardian.com/film/video/2014/jan/20/8-minutes-idle-film-tr> <http://ow.ly/2D73JW>

20 Jan 2014

And Tonic, the PR agency, using their derided marketing strategy, *John the Cat*, produced a Twitter feed to recirculate PR to 112 followers.



John the Cat @JohnTheCat Feb 11

RT" **@8MinutesIdle**: Tom Hughes and Mark Simon Hewis at the premiere of 8 Minutes Idle! pic.twitter.com/zTeaat4PrI"

11 Feb 2014

Other stakeholders tweeted and linked to evidence of the film's USP or marketing assets. Both BBC films (87,100 followers) and Creative England (19,600 followers)

tweeted on the arrival of the second finished trailer, which was persuasive to cinema goers, within 24 hours of each other:

IFeaturesUK @IFeaturesUK

Great new trailer for comedy romance '8 Minutes Idle' starring Tom Hughes & Ophelia Lovibond featuring Paul Kaye <http://bit.ly/1cLy8Ta>

20 Jan 2014

Creative England @CreativeEngland

Have you seen the trailer for 8 Minutes Idle? The [@IFeaturesUK](#) film, funded by Creative England, released on Feb 14:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE7o8XMSifo ...](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE7o8XMSifo)

21 Jan 2014

Creative England also linked to influential organisations in their tweets such as *Time Out London* (351,000 followers), although the post did not put *8MI* as first choice, and any detailed research would have most likely have been discouraged a potential cinemagoer to see *8MI*. The tweet below was therefore misleading:

Creative England @CreativeEngland

.@TimeOutLondon pick original [@IFeaturesUK](#) film 8 Minutes Idle as top Valentine's Day viewing. We couldn't agree more

[http://www.timeout.com/london/film/valentines-day-viewing-seven-top-films-to-see ...](http://www.timeout.com/london/film/valentines-day-viewing-seven-top-films-to-see)

13 Feb 2014

Time Out is London's premier entertainment guide and this post linked to a page which listed three other films before *8MI* including *Her* (Jonze, 2014), romantic period drama *The Invisible Woman* (Fiennes, 2014) and romantic comedy *Cuban Fury*

(2014) before it. If a prospective *8MI* viewer were to follow the link from this page to the full review of the film they would have been confronted with this less than ecstatic review which would not have been likely to lead to a ticket sale, especially considering the competition:

With the likes of [BBC's] 'The Office' long having staked out this comedic territory, this screen version of Matt Thorne's novel has to work hard to compete. In its favour, there's a whimsical sense of humour which means you're never far from an unexpected smile; but otherwise the central romance is lukewarm, and leading man Hughes tries way too hard to be diffident. It's still oddly likeable, just not distinctive enough.

Johnson, 2014

The strategy for Creative England presumably depended on prospective viewers not following up every link but scanning the headlines to re-enforce their decision.

Other negative posts include one from *Time Out* just before the theatrical release.

Time Out Film @ Time Out Film

REVIEW: More Britcom action with whimsical underwhelmer 8 MINUTES
IDLE: [http://www.timeout.com/london/film/8-minutes-idle ...](http://www.timeout.com/london/film/8-minutes-idle...)
12 Feb 2014

Professional posts and the testimonials are important. Posts from stakeholders tended to refer or link to marketing assets to reinforce their support but as noted not all linked elements were positive.

Amateur Posts

The amateur posts were mainly negative although there were some positive exceptions. Posts by people who were not connected to the film or stakeholders made up less than a quarter of posts.

The regional identity of the film was also an important part of the interest surrounding the film. As stated above the director and producer were interviewed on BBC local news 'Points West' programme as part of the traditional PR push. Although BBC local news has an audience of typically over 45 years old and therefore outside the film's audience as defined by the production team, their appearance stimulated posts. As I will explain later, the surveyed audience was also largely made up of people who were 35+ and so this marketing activity had a minor impact on participation at the local cinema screening.

Andy Howard @AndyHoward

New film made & set in #Bristol is in cinemas. 8 Minutes Idle is about a lad who finds love in a call centre. ❤️ @bbcpointswest 6.30pm BBC1
13 Feb 2014

And this post from somebody who had caught the film on BskyB and who enjoyed the regional identity in the film.

Wendy Brown @WendyB

Watching 8 Minutes Idle, great film. Loving the Bristol accent
Swindon 27 Apr 2014

The policy of active monitoring of the Twitter feed by Sarah Cox increased the positive traffic as the post below shows:

Laura @Laura

The 8 minutes idle film twitter people retweeted me. i guess that's the closest i'll ever get to tom hughes *tear* 26 Jan 2014

Interestingly, the majority of negative posts were not posted during the theatrical release, but were reactions to seeing the film on BskyB, VOD or DVD. Negative reviews were placed on forums such as MumsNet under the string *The rubbish you watch when you can't sleep:*

Twitter Post: Sun 27-Apr-14

I watched 8 minutes idle last night. It's about a call centre worker from Bristol. I actually watched to the end - then questioned myself, why? I watch all kinds of shite when I am wide awake. I'm known to watch the teleshopping channels just to see how low the prices go.

Whereas other tweets were short and dismissive about their perception of the film's quality:

via @9999_@lilmissjenkins (6353 followers),

8 minutes idle is the shittiest film I've ever seen

4 May 2014

Chantelle Jenkins @Lil MissJenkins (253 followers)

Being made to watch 8 minutes idle. pointless rubbish film 🙄

8 Jun 2014

Cinema goers survey analysis

The film was released into four cinemas on 14 February 2014. These included three cinemas in London - the Ritzy in Brixton and Curzon Cinemas in Soho and Wimbledon and in the Watershed in Bristol. The results were disappointing as the total amount for the weekend was £2,414, but with a high screen average of £603 (BFI, 2012).

To understand why theatrical viewers went to the cinema, entrance surveys were taken which investigated what marketing they had seen and what they thought was the most persuasive.

From Friday, 14 February to Thursday, 20 February, 563 people viewed the film at the Watershed Cinema in Bristol. The response rate was 67 per cent or 376 surveys which were completed as patrons waited for the film to begin or as they sat while the trailers and advertisements were playing. The film attracted slightly more female viewers who made up 56 per cent of the total. The film was popular with full capacity or 'selling out' for the first six viewings and with 69 per cent and 85 per cent capacity for the last two nights. The film was screened in three sizes of auditorium; in Cinema 1 on Friday night, which was also the Bristol premiere with the filmmakers and cast present, and had a capacity of 197. The following five performances were in Cinema 2 which has a capacity of 45, and the final two performances on Wednesday and Thursday evenings were in Cinema 3 which has a capacity of 101. The film was played mainly in early evening slots between 17.30 and 18.30, or at 14.30 in the afternoon. It is interesting to note that the cinema's scheduling of the performances

did not negatively impact on the capacity as the Watershed’s programmers understood that part of the audience preferred to see the film in the daytime.

Figure 22: Output from SPSS showing relationship between date of viewing and age for cinemagoers for *8 Minutes Idle*

| Date of viewing film | Age in years | | | | | Total |
|----------------------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|
| | 15-20 | 21-25 | 26-35 | 36-50 | 51+ | |
| Friday | 2 | 6 | 20 | 14 | 19 | 61 |
| Saturday 1430 | 0 | 1 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 32 |
| Saturday 1740 | 0 | 5 | 9 | 17 | 13 | 44 |
| Sunday 1820 | 2 | 1 | 11 | 10 | 14 | 38 |
| Monday 1430 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 3 | 15 | 40 |
| Tuesday 1430 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 6 | 17 | 34 |
| Wednesday 1820 | 8 | 2 | 10 | 15 | 19 | 54 |
| Thursday 1810 | 6 | 8 | 15 | 22 | 19 | 70 |
| Total | 27 | 26 | 98 | 93 | 129 | 373 |

As this table shows, the audience for the film had an older skew than that anticipated by marketing agencies as the under 25-year-old brackets were under-represented, while the 26+ age ranges made up 86 per cent of viewers. It is interesting to note that the largest age-group was the over 51-year-olds who made up 35 per cent of the audience. The core age of the audience for the cinema is over

36 years old (Cosgrove, 2015), which indicates that the marketing did attract more of the 26-35 but failed to attract the 15-25 year age range.

The question at the beginning of the chapter was concerned with the impact of social networks but traditional sources were still influential. The survey revealed that the main ways that people found out about the film were through personal recommendation from family or friends (45 per cent), through the Watershed email mailing list or website brochure (47 per cent), by those using a variety of social networks or blogs (23 per cent) or through a newspaper or magazine review (16 per cent). Although the producers spent a great deal on the trailer and thought it was important, it was only mentioned by six per cent of respondents. The impact or indication of the persuasiveness of marketing by family and friends was still the highest with 45 per cent of respondents identifying it as the most influential source.

Digital marketing was important. The Watershed's own marketing (its website or email newsletter) influenced 36 per cent of respondents, with the collated results for social networks and blogs were influential for eighteen per cent of respondents. However, 42 per cent agreed respondents reported they made arrangements to see a film by social media. This suggests that social media was persuasive.

The survey asked respondents to rate the three most important features of the film as communicated to them through the marketing that persuaded them to come to the cinema. Taking the combined scores, the most important aspect to respondents was its shooting location with 297 votes, that it was a British film had 162 responses,

and at almost joint third - the appeal of the story (124 responses) and 'liking' the genre, which gained 123 responses.

Figure 23: Most persuasive marketing media for *8 Minutes Idle*

| Answer | Response | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|----------|------------|
| Cinema Brochure | 37 | 11% |
| Family / Friends | 152 | 45% |
| YouTube | 4 | 1% |
| Web Ad Banner | 3 | 1% |
| Twitter | 9 | 3% |
| Cinema Poster | 16 | 5% |
| Work contact | 16 | 5% |
| Web trailer | 22 | 7% |
| Newspaper / Magazine review | 53 | 16% |
| Facebook | 14 | 4% |
| Blog review | 10 | 3% |
| Watershed Email /website | 121 | 36% |
| Cinema Trailer | 21 | 6% |

Figure 24: Reasons for seeing *8 Minutes Idle*

| Question | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | Total Responses |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----------------|
| The story appealed to me | 42 | 44 | 38 | 124 |
| I was interested in the production scheme | 8 | 15 | 14 | 37 |
| I like the members of the cast | 8 | 17 | 16 | 41 |
| I like the genre/ type of film | 29 | 37 | 57 | 123 |
| It is a British film | 23 | 71 | 68 | 162 |
| I was asked to come along by a friend / partner | 44 | 33 | 21 | 98 |
| The critics rated the film | 3 | 5 | 12 | 20 |
| I liked the trailer | 11 | 17 | 26 | 54 |
| I liked the poster | 2 | 3 | 5 | 10 |
| It was shot in Bristol | 165 | 86 | 46 | 297 |
| My friends are talking about it online | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| I know someone in the production team / cast | 32 | 8 | 8 | 48 |
| I like films in this budget range | 1 | 11 | 10 | 22 |

This confirms that audiences like local narratives but presumably that is because it's a rarity – if there were other frequent Bristol based narratives other aspects of the films, such as story, would become more important.

Sales

Figure 25: The gross sales and costs for *8MI* at 30 September 2014

| Gross sales | Deductions (Fees, commissions and expenses) | Recouped | Profit/Loss |
|----------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| £34,006 | £18,265 | £18,308 | £18,308 |

During interviews with Cox (2014c) and Melling (2015) provisional sales figures to September 2014 amounted to £34,006. This was made up of a licence to BSkyB for pay-per-view and subscription service for £15,357. HBO in Latin America and licence per pay TV for £13,095. The next highest licence was to the Netherlands for pay TV for £6,071. There were two smaller licences to Turkey, and Cyprus and Azerbaijan for rights to Pay TV VOD, Subscription VOD, Internet mobile and Catch Up for £2,380 and South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar for £892. There were two contracts listed in the USA with VUDU and *Go Digital* for Internet services including iVOD & Internet Download To Own but the price had not yet been agreed.

A licence for pay TV & VOD for the whole of central and Eastern Europe for 3 years had been agreed for £3,636, for Asia for £909, and central Africa for £606 (although for two years). A years VOD license for Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria was agreed at £181.

By September 2014, with most of these deals being in place from the end of 2012, £34,006 had been received. In total, Melling estimated that the film would, over the film’s expected life of three to five years, generate maximum revenues of \$70-80,000 or approx £47,200 (Melling, 2015 and Cox, 2014b). It is sobering to recognise that this was almost the same amount as the marketing budget.

The sales agent, Content International, had applied many costs to the film (see table 11). Cox summed up that the costs applied to her film as at September 2014 as being £18,265.

Figure 26: Breakdown of costs attributed to *8 Minutes Idle* by sales agent Content International

| Type of deduction | Amount |
|---------------------|----------------|
| Commissions | £4,400 |
| Expenses incurred | £2,550 |
| Market expenses | £3,333 |
| Additional Expenses | £7,981 |
| Total | £18,265 |

Direct costs included £4,400 in sales agency commission, and £2,550 for expenses incurred which includes costs of promotion (including £1,190 for a trailer, £297 for publicity and £446 for screening cinemas shipping and freight costs were £404). £3,333 was spent in representing the films at film markets MIPTV 2012 and 2013, and MIPCOM 2012 and 2013. There were also £7,981 in additional expenses including £4,702 of technical service fees, third-party legal fees of £1,190 and £1,964 for 'international film festival' costs. Together these represent significant costs of over £18,265 (Cox, 2014b). These amounts represent a share of the costs that the sales agents attribute to individual films within their entire portfolio of films when visiting film markets. Therefore the low budget films could be said to be subsidising higher budgeted films which received greater sales. This reinforced the position taken by the producer of *Weekend*, in chapter 5, where he chose to use a hybrid strategy so that the costs of sales agents and distributors were not front loaded onto his film. Independent producers claimed that sales agents and distributors license low budget films not because they can make any substantial profit but to cover their overhead and spread costs. However, the situation was ameliorated as iFeatures had negotiated a 30 per cent 'producer's equity corridor', which meant that producers received their share on all revenues after the sales agent's commission.

Was the film successful?

The revenues that *8MI* attracted was similar to comparable low-budget films released with similar strategies. In September 2013 the BFI published an 'Insight Report' into *Borrowed Time* (BFI, 2015), which was a Microwave scheme film with a

£120,000 production budget and a P&A budget of £50,000. As reported in this case study, *Borrowed Time's* failure to recoup its P&A investment prevented Cox from securing BFI distribution funding. The similarities with *8MI* are direct as £20,000 of the P&A budget was also raised through a Kickstarter campaign, and they were advised also by David Shear at Shear Entertainment. The conclusions of the report stated that £50,000 P&A was inadequate, especially as *Borrowed Time* was a drama, which had a less defined audience and was less easy to market. The market for dramas was overcrowded and therefore it was difficult to stand out above the marketing buzz of other features being marketed by studios with large marketing budgets. It was clear to the producer of *Borrowed Time* that the strategy for marketing and distribution needed to be in place before the team were recruited. He said 'If you don't yet have a fully formed vision for the release, and you've already brought partners on board, it can be very dangerous and potentially compromise the capacity to achieve your objectives. (Olivier Kaempfer, producer, quoted in BFI, 2015 p. 16)

The returns were disappointing, and worst than *8MI*. *Borrowed Time* had theatrical revenues of £7,245, DVD gross sales of £3,998 and net revenues for the producers from VOD of £5,858.

Therefore the release of *8MI* occurred in a crowded market, with an unclear strategy that was incongruous with the features of the film. It is also clear that the marketing budget was still not adequate even with £15,000 spent in the first phase and almost £50,000 in the second and third phases. The incoherence of the strategy appears to

be due to the various agencies not being directly coordinated appears to have contributed to the poor performance, especially when compared to *Flying Blind's* total marketing budget of £25,000.

Conclusion

This case study shows that social networks would be able to correct some of the structural issues in the British film industry appears to be highly optimistic. However, social networks do have a limited ability to persuade potential viewers to purchase tickets but they are not a panacea for low budget filmmakers working within the in-grained issues of the British film industry.

The hopes for the film, from various stakeholders, did not materialise. The varied age groups that were identified as its audience and the limited production budget meant that the creative hopes for the film did not occur and this made *8MI* a difficult project to promote. The various stages of planned marketing such as INNOVATE, and a large part of the Coffee and Cigarettes strategy, was not carried through resulting in wasted resources and a loss of momentum in aborted campaigns. Nor did the Kickstarter campaign seem to improve the marketing of the film. The narrative of the underdog of the British film industry finally getting their film into cinemas was useful, although it also raised some questions and doubt about the quality of the film.

In terms of the marketing strategy document developed by Coffee and Cigarettes, the audience survey suggests that the largest proportion of viewers were defined as the secondary core target audience (people with a particular emotional tie to the film, its themes, setting or cast i.e. Bristolians) and the secondary mass-market (i.e. fans of British comedy and independent British films). The primary core, (the 'cool and discerning' audience) and primary mass market (fans of mainstream rom-coms) were not attracted by the marketing proposition of the film and there were other films within the theatrical release window that were more attractive to these audience segments.

Overall, it seems clear that social networks have contributed to the overall theatrical box office of *8MI* as part of a campaign including other forms of marketing. The prevalence of the positive 'professional' posts did not translate into large box office receipts. In fact that the professional tweets and posts added to the background marketing noise and had negligible impact as no respondent referred to them.

The last minute nature of the theatrical release was an achievement for the team to arrange and coordinate. The Kickstarter campaign was a success financially but the marketing campaign that it afforded lacked a coordinated strategy which failed to offer a coherent message. It was a good example of how (as described in chapter 5) a coordinated strategy was crucial to the successful marketing for low budget films and this is also confirmed by the BFI's Insight Report on the distribution of *Borrowed Time*.

Finally, the online buzz for the film as identified by Brandwatch was largely positive although this did not translate into large audiences. Although pirate sites offering free downloads could be argued as positive (see Jenkins, 2008) in allowing viewers the opportunity to see the film and that these viewers could become advocates thereby increasing legal downloads (see chapter 5 for further discussion), evidence for this effect was not witnessed and illegal downloads had the effect of cannibalising legal sales.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Introduction

This conclusion will draw on the findings from each chapter to establish where themes have emerged that help to answer the research questions posed and to position iFeatures in the wider context of low-budget production and distribution.

To recap, the research questions were:

1. What possibilities does digital marketing and distribution offer low budget filmmakers in the UK?
2. How did the filmmaking teams experience the process of taking part in the iFeatures scheme?
3. Could the iFeatures production and distribution model offer a sustainable framework for future low budget production?

The thesis inadvertently captured the end of a period of history between 1999 and 2014 where the hopes for digital distribution of low budget feature films were eventually, for various reasons, found to be largely without foundation. As a result, although the research project started as an investigation into the potential benefits of digital distribution and marketing, events occurring within the iFeatures scheme required it to adapt its focus.

The main themes will be explored under general headings. I will be arguing that the iFeatures scheme had many positive aspects but the objectives were contradictory and so the ability for the films to succeed commercially or critically was compromised from the start. The American domination of the British film industry was too ingrained, and was already in a dominant position in the use of digital marketing and distribution. The research has shown that the process of marketing and distribution is complicated and requires coherent and coordinated professional strategies to be effective; because the market is extremely competitive, there are no guarantees of success. The recruitment process selected filmmakers whose dispositions were opposed to the commercial ethos of the iFeatures scheme and the training was inadequate to prepare the inexperienced teams for the challenges they would face. It is important to foreground that this thesis was only concerned with the first iteration of the scheme. There have been three further versions which overlapped each other, with the development of the following scheme starting before the preceding iteration's films had been edited or released. Therefore there was not an opportunity for the new management teams the opportunity to reflect on issues I have indicated in this thesis and refinement of its objectives. A fuller account of the schemes, the films commissioned and their reception is given in appendix 6.

This conclusion will therefore help to define what was learned through the research and indicate how this impacted on the iFeatures scheme, its slate and participants, in order to identify issues that would need to be resolved in the future and to indicate what further research is needed.

What did iFeatures achieve?

The three iterations of iFeatures have been a considerable benefit to the British low budget film industry (see Appendix six for a brief discussion on the changes to iFeatures 2-4). Chris Moll's initiative has attracted approximately £4.6 million into the sector. Nine feature films (soon to be joined by three more in 2017-18) have been produced and over 130 aspiring filmmakers benefited from some form of training and mentoring from leading British industry experts. As a training ground it had mixed results: some participants have gone on to develop careers in the film industry while others have returned to television production or higher education. iFeatures1 had multiple objectives and it was, in retrospect, unlikely to achieve them all.

Themes

The tension between culture and commerce in the British film industry

The most important theme to emerge from the thesis is the continuing tension between feature films being valued either as cultural artefacts or as commercial products. This has been a characteristic of the British film industry since the 1920s and it resurfaced in the objectives of the iFeatures scheme. iFeatures was created by personnel within the regional screen agency of South West Screen, which was funded in turn by the UKFC and therefore directly influenced by its instrumental approach to cultural funding. The need for the creative industries to justify support

through the instrumental proof of improved financial metrics, rather than perceived intrinsic benefits, became more pronounced during the 1990s and this has continued to the current day. This policy was woven into iFeatures' creation and its objective for recoupment through box office success. This is part of the reason why the scheme was not wholly successful.

Commercial returns

The financial return appears to show that the iFeatures production model is not sustainable. Figure 29 summarises the returns and recoupment from the iFeatures1 slate of three films.

The films had poor box office and ancillary sales, which meant gross revenues of £93,674 was 9.4 per cent of their combined production investment of £1 million by 30 September 2014, with little expectation from the sales agent that this would improve.

If we take the net revenue after costs of £23,915, i.e. revenues that were available for recoupment, this is 2.4 per cent of the production investment. The scheme has, therefore, not recovered 97.6 per cent of the production investment, and this ignores the undisclosed overheads of the iFeatures scheme such as salaries for staff and office rent and costs.

Figure 27: The revenue and recoupment for each film at 30 September 2014.

| | Revenue | Revenue after deductions |
|-------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| <i>In the Dark Half</i> | £7,979 | -£3,667 |
| <i>Flying Blind</i> | £51,689 | £26,137 |
| <i>8 Minutes Idle</i> | £34,006 | £1,445 |
| Total for slate | £93,674 | £23,915 |

Although this represents a poor return we could look at the costs in relation to the commercial success of the global film industry. The rate of success in Hollywood is approx. 1:10 and so iFeatures has not yet made a sufficient number of films in its three iterations, if the Digital Departures scheme is ignored, to be measured by this admittedly, arbitrary, criteria. Not until 2017-18 when iFeatures 4 is completed will 12 films have been distributed and only at that point in time can the final evaluation be made on financial sustainability. However, applying this Hollywood logic is also problematic as low budget features produced in a British context make such a comparison tenuous.

The dominant logic was defined by the UKFC. Although, as Doyle et al. (2015) argue the definition of sustainability changed through the decade of the UKFC's life, by the end it had started to shift its definition of sustainability from being defined in strictly

commercial terms to incorporating creative values as criteria for success. Had this change in ethos been in place in the formative phase that influenced iFeatures' development, the initial failure of the scheme's own objectives might not have occurred.

Conflicting stakeholder agendas and the impact on the scheme

The study has demonstrated that the stakeholders had conflicting agendas and this impacted negatively on the scheme and contributed to it not achieving its objectives. The UKFC, on the surface, wanted films that would recoup its investment as shown by their refusal to fund *In the Dark Half* and *Flying Blind* as they thought only *8 Minutes Idle* was commercial enough and would give financial returns but this was not a consistent goal. Although the scheme had instrumental foundations, key stakeholders made decisions based on their own agendas, which had intrinsic criteria. The BBC wanted to support talent creation, regional filmmaking and infrastructure development to help to justify the charter renewal and licence fee negotiations. Bristol City Council used part of its marketing budget to fund their contribution to the films and so presumably hoped the scheme would contribute to Bristol's status as a media hub and attract businesses and tourist income to the area. Matador Pictures, through its investment schemes, managed to achieve its goals despite the commercial failure of the films. Matador Pictures' business model, in conjunction with its sister company Regent Capital, funded films to acquire the tax credits, and selling the tax benefits onto wealthy individuals. Combining this with

the fee structures for distributors and sales agents allowed them to extract revenues at the beginning of the revenue cascade, even on films that were unlikely to return any of their production investment. Therefore the distributors and the sales agent were able to make profits from films that could never recoup. Thus the only stakeholders that were winners in iFeatures were BBC Films, Matador Pictures and Content International as all the other stakeholders (UKFC, Nesta, Bristol City Council, and South West Screen) did not achieve their objectives.

It could be argued that iFeatures created their objectives not because there was a clear opportunity for success but to attract funding to itself. Without the commercial objectives, it was unlikely that the UKFC, Bristol City Council or the commercial funders would have wanted to be involved. The commercial viability of the scheme attracted production funds but also created a millstone that hung around the necks of the participants. It was an objective that could not be achieved as the scheme itself rejected innovative or non-mainstream aesthetic or stylistic approaches that might have, arguably, been a more successful strategy. So the scheme can be characterised as having two mutually incompatible production models. The stakeholders talked about training a new generation of filmmakers to make commercial films, while the filmmakers pursued peer approval by trying to enhance the creative potential of their films while navigating around the commercial ethos.

Flawed aspects of the scheme's design and implementation

There were many aspects of the scheme which undermined its success. The recruitment of the filmmakers was not carried through with one clear objective. Teams were selected with artistic or autonomous dispositions, which could not be changed within the short timeframe of the training. Hence, once the recruitment process was complete the iFeatures scheme had little hope to succeed in its objectives as it repeated the age-old dichotomy in British film policy. The 'cultural underpinnings' that Higson (2011) referred are seen in the interplay of habitus and social capital which confused the instrumental goals of the scheme. Therefore the filmmakers' dispositions meant that were more interested in critical success through peer approval than commercial success. In fact, the participants believed that the commercial success of films would be only possible *through* critical success. The filmmakers saw that British films such as *Submarine* (Ayodede, 2010) were authentic, unique and successful because they were able to breakout out of a niche into the mainstream. The setting of an abstract commercial goal was counterproductive as nobody knows whether a film will be a financial success. As a result, the films had very few, if any, distinctive properties for audiences to engage with and subsequently recommend by word-of-mouth.

The recruitment process was undermined by stakeholders having different agendas. *In the Dark Half* was selected despite the film's genre confusion as a psychological ghost story, which would not appeal to core audiences looking for either a psychological drama or a ghost story. Steve Jenkins, Head of Acquisitions at BBC

Films, commented that the selection panels had the effect of homogenising the films that were selected as projects had to fit into the agendas of multiple stakeholders. This arguably reduced the ability of a project to be distinctive, which would appeal to a niche core audience and increase its playability potential to break out into the mainstream. iFeatures, for all its commercial rhetoric, selected directors and producers with experience and dispositions within the European arthouse, British arthouse or the British documentary tradition. This incoherence in the recruitment strategy and the optimistic belief that they could be mentored or trained to make films against type made successful delivery of the films almost impossible.

Another issue with the scheme was its competitive process. The scheme's structure of teams being whittled down from twelve to six to three was clearly competitive. Chris Collins, Head of the UKFC's Film Fund, said that the scheme had similarities to *The X Factor* television show where contestants are rejected at the end of every episode. This was not a creative environment for talent development. After the first round of expulsions, there was the clear impression that if participants expressed creative differences with their teams or concerns with their projects, the stakeholders would regard that as a failure and the team would be dropped from the scheme. This meant that the filmmakers were discouraged from dealing with creative issues and limited the adoption of 'left field' solutions or innovations. Such innovations might have made the films distinctive, rather than derivative sub-standard features, and meant that both critical and commercial success could have been attained.

Attitudinal dissonance of participants to iFeatures' objectives

The research also showed that the scheme attempted to influence the participants' attitudes but failed. Buckingham's controversial lecture on distribution and marketing was taken by the participants as the verbatim policy of iFeatures. What they understood was that commercial success was the most important metric and this was never contradicted or clarified in later training sessions. This conception produced a barrier to the participants' engaging with potential audiences. By using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, symbolic capital, autonomous production and heteronomous production within his framework of the field of cultural production (see Bourdieu, 2012 p. 124 and chapter 4). The research has shown that production teams were mainly concerned with autonomous production as they perceived that the accrued symbolic capital would be more valuable in the long-term to their careers and progression than any economic gains or capital which would be almost impossible to achieve within the context of the UK film industry, especially in low budget production, as discussed in chapter 3. It also shows that requiring production teams to market their films within the subfield of heteronomous production would need to overcome considerable attitudinal dissonance, which the scheme's management did not recognise and therefore did not attempt to alter.

The research also discovered that Buckingham's personal views were not the same as those that he advocated in his masterclass. It transpired that he intended his talk to be a polemic – its primary aim being to introduce concepts that he assumed would be an anathema to the participants as a type of 'wake-up call'. This backfired

as it was largely ignored because participants rejected its philosophy and it became a barrier to their progress. The lecture could have been so much more progressive and helpful had Buckingham tempered this philosophy in a subsequent training day, or had a series of training sessions that reframed the term 'marketing' with 'audience engagement' – a concept that would have been more palatable to the participants. Had these lectures also used the UKFC's own research from the Digital Innovations in Distribution scheme (2010 – 2014), in particular the case studies of low budget films that engaged their audiences in new and creative ways, then this objective would have been more achievable. By framing marketing as a business rather than a creative issue, Buckingham failed as a marketer to use a basic tenet of strategic marketing: to fully understand the audience you are seeking to persuade or influence.

Talent development

Talent development has not been a uniformly positive story especially for the Bristol based creatives. *ITDH's* writer, Lucy Catherine, returned to script writing, which she had been doing before the year spent developing and finalising the script. She was critical of the opportunities that the scheme gave her and the personal cost (through not being able to take on other work). She also felt that the low budget label of the scheme was negative and restricted her ability to use the experience professionally. Catherine also claimed she would not have participated in the scheme if she had known about the costs and creative restrictions from the outset. This sentiment was

also shared by Sarah Cox, producer of *8MI*, who felt that the interference by the stakeholders negatively impacted on her team both in trying to make a better film and recoupment. In *8MI*'s case, the growing workload of marketing and distribution due to the film's delayed release by two years was damaging to Cox's ongoing production company (and her sanity). Simon Mark Hewis, *8MI*'s director, returned to academia to lecture on a film production course at the University of Gloucestershire. Alison Sterling, producer of *Flying Blind*, has been in development with other projects but has not been able, so far, to capitalise on her success. Her original writer, Caroline Harrington, has not continued with film entertainment but returned to radio scriptwriting for the BBC.

The creatives based outside Bristol have done better. *ITDH*'s director Alistair Siddons, made a second feature length documentary, *Inside Out* (2013) immediately after *iFeatures*, and has now written and produced a fiction film released in 2017 called *Trespass Against Us* (Smith, 2017) starring Michael Fassbender. This represents a considerable success for the scheme. The producer, Margaret Matheson, has seven further credits in the industry since filming through her established company, Bard Entertainments. *Flying Blind*'s director, Kasia Klimkeiwicz has continued her career back in Poland with shorts and television drama serials.

iFeatures was keen to extend Bristol's previous reputation for television drama production with long running series such as *Skins* (2007-13), *Casualty* (1986 – ongoing but ceased filming in Bristol in 2011) and *Teachers* (2001 -2004) by establishing Bristol as a feature filmmaking base. Although some production roles

were taken by south west residents, many heads of department were recruited through previous professional relationships of the participants, or through their expertise gained on other productions, and imported into the region for the duration of the production. For instance, the cinematographer for *Flying Blind* was from Poland and therefore the scheme did not achieve this ambition. The objectives appeared to be mutually exclusive as the focus on recoupment of production costs rather a priority to train a new cohort of filmmakers casts doubt on whether the scheme ever could have achieved its goals.

By comparison, the development of the Bottle Yard Studios in 2010, another initiative of Bristol City Council, the British Film Commission and the Bristol and Bath Film Offices to convert a former bottling factory into a film studio has achieved some of the objectives by building a sustainable infrastructure in Bristol. BBC Productions such as *Sherlock*, *Poldark* and *Wolf Hall* as well as Disney's *Galavant* have all been filmed there and seventeen support companies offering services including wardrobe, scaffold and prop construction have been created around the studios. It has generated inward investment of £16.7 million inward investment (Bottle Yard, 2016)

The false hope of digital disruption

The promise that digital distribution and marketing could make low budget feature film production sustainable was based on the concept of disintermediation through the disruption of traditional business models. This was, on the face of it, a laudable ambition.

However the research demonstrated that the early success for digital marketing on projects such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) was not going to be repeated as social media and the web had been co-opted by multinational companies promoting big budget films. It was hoped that digital marketing and distribution had the power to disrupt the hegemony of traditional exhibitors and distributors. This has turned out to be a naïve proposition. The belief that the US industry would cede control without a fight was extremely optimistic and ignored historical precedents such as the Dalton Duty and anti-competitive practices of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. Also, the theory underpinning the use of digital distribution, such as Anderson's economics of the long tail, was undermined by Elberse's research. She argued that as only aggregators such as Amazon were able to benefit from digital distribution and so the long term recovery of production funds for low budget filmmakers was very unlikely. The UKFC's own research into digital marketing also showed that the techniques needed expert construction and management. Digital technologies should only have been used with caveats and were clearly not the panacea to the deep-rooted issues affecting the British film industry in the 2010s.

Also digital distribution had drastically altered the funding model. The returns from the digital distribution of feature films through legal streaming services were reduced and this meant that producers and funders were far less likely to be able to repay the production investment. iFeatures' objectives, it could be argued, were strategically feasible in the early 2000s (although unlikely to be met) but the evidence showed they were clearly out of date by its launch in 2009.

DIY Marketing and distribution

The hopes for digital marketing were misplaced through not being aware of the speed of change in the digital arena; theories that applied at one point are soon outdated and superseded. The idea that DIY marketing, carried out by filmmakers, was going to be effective has also been proven to be false. The skills of filmmakers as storytellers may on the face of it have similarities with the storytelling skills required for marketing. However, as the nuances of marketing are not well-known outside marketing circles, and because filmmakers equate marketing with 'selling' rather than relationship building, the attitudinal and skills 'distance' that filmmakers needed to travel was too great. Also the time that filmmakers needed to dedicate to these processes and techniques also meant that creatives were being asked to focus on their weaknesses rather than play to their strengths. The conceptual leap of filmmakers to create marketing messages from within the story world is not impossible to imagine but having the wherewithal to turn that into an asset that improves a film's marketability was a step too far. The case studies showed that success came through traditional assets. For instance, *Flying Blind* received publicity due to the lead actress Helen McCrory's 'star value' which earned two editorial interviews in the Sunday supplements. However this would not have been possible without the distributors' internal team and PR agencies.

The research also showed that professional marketers were now dominating social media platforms. The online data illustrated that the ratio of professional posts to amateur posts on Twitter was at best 70:30. This is indicative of a campaign that

was inadequately resourced and strategically flawed. The tweets that did come from the production team or cast improved awareness of the film to the general public and acted in some degree as a testimonial to their followers, but the impact was limited. The research has shown that 'professional' posts were less persuasive as they were not authentic messages. Overtly promotional tweets that sold the film were less convincing than a tweet from someone who had seen the film, although most of these were negative in tone.

The importance of a coherent marketing strategy controlling tactics

The research has shown that marketing can only be effective with a coherent strategy that linked the different functions of the campaign within an overarching message to a defined audience. The failure to adopt a clear marketing strategy appears to be one consistent element that contributed to the poor performance of the films. The iINNOVATE fund was poorly utilised as different agencies were employed to produce marketing assets. *ITDH's* social game, *8MI's* proposed work walkout and *Flying Blind's* use of Facebook Promotions, all suffered as they never seem to be tied into a single strategy or addressed to an agreed audience. In general, the marketing budget for each film could have been more effectively spent with a greater understanding and adoption of a marketing strategy. It is puzzling to understand why, when the UKFC played such an important role in iFeature's development, ethos and training that its own research into the marketing of low

budget films, including the report from TruffleNet on *Norwegian Wood*, was not presented to the iFeatures participants as examples of good practice.

The problem of the training pedagogy

Although iFeatures was intended as a talent development initiative, the training in iFeatures was, in the opinion of most of the filmmakers, inadequate. Although iFeatures commissioned its own research which was positive, the feedback from the participants to the author was negative about the skills acquisition of the training and their preparation for their own films. The pedagogy of the intensive training sessions in Bristol, where the teams were lectured for an entire morning without any practical opportunity to apply the information, meant that they were unprepared for carrying out iFeatures' objectives in managing the marketing of their films. The author did not witness the one-to-one mentoring sessions and so cannot evaluate whether this part of the training overcame any of the issues described above, but participants were not happy with the ethos or the content of these sessions.

Creative Skillset, with a remit to provide training for the creative industries, had invested £100,000 in the scheme's training and it is therefore surprising that it should get such poor feedback from participating filmmakers as it did not meet their specific needs. The training was clearly inadequate for the specific needs of the directors. Mark Simon Hewis remarked that he was unprepared for leading a large crew. Alistair Siddons applied on his past professional documentary production skills to fiction filmmaking which did not, according to observers, translate well. Katarzyna

Klimkiewicz was unprepared for managing experienced actors according to her producer. The fact that many of the filmmakers were unprepared in filming skills and logistical issues, which professional trainers in further or higher education would have regarded as a basic requirement of filmmaking technique, meant that the training aspect appeared to be pedagogically compromised. The training ethos of the scheme was that the best teaching only comes from people in the industry. The realisation that training needs to be structured using pedagogical theories such as Kolb's learning cycle, where the training is based on learning while doing in physical exercises and reflection rather than being lectured in a classroom, would have meant that the training could have been much more relevant and effective.

The solution to these problems might have been to finance the teams to make a short 'pilot' film, based on their scripts. This would have allowed them to set a style, focus on the script, and gain valuable experience in working with crews and actors. This recommendation is not new; pilots are made in the television industry when attempting creatively to break the mould or work with an untested team. This would also have allowed the stakeholders to have understood the tone of the films and perhaps offered some insight into how the films should or could have been tweaked to meet the distribution needs.

Piracy

There has been considerable discussion by researchers into the positive aspects of piracy for filmmakers. The argument is that filmmakers need to have their work seen

by as many people as possible to increase word-of-mouth, which can then translate into increased ancillary sales or symbolic capital. However, this is not true in the field of low budget production. In this study, the evidence offered an alternative position on piracy which is that the illegal DVD rip sites, which offer the film as a free download, are cannibalising the legal sales. Also there was no evidence that viewers of illegal downloads were contributing to the digital word-of-mouth that would have offered low budget filmmakers non-financial benefits. Therefore piracy would not apply or benefit low-budget filmmakers and piracy should be regarded as a drain on their already meagre returns.

The amateur status of filmmaking in Britain

The British film industry has become so distorted that producers, directors and scriptwriters can only remain in the business if they make it a 'lifestyle' choice. These creatives work within an industry where they do not expect to make a consistent income and have chosen to work in the industry for reasons other than financial reward. This research followed Bourdieu's framework and applied it to Buckingham's positioning of films on the cultural or commercial criteria. It demonstrated that Bourdieu's framework, when applied to iFeatures, predicted the behaviour of participants, which could have allowed stakeholders to understand why they would behave in the way that they did. The need for filmmakers in the scheme to seek peer approval from the sub-set of the field of feature filmmaking, and the allocation of symbolic capital that a critically successful film accrues is the motivation

for their presence in the autonomous area of production. With the creative teams only receiving £6,000 for over a year's commitment (Catherine, 2011). The in-kind investment of £30,000 each from 'lost' fees for other commercial work (Hewis, 2012) demonstrated that the scheme relied on the teams to self-fund their participation. These team members described the intense financial pressure that they were under for up to three years when their incomes revived after the disruption from the scheme. As a result it could be said that to build a career in the British film industry you would need to have a second 'day job' or, more likely, other private sources of income, which could reduce the diversity of voices in filmmaking and thus the plurality of cultural films.

Re-evaluating the economic risk in feature film distribution

The theatrical distribution business model was also questioned by the research. The findings show that the traditional value chain and revenue cascade where exhibitors and distributors take their fees before producers, works against the financial interests of low budget producers. The fee of 20-30 per cent plus costs, was established when distributors would advance production funds based on a script and attached cast. There was a clear risk that a film would not perform in the marketplace and the advance would be lost. However, distributors now regularly take on films that have been finished and may even have had some success in festivals. So the film has been tested in the marketplace and the distributor can

personally analyse the production values and marketing assets and to a large extent, the risk has been reduced. Distributors also do not give low budget filmmakers any upfront advance on the distribution or 'minimum guarantee' payment and so have little 'upfront' financial risk. On the other hand, producers have to navigate the logistical issues of filming under a tight budget, usually with deferred fees, with a cast who may not live up to expectations, and with an inexperienced crew who are more likely not to achieve the vision. For a producer, all of these issues add up to a huge risk to their personal income and professional status as seen in the iFeatures scheme with the low sums paid to the creative team of approximately £6,000 each and their focus on peer approval. Therefore from a producer's perspective the basis for the business model and its terms of trade are flawed.

The research has shown that distributors will distribute films that have very little chance of financial success but offer the company some financial benefit. For distributors, low budget films ameliorate their business overheads of staff and rent. From a cynical perspective, the distributors could represent a film if it will earn enough revenue to cover their fees and costs, but without the expectation the film will pay anything to the producers. For low budget filmmakers the use of sales agents and distributors therefore seemed counter intuitive, as Tristram Goligher stated in the *Weekend* case study in chapter 5. He used hybrid distribution because he wanted to control the costs and reduce fees and because for him to make a film 'and not see anything for it, seemed nuts' (Goligher, 2013). Although this is the conventional expectation within the industry, it is clearly unsustainable.

Areas for further research

Any doctoral research project produces many unanswered questions that falls outside the scope of the specific project or that only emerge during the process. This project is no different. In this section I identify some new questions for further research.

One would be a longitudinal study of the creatives who have participated in the schemes to map their career development. This would allow the talent building objectives to be monitored and different schemes or initiatives to be evaluated. Supporting feature filmmakers to make one feature, which if it does not meet undefined standards of success, then a new filmmaker will be taken on, does not seem to be conducive to real talent development such as those that informed the BFI Production Fund or Channel 4's early support of filmmaking.

The marketing and distribution training provided by iFeatures was inadequate and so therefore building on the attitudes to marketing uncovered in this research could lead to further studies on how to teach creatives about the film business and what content should be included. Also, there seems to be a disconnect between the skills required to make a short film and the additional skills needed to make a feature. The publication of the BFI's Insight Reports is a welcome development and could form the basis for such research.

Whereas filmed drama has been defined by traditional distribution to cinemas, perhaps in 2016 there is time to re-evaluate how we define features to always

include production for small screens. Further research to evaluate the hybrid business models of terrestrial television, and Internet-based production could offer national cinemas or industries that have been dominated by American multinationals for so long, to move out of the shadows and become sustainable by offering diverse subjects and treatments for culturally British filmed entertainment.

Appendices

1. Table of interviews.
2. Example of entrance survey.
3. Ethics approval for research.
4. Alternative low budget schemes.
5. Buckingham's presentation: *What Do We Look For In A Film? UK Audience Indicators of Commercial Viability.*
6. The development of the iFeatures scheme from 2012- 2016.

Appendix 1

A list of interviewees with the date(s) of their interview(s), role and the reason for their interview.

| Date of interview | Interviewee and role | Team |
|--|---|---|
| 18 August 2011 8 July 2011 4 December 2013 | Alistair Siddons, Director Lucy Catherine, Writer Margaret Matheson, Producer | <i>In the Dark Half</i> production team |
| 8 November 2011 10 December 2013 7 July 2015 1 September 2012 | Sarah Cox, Producer Mark Simon Hewis, Director | <i>8MI</i> production team |
| 8 July 2011 5 February 2012 10 November 2015 19 July 2011 | Alison Sterling, Producer Katarzyna Klimkiewicz, Director | <i>Flying Blind</i> production team |
| 20 September 2011 6 November 2011 26 July 2012 | Melissa Blackburn, Production Manager Shefali Malhoutra, Script Executive Tristram Goligher, iFeatures 2 Executive Producer | iFeatures Management |
| 13 October 2011 | Nigel Thomas, Executive Producer, Matador Pictures | Funder |
| 7 November 2011 21 January 2014 7 July 2014 | Toby Melling, Sales Agent, Content International | Funder |
| 13 October 2011 3 October 2011 | Chris Collins, Head of Film Fund, UKFC Pete Buckingham, Head of Marketing and Distribution, UKFC | Funder |
| 25 November 2011 | Dan Simmons, Head of Film, Creative SkillSet | Training provider for iFeatures |

| | | |
|------------------|--|---|
| 12 October 2011 | Steve Jenkins, Head of Acquisitions, BBC Films | Funder |
| 3 October 2011 | Jacqui Barr, Marketing Executive, BBC Films | |
| 4 August 2011 | Conor McCormack, Writer / Director | Un-commissioned iFeatures participants |
| 4 August 2011 | Mathew Haynes, Writer | |
| 28 July 2011 | Abigail Davies, Producer | |
| 25 November 2011 | Dictynna Hood, Director | |
| 27 July 2011 | Emily James, documentary Director | Comparator independent filmmakers |
| 31 July 2012 | Christian Martin, Producer / Director | |
| 10 August 2012 | Guy de Beaujeu, Producer | |
| 3 November 2011 | Ed Fletcher, Co –founder and Managing Director of Soda Pictures | Distributor of <i>Flying Blind</i> |

Appendix 2

An example of the paper based entrance survey which was completed by cinema visitors as they waited for the film to begin.



PhD survey: Finding an audience for British feature film production

Thanks for taking part in this survey which is being carried out by a researcher from the University of the West of England, Bristol. Your input is essential and greatly appreciated.

Age in years:

1. About you:

| | | | | | | |
|--------|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|------|
| | | 15 - 20 | 21 - 25 | 26 - 35 | 36 - 50 | 51 + |
| | | | | | | |
| Male | | | | | | |
| Female | | | | | | |

Your postcode:

2. How did you find out about '8 Minutes Idle'? Please '✓' all that apply to you.

| | | | |
|------------------|--|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Cinema brochure | | Web trailer | |
| Family / Friends | | Newspaper / Mag review | |
| YouTube | | Facebook | |
| Web ad banner | | Blog review | |
| Twitter | | Watershed Email/website | |
| Cinema Poster | | Cinema trailer | |
| Work contact | | Other: please indicate | <input type="text"/> |

3. Please indicate on the criteria above with an 'X' **which source was the most influential?**
4. Which **3** features of the film were of interest to you? **Please select 3 from the list below.**

| | 1 st | 2 nd | 3 rd |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| The story appealed to me | | | |
| I was interested in the production scheme | | | |
| I liked members of the cast | | | |
| I like the genre/ type of film | | | |
| It is a British film | | | |
| I was asked to come along by friend / partner | | | |
| The critics rated the film | | | |
| I liked the trailer | | | |
| I like romantic comedies | | | |
| It was shot in Bristol | | | |
| I liked the film poster | | | |
| I know some of the production team | | | |
| My friends are talking about the film online | | | |
| I like films in this budget range | | | |
| Other – please indicate (.....) | | | |

5. Have you ever recommended, discussed or made arrangements to see a film via social media? Please circle your response.

YES / NO

Thanks again!

Further info at tim.tarrant@uwe.ac.uk

Appendix 3:

Copy of the application for approval from the Ethics Committee at UWE, Bristol



FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS

RESEARCH ETHICS SUB-COMMITTEE APPLICATION FORM

All students and staff intending to undertake a research project with human participants need to gain ethical approval for their proposed study before the research begins.

NB: If the proposed research involves NHS patients, patient tissues or organs, NHS staff, NHS premises, NHS data, you should NOT use this form. Please contact Patrick Lansley, FCA Research Ethics Sub-Committee administrator for further details.

Please provide all information requested and justify where appropriate. Use as much space as you need – the sections expand as you type. Use crosses [X] in the boxes that apply. Please use the guidance notes to help you with your application.

Your application needs to be completed electronically and emailed to Patrick Lansley (patrick.lansley@uwe.ac.uk). A paper copy with signatures should be sent to the School of Creative Arts within 3 days of sending the electronic version.

Please indicate here that you have included the following with your application:

- **participant consent form(s)**
- **participant information sheet(s)**
- **interview schedule (if appropriate)**
- **questionnaire (if appropriate)**
- **observation schedule (if appropriate)**
- **letter of permission (eg from a workplace)**
- **other (describe)**

For further guidance, please contact:

(patrick.lansley@uwe.ac.uk – Secretary, FCA Research Ethics Sub-Committee).

or

(Matthew.Partington@uwe.ac.uk – Chair, FCA Research Ethics Sub-committee).

FCA Research Ethics Sub-Committee

APPLICATION FORM

Part A: Section 1 Details of Research Project

A1. Name of researcher

Tim Tarrant-Willis

A2. Contact address

157 North Road, Bristol BS6 5AH

A3. Email address (if available)

timtarrant@btInternet.com

A4. Contact telephone number and whether work or home

H 0117 942 2494 M 07802 407720

A5. Is the research being undertaken as part of an educational course or degree?

Yes No

Give name of the course/degree or details of how research fits within the Faculty
e.g. small grant, scholarly work

PhD funded through AHRC Studentship award

A6. Name of supervisor/mentor

Prof Jane Arthurs

A7. Title of research

Finding an audience: evaluating new digital marketing and distribution strategies for low and micro-budget British feature films.

A8. Anticipated start date

Of PhD - Oct 2010. Of research - March 2011

A9. Anticipated completion date

Sept 2013

A10. Other key investigators/collaborators

Not applicable

Name:

Organisation:

A11. Other Research Ethics Committees that will be approached?

Not applicable

Give details

A12. Where will the research take place?

Give details

Phase 1 of the result will take place in Bristol in both private homes and offices.

Phase 2 will take place in public places such as cinemas and the streets outside cinemas.

A13. Has funding for research been secured?

Yes No Not applicable

If yes, give details of funding organisation(s) and amount secured

AHRC gave an award through their studentship award.

A14. Has the funder of the research agreed to act as sponsor as set out in the Research Governance Framework? (see note 1 below)¹

¹ In student research the supervisor normally acts as the sponsor
In unfunded staff research, the University acts as the sponsor

Yes No Not yet known Not applicable

A15. Has the employer/supervisor of the researcher agreed to act as sponsor of the research? (see note 1 below)

Yes No Not yet known Not applicable

Give details of the organisation who will act as the sponsor of the research:

Organisation:

In funded staff research, the sponsor might be the funder or the University but this must be clearly stated. If unsure, seek advice from your supervisor or Matthew Partington, Chair of the FCA Research Ethics Sub-Committee.

A16. What is the principal research question/objective?

To identify if digital marketing and distribution strategies and techniques aid low budget features to meet their cultural and commercial objectives.

A17. What are the secondary research questions/objective?

How can low and micro budget feature films use digital marketing and distribution strategies to engage audiences in the absence of large marketing budgets?

How do the production teams negotiate any conflict between their cultural and commercial aspirations for the projects in the way that their films are marketed?

Can the 'iFeatures' production and distribution model offer a sustainable framework for regional film making in the UK?

A18. What is the justification for the research? What is the background? Why is this an area of importance?

In June 2009 the UK Film Council published a study of the cultural impact of British film from 1946 -2006 called 'The stories we tell ourselves'. It demonstrated that British film holds a unique position in our culture by helping us to understand our shared traditions, beliefs and practices.

Cinema going is a popular activity in the UK. Each year over 500 domestic and international features are released, selling 164 million cinema tickets and contributing £3.7 billion to the UK economy. However, while many British films gain critical success and are regarded as culturally significant, they fail to find a profitable audience. Indeed, many do not even reach an audience: of the 535 UK feature films produced between 2003 and 2006, 47% were never released.

This research will investigate if digital marketing can help micro and low budget feature filmmakers find and reach audiences, repay their productions costs, support a sustainable British film industry and enhance the cultural impact of British feature films.

A19. Give details of methods and overview of the planned research. *(It should be clear what will happen to the research. Please include a copy of the proposed interview schedule/questionnaire/observation sessions as appropriate.*

Methods of data collection.

Phase 1

It is planned that face to face in-depth interviews with the production teams and film industry experts. It is anticipated that this will be a rich source of data and informed consent will be sought. This data will not be destroyed and help in an archive for possible future research.

Phase 2 (from Jan 2012 at the earliest)

Focus groups and surveys (Online and paper based) will be carried out with the audiences before and after performance of the films. This data will be anonymised and will be stored securely for potential future research.

Online data collection using software like Alterian SM2 will be used to track the 'discussion clusters' that grow over social networks as a response to the marketing strategies and techniques employed by the filmmakers or their agents.

Data from other organisations such as the UKFC's overnight data will also be used as a comparator.

| Potential time window | Work |
|-----------------------|--|
| | |
| 2011 | |
| | |
| Mar | Start year long data collection of iFeatures film marketing |
| Mar | Intv directors / producers |
| Mar | Intv iFeatures management team |
| Mar | Intv sales agents and distributors |
| April | Intv digital marketing consultants |
| Feb | Begin monitoring web activity |
| Mar – Dec | Locate and follow marketing of comparator feature films |
| Jan - April | Further reading of relevant literature |
| May - July | Write up draft chapters on historical context and literature review. |
| April - Dec | Potential first theatrical release of iFeatures Film A |
| March - Dec | Collection of pre release marketing data of iFeatures film A |
| March - Dec | Audience research of responses to the film A exhibition |
| | |
| | |
| 2012 | |
| | |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Feb - Dec | Collection of pre-release marketing data of iFeatures films B, C and comparator films and follow-up audience research after films are released. |
| July - Dec | Write up and publish industry report for iFeatures and funders |
| July - Dec | Further analysis of data from audience research and comparator films. Draft final chapters and conclusion |
| | |
| | |
| 2013 | |
| | |
| Jan - April | Collect and analyse any further relevant data |
| | |

A20. How is it intended the results of the study will be reported and disseminated? *(select all that apply)*

- Peer reviewed journal
- Internal report
- Conference presentation
- Other publication
- Written feedback to research participants
- Presentation to participants or relevant community groups
- Dissertation/Thesis
- Other

If other, give details

It is anticipated that this data could be disseminated in a book for either academic or popular consumption.

B1. How will potential research participants in the study be (i) identified, (ii) approached and (iii) recruited?

Include inclusion/exclusion criteria and give details for cases and controls separately if appropriate.

Phase 1

These participants will be working on the film projects. They are familiar with the researcher and know that research is being carried out on the iFeatures scheme.

The approach will be respectful and courteous. It will not be assumed that they want to take part in the research. They will be invited to participate and will have the research explained to them initially verbally and then in writing.

Recruitment will be on the signing of a consent form. This will only be presented to them after they have had time to reflect on the impact the research may have on the participants and they agree to participate.

Phase 2

The respondents will be identified by being at the public events. They will be approached by various methods . A series of posters will inform movie goers that research is being carried out, a public announcement may be possible, surveys may be left on seats with an information sheet.

Recruitment will be taken on active participation. The act of filling in a clearly worded survey with an information sheet (which identifies the research topic, the use of their contribution and the or speaking to a survey taker) will indicate consent.

B2. Will any research participants be recruited who are involved in existing research or have recently been involved in any research prior to recruitment?

Yes No Not known

If yes, justify their inclusion in your study:

B3. How are participants informed that withdrawal is possible?

This is will be explained to them in the research documentation that will be given to them whenever someone participates. It will list the process by which they can withdraw ie by writing /emailing the researcher with details of name, place of research and date. It will also identify the supervisor name, office address, email and office telephone number to complain about any aspect of the research.

Part B: Section 2 Consent

B4. Will the participants be from any of the following groups? (select all that apply)

- Children under 18 (16 in Scotland)
- Those with learning disability
- Those who are unconscious, severely ill or have a terminal illness
- Those in emergency situations
- Those with mental illness (particularly if detained under Mental Health Legislation)
- People with dementia
- Prisoners
- Young Offenders
- Adults in Scotland who are unable to consent for themselves
- Healthy volunteers (where procedures may be adverse or invasive)
- Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator, e.g. those in care homes, medical students
- Other vulnerable groups

Justify their inclusion

It is not known at present but the film certificates may not exclude those under 18. This is an important audience for research studying the impact of the Internet which younger people are in the main more comfortable with using the Internet and their approach to marketing than older respondents. The younger group of 16 – 18 year olds would therefore be useful as a comparator to older respondents.

B5. Will informed consent be obtained from the research participants?

Yes No

Give details of how consent will be obtained and by whom. Give details of any particular steps to provide information (in addition to a written information sheet) e.g. videos, interactive material. If consent is not to be obtained, please explain why not.

If participants are to be recruited from any of the groups in B4, give details of particular steps taken to protect individuals

Phase 1

Most of the potential interviewees are aware of the research having been introduced through the iFeatures scheme since Jan 2010. I have been present at many of the selection events and have made personal relationships with them. I have personal contact details for at least one member of each team. I have spoken to them and explained the reasons for the research, my funding and hopes for it. No consent forms have been presented to potential participants to date.

I now aim to contact them again via telephone and then follow up by email where I can describe the research in writing and allow the respondents sufficient time to think about any potential issues and seek clarification.

B6. How long will the participants have to decide whether to take part in the research? (days, weeks?)

Due to my previous relationship I imagine a 3 to 7 days will be adequate.

B7. Will a written information sheet be given to research participants?

Yes No

Attach a copy of the information sheet to be used

If answer is no, please justify.

B8. Will a signed record of consent be obtained?

Yes No

Attach a copy of the consent form to be used

If answer is no, please justify

B9. What arrangements have been made for participants who might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information given in English? (e.g. translation, use of interpreters etc.)

Phase 1 – this is not likely to be an issue as English will either be their first language or they will use English on a daily basis in business.

Phase 2

The research is being carried out in Bristol and potentially other British cities. The three films will be in English without any subtitles. It is assumed therefore that all respondents will have enough English to understand the survey questions. If this is not the case the research will acknowledge that some respondents could not take part.

B10. Is subsequent withdrawal of data possible if a participant withdraws?

Yes **No**

Please describe/justify

Yes this is a right of anyone involved in research and this is indicated both verbally and in the written descriptions of the research.

The contact details of the researcher and supervisor will be given to all participants so that notice of withdrawal from the research can be given in a non-confrontational manner.

The data will be kept separate where the respondent has given personal details. If a named person withdraws then their survey or responses can be removed prior to analysis.

In the case of surveys where personal details has not been supplied or recorded then withdrawal of data will not be possible. As this data will mainly be numerical (ie percentage of males who saw the film) then participants will not be compromised by their inclusion of their responses.

B11. Will group or individual interviews/questionnaires identify any topics or issues that might be sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting? Is it possible that criminal or other disclosures requiring action could take place during the study? (eg recounting of upsetting experiences, admitting to illegal drug taking)

Yes. Phase 1 will contain some discussion of marketing campaign timings, strategies or conclusions about the quality of the final films. The research may indicate through comparison with other campaigns a shortcoming in a participants employment.

However the research will not be released or published until 2 years after the end of principal photography when the films will get their first UK television screening on BBC TV. At this point the commercial exploitation of the film will have ceased and so any release will not influence future earnings. Also the strategies or decisions taken in promoting the film will most likely be out of the mind of potential future employers or business partners and the participants will have other more successful projects completed.

B12. What is the potential for pain, discomfort, distress, inconvenience or changes to life-style for research participants as a result of their participation in your study? How will this be dealt with?

The research may cause some discomfort if a film's marketing is not as successful as anticipated. However the tone of the results will not be intentionally inflammatory and so the potential risk of this will be low.

B13. What is the potential for benefit for research participants?

Phase 1

The research is attempting to improve the wealth and sustainability British film industry. All participants will benefit from the conclusions/recommendations and so should want to take part.

There may also be some kudos attached to participating in industry research.

Phase 2

The research will be designed to take place covertly during marketing so not to influence the results.

The audience surveys will be structured to be a fast a pleasant experience.

B14. How will any problems identified by the researcher during the study be referred onwards or dealt with eg helpline numbers given, counsellor available?

None. As this is not a personal issue to respondents and the process of data collection is not problematic. The results will be released in the thesis two years after principal photography has finished to allow for unhindered financial exploitation of the film.

B15. Describe what steps will be taken to protect the researcher? e.g. take mobile phone, whereabouts known by third party, staff nearby, regular supervision, etc.

Due to the nature of the research there is a low risk of personal harm. However precautions will be taken by assessing hazards – when working at cinemas during the evening only working in well lit areas. I will need for practical reasons to collect many surveys in a short period thereby working with a team in one location would be advantageous for numerous reasons.

B17. How will the results of research be made available to research participants?

If requested a summary of the results could be emailed to respondents who offer their addresses. For those without Internet access a paper copy could be sent to their homes.

B18. Will the research involve any of the following activities at any stage (including identification of potential research participants)? (Select all that apply)

- Transfer of data by floppy disc
- Sharing of data with other organisations
- Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers
- Publication of direct quotations from respondents
- Use of audio/visual recording devices
- Storage of personal data on any of the following:
 - Manual files
 - NHS Computer
 - University Computers
 - Home or other personal computers
 - Laptop computer
 - Other

Further details:

B19. What measures have been put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data? Give details of whether any encryption or other anonymisation procedures have been used, and at what stage?

The data will be held on a home desktop computer. This will require a password to access transcripts or recordings. The computer will be kept in a house with a burglar alarm and secure locks.

The computer will have anti-virus protection to prevent any malware and any unauthorised access through 'hacking'.

On Phase 1 the consent will ask for named use of their input. Where this is not given care will be taken to avoid culminative identification where numerous facts will identify the respondent ie a Bristol based film producer who is female aged 34 would limit the numbers of potential people to a very small number which other industry professional would be able to ascertain the identity of the participant.

On transcripts of focus groups this will be done after analysis. Previous versions of the documents which identify names and other personal details will be permanently deleted.

Phase 2 surveys - Where possible some personal details such as name, age, gender and contact number/email address will be requested but some respondents may prefer not to disclose personal information. It would not rule out participation if a participant wants to be part of the survey but not give information. The thesis will not list participant details except general details such as age and gender.

B20. Who will have access to the data generated by the study?

Mainly the researcher and supervisory team will have access. Transcriptions will be carried out by personnel who have been used by the university before and can give assurances of confidentiality.

B21. Who will have control of, and act as the custodian, for the data generated by the study?

The researcher.

B22. Where will the analysis of the data from the study take place and by whom will it be undertaken?

The analysis will be undertaken at the researcher's home.

B23. For how long will data from the study be stored?

0 Months 10 Years

Give details of where they will be stored, who will have access, and of the custodial arrangements for the data:

The data will be stored at UWE, with access limited to accredited researchers. The researcher will manage the custodial responsibilities of the data.

B24. How will the data be destroyed and by whom?

The data will be destroyed by a permanent method such as shredding and incineration. It will be destroyed under the instructions of the researcher, the supervisors, future custodians or the Ethics committee.

Part B: Section 5 Declaration

- The information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- I undertake to abide by the ethical principles underlying the Declaration of Helsinki, and Good Practice Guidelines on the proper conduct of research.
- If the research is given a favourable opinion, I undertake to adhere to the study protocol without agreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter sent by the University/Faculty notifying me of this.
- I am aware of my responsibility to be up-to-date and comply with the requirements of the law and appropriate guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when appropriate with the appropriate Data Protection Officer.
- I understand that research records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in future.
- I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this application will be held by the FCA Research Ethics Sub-Committee and that this will be managed according to the principles established by the Data Protection Act.

.....
Signature of the Researcher:

Date:

FOR STUDENT APPLICATIONS ONLY

- I have read the ethics application form and support this submission to the FCA Research Ethics Sub-Committee. As supervisor, I understand my responsibilities as a sponsor of the student research.

Signature of the Supervisor:

.....

Date:

.....

ENSURE THAT YOU COMPLETE THE FORM, AND ENCLOSE ALL RELEVANT ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS INCLUDING CONSENT FORM, PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND INTERVIEW SCHEDULE QUESTIONNAIRE/ OBSERVATION SCHEDULE. PLEASE SEND A HARD COPY WITH SIGNATURES TO Patrick Lansley at the School of Creative Arts, Bower Ashton Campus, WITHIN THREE DAYS OF SENDING THE ELECTRONIC VERSION. THE PROCESS OF SCRUTINY CANNOT BEGIN UNTIL THE SIGNED COPY IS RECEIVED.

'Finding an audience' research - participant information form

The Researcher

The research is carried out by Tim Tarrant as part of his PhD at the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE). The research is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and will be completed in the autumn of 2013. The results will be published as a thesis, in articles in trade and academic journals, magazines, and potentially a book. This research has been approved by the faculty ethics committee which oversees how research projects are conducted at UWE explicitly to minimize the impact of the research on participants.

Summary of the research

This post graduate research project builds on research carried out by the UK Film Council in 2009. They identified that between 2003 – 2006 47% of UK feature films were never released into cinemas. They also showed that many acclaimed projects do not find the audience to repay their production costs. This research will hopefully help British distributors, producers and filmmakers gain insights into how to develop and build sustainable audiences for British films to the benefit of the British film industry.

Participants

Your contribution to this research is essential and greatly appreciated. The research is collected as either recorded interview, focus group or a survey and your informed written consent is required. After transcribing and analysis, the recordings and data will be stored securely at the University in a locked cabinet. The research and data may potentially be used by other academic researchers in the future. Any interviews used will be attributed to the respondent together with their role e.g. 'Jane Smith, producer'. However it is important for every participant to realise that they can ask for the data to be anonymised or withdraw from the research at anytime by writing to either the researcher or supervisor.

Any complaints about the research or researcher should be directed to Prof Jane Arthurs at the address below.

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Appendix 4

Other low budget production schemes

This very brief overview of alternative low budget production schemes aims to allow readers to understand how iFeatures was just one of many different schemes which intended to build regional infrastructure and develop talent. iFeatures was not an unique experiment, but it did have unique features which, although flawed, it is still in operation whereas other schemes have ceased to exist.

Film London created the first scheme called Microwave in 2006 (Bayes, 2013 npn.). It had an intensive approach to filmmaking training, creating the ‘training through production’ template that other schemes mimicked (UKFC, 2008, p. 40). Skillset ran an intensive four-day training session for teams to develop their projects before going into the selection process, consisting of pitches to an industry panel. The films needed to be produced for a total cost of £100,000 - made up of a grant from Microwave of £75,000 with the remainder having to be found by the production team. This was designed to encourage entrepreneurialism and reflected the UKFC’s instrumentalism (as described in Chapter 3). The BBC contributed to the production budget in exchange for the free-to-air UK television rights. No theatrical distribution arrangements were in place with each team negotiating on a film-by-film basis. *Shifty* (2008), an urban thriller about a drug dealer whose life is turned around by the reappearance of a childhood friend, achieved critical and commercial success: it was BAFTA-nominated and earned £147,000 in box office taking; more than 50,000 copies on DVD were sold, due in part to its sound track (Raindance, 2012 npn.).

The Atomic Pictures development fund was launched in 2007 by the Northern Film and Media Agency (NFM) in collaboration with a production company called Pinball Films located in the North-East. Pinball agreed to deliver between two to four micro-budget features with NFM providing £100,000 for the slate of productions. Pinball was responsible for supplying additional funds from various grants and investors. The selection process for films chosen was based on two main criteria; their commercial potential and expected recoupment of the projects, and the creative potential of the filmmakers. There was also an expectation that the scheme would help to develop a commercial feature filmmaking infrastructure in the North East. However, Pinball only completed one film *Brilliantlove* (Horner, 2010) (BFI, 2015 npn.).

Moxie Makers was another micro budget film scheme based in the North East of England. It was managed by a production company Ipso Facto Films, which sought 'fresh, engaging, and original films with commercial appeal that can be realised on budgets from £150,000 up to £500,000' (Microwave, 2014 npn.). Moxie Makers produced two films in the scheme *Who Killed Nancy?* for approximately £300,000, and *Mad, Sad and Bad* with a budget of approximately £200,000 (IMDb, 2014). Both films were released by Soda Pictures, a London based independent distribution company 'of art house, independent and world cinema' founded in 2002 by Eve Gabereau and Edward Fletcher (Soda Pictures, 2015 npn.). Moxie Makers also organised The Big Pitch in 2008, a skillset supported production scheme in which teams pitched their ideas to compete for £250,000 in production finance. *Different Shades of Graham* won the competition and Soda Pictures was to distribute. However, there is no published information to confirm if *Different Shades of Graham* was completed or distributed.

In addition to the aforementioned schemes, one private company, Warp, also developed a successful low-budget feature film initiative in 2008. Warp, through sister company Warp X, had been able to develop a successful digital production and distribution model for the music industry through a £150,000 grant from Nesta in 2001, and subsequently in 2004 applied to run the UKFC's Low Budget Feature Film Scheme, winning an award of £4.5 million to produce a slate of seven low-budget features between 2008-13 with budgets between £400,000-£800,000, a figure that was later increased to £1.3 million. These films were designed 'to provide creative opportunities for first-time directors without the pressure for box-office success' (Spicer and Presence, 2016 p. 20). In fact ten films were completed and these included art house – *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012) and commercial films – *Donkey Punch* (2008). Warp achieved critical and commercial success with *Four Lions* (2010) and *Submarine* (2011).

This brief round out illustrates that iFeatures was not the only production scheme initiated by regional screen agencies. The schemes were popular as they offered the ability to support indigenous film production, build local filmmaking infrastructures and, potentially, recoup the production finances. The schemes illustrated many approaches to achieving these goals although as Microwave and iFeatures are the only schemes still in operation in 2016 the objectives were not met and finance was distributed in other ways.

What do we look for in a film?

UK Audiences and Indicators of Commercial Viability

Peter Buckingham - UK Film Council

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Who Is The Audience? Topline Information

- **Young.** 15-24s represent 32% of the population, but 40% of cinema audience. By contrast 55+s represent 34% of the population, but only 20% of the cinema audience. 35-44s who make up 38% of cinema audience represent 35% of the population.
- **Upmarket.** ABC1s represent 49% of the population, but 60% of the cinema audience which increases up to 66% amongst heavy cinema goers. Rule of thumb; the older the audience, the more upmarket.
- **Frequency.** 15-34's form 60% of heavy cinema goers and within that 40% are from the 15-24 group. Medium cinema goers are 50% of 25-44's. The 55 plus make up 32% of the light cinema goers.

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How do we define the audience? One way Is Clustering



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UCI Clusters



Film fanatics

Male, pre-plan their trip. Go in 2s.
25-44. Review led.

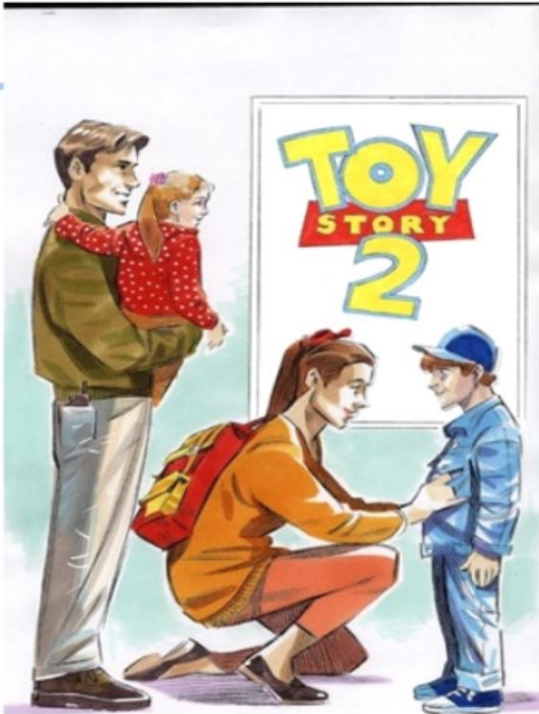


Impressionable socialites

Male/female. Under 25. Like
blockbusters. Led by ads.

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Modern families

Kids pressurising the parents.



Fun lovers

Not film literate. Big TV and video consumers.



Hero seekers

35 plus. Don't go out much, and plan well in advance.



Impulsive Materialists

Fashion victims, affluent, dinner-film-drinks. Word of mouth key.



Youth of today

See films as soon as they come out

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A research lead tool.....

Set to find two things:

- How do audiences really behave and why?**
- Are there any possible 'tools' to help film makers and distributors in assessing the viability of the project?**

Who we spoke to

Very Mainstream Types

I only like romantic films / action films that are recognised as 'big films' / blockbusters

General Film Goer (majority)

Broad variety of films enjoyed. Unlikely to seek out European / Foreign films

Film Buffs

Collecting mentality. Pride in watching 'different' and 'difficult' films i.e. European / Foreign subtitled complex plots. Can think of themselves as 'working in film'

The majority of people we spoke to were General Film Goers

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Activities more important than film

For most people (except some Film Buffs)

Men

Music
Drinking
Sport
Socialising
TV

Women

Music
Socialising
Shopping
TV

Younger

Music
TV
Computer
Games
Socialising
Shopping

Although there is this ranking, socialising and to a lesser extent, music (soundtracks) are important factors in the decision to go and see films. Also, films still play an important part in people's lives.

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The Role of Film in People's Lives

From the research, it is clear that one of the main roles for film is that they act as an antidote to people's everyday lives when they are called upon to be 'in control' and 'responsible':

"Films make you forget what is on your mind"

"You escape from yourself, day to day activities and work"

"You hardly ever enjoy work. It's every single day"

"If work was what you wanted it would be like in films. You wouldn't have to do that much and it would be fun"

Film is important to people. It satisfies many of their unfulfilled desires.

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Unfulfilled Desires at Work (MORI)

- Excitement
- Exhilaration
- Power
- Fun
- Ambition
- People to admire
- Creativity
- Imagination
- Innovation
- Style and glamour
- The surprising and the unexpected

To a large extent the role of film is to fulfil people's desires. This needs to be borne in mind when people talk about which films they enjoy and why.

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What film shall we go and see?

Once people are in the film going frame of mind their decision making about what they will go and see is affected by:

- What their partner / friends want to see. Often, the choice of film is a compromise. However, people still want to feel the film they will see will give them a peak experience i.e. they will leave the cinema on a high.
- No one wants to be blamed for choosing a 'bad' film. Apart from the emotional reasons attached to seeing a 'bad' film, it can also feel like a waste of money.
- In a group of friends, those films that polarise, are unlikely to be seen - even if a large minority like them. So, inclusive blockbusters will always win out.
- People do not like seeing films on their own and £7 is felt to be a significant amount of money especially when the group's entrance fees are totalled up together

Going to the cinema is still felt to be an event. So, no one wants to make a mistake. This contrasts with watching a video at home where people do not mind as much about choosing a more 'risky' i.e less enjoyable (probably not as 'cinematic') film. As well as rationally, emotionally people always like to feel they picked a winner.

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Drivers and Barriers

Given people's desire not to make a mistake, and also in order to make a quick and effortless decision, they look for clear signals the film really is one they will like:

Drivers

Genre I like
Actors I like / top names (who are well cast)
Producers I like:
Tarantino, Spielberg & Scorsese
Well known book
Everyone's talking about it
i.e. friends, critics and media
Good and obvious hook
Surprising twist
(Soundtrack)

Barriers

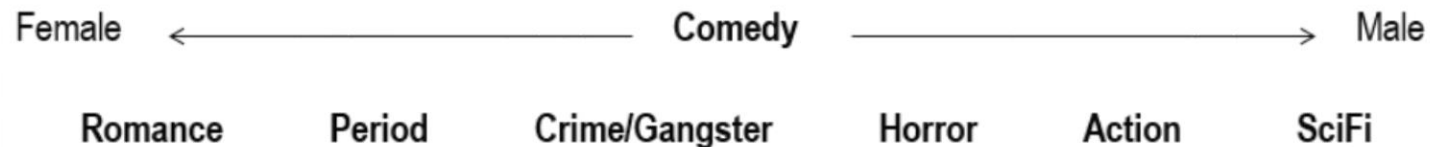
Genre I don't like or genre not clear
No big names and actors I do not like, never heard of them
"Same few actors" i.e too predictable/samey
Don't know the story
No one is talking about / heard of the film
No obvious hooks or surprising twist

Films need to quickly and obviously signal "*they are for me (us)*".
"*You need to be able to explain to your friends why they should go and see it with you*".

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Crossing the male-female divide

Although people generated a whole variety of types of films/genres in the sessions eg animation the main categories were:



Women were much more favourable than men to seeing romantic and period films. Men tend to favour action and SciFi films and any films with a lot of violent/aggression. However, when genres combined with comedy they were then able to cross the female/male divide.

"Bridget Jones was really a film for us" (Women)

"I disagree. I thought it was funny. I enjoyed it" (Men)

"Even horror films these days are often very funny" (Women)

In order to have maximum appeal films need to appeal to men and women - even if they are paying attention to different aspects. Comedy is a great unifier.

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The appeal of U.S. films

Whenever the audience were asked which films they most preferred - British or American the latter was invariably selected (although in their hearts most wanted to pick British)

Specifically American films are positively associated with:

Epic

Excellent, exciting and exhilarating

Glamour and style

Escapism and fantasy

Heroic

Romantic

Most recognise American films have much more resources to deliver what the audience want from film. Also, America have helped define expectations of what a 'good' film is i.e. high in emotion, visual and entertaining. (Contrasting with U.K. films which are felt to be from a more literary, cerebral and issues led tradition).

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U.S. Films - Negatives

The negatives associated with U.S. films are:

- **ive**

- Moralistic
- Unrealistic
- Schmaltzy
- Patriotic
- Squeaky Clean

"Its when Americans believe they are the only ones to save the world"

"They could never have made Trainspotting. They have to tell us drugs are wrong"

"Apart from Tom Hanks Forrest Gump was pure schmaltz"

Although U.S. films give the audience much of what they want there is still a clear role for British films in people's film going repertoire.

British Films – Positives

+ ive

- Characters and situations I can identify with
- Likely to be fresh new acting talent and / or established actors who really can act (Dench, Rickman, McGregor etc)
- “British humour is something no one else can do”
- Authentic / believable. Not the ‘typical Hollywood treatment’

+ ive

- Intelligent, fresh and original. Likely to have twists and turns and be multi-layered
- Unsentimental, amoral and clever
- Opportunity to see people who really break the rules. Not afraid to deal with taboos. Daring

At there best, British films are highly believable and easy for the audience to relate to when they are executed in a way that is funny, clever (knowing) and is not over sentimental or schmaltzy. (Soundtracks can be a good way to capture the British attitude and feel of the film).

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British Films – Negatives

- ive

- No known faces and / or same old faces
- Depressing and grim locations / stories or period romps
- Not cinematic. Better to watch on video / tv (lacking heightened emotions, big names, small scale themes, quirky and production values)
- No real peak moments so do not engender real emotions
- Moralising and worthy
- Limited and predictable (*"they are either working class or very middle class and they seem very samey"*)

British films at the worst can seem mundane, predictable and in some cases grim. Also, they can seem more appropriate for video i.e. lacking cinematic qualities. However, when people say 'more appropriate for video' they are still more likely to choose blockbuster/popular cinema films.

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Mapping Films

Throughout this presentation we have seen the importance of:

Positive and negative American traits

- Uplifting and glamorous
- schmaltzy and moralising

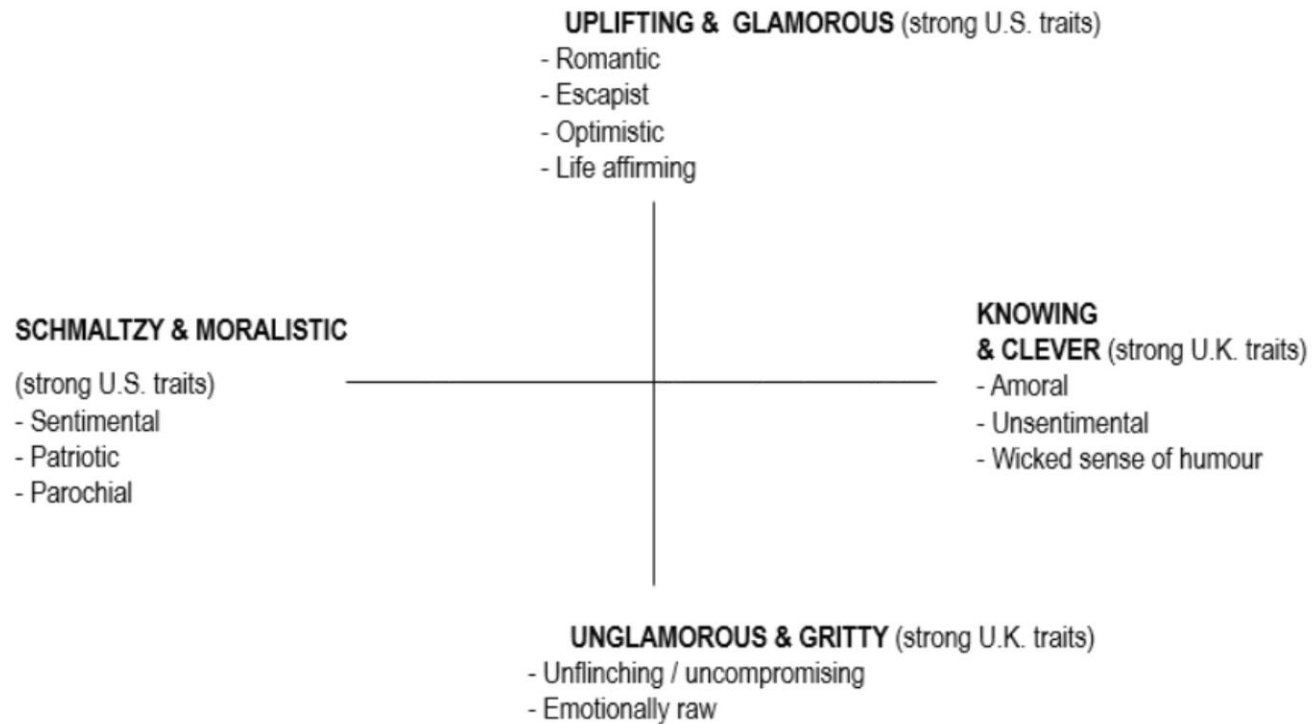
Positive and negative British traits

- Knowing and clever
- Unglamorous and gritty

These traits inform the way the audience think about films and how they select what to go and see.

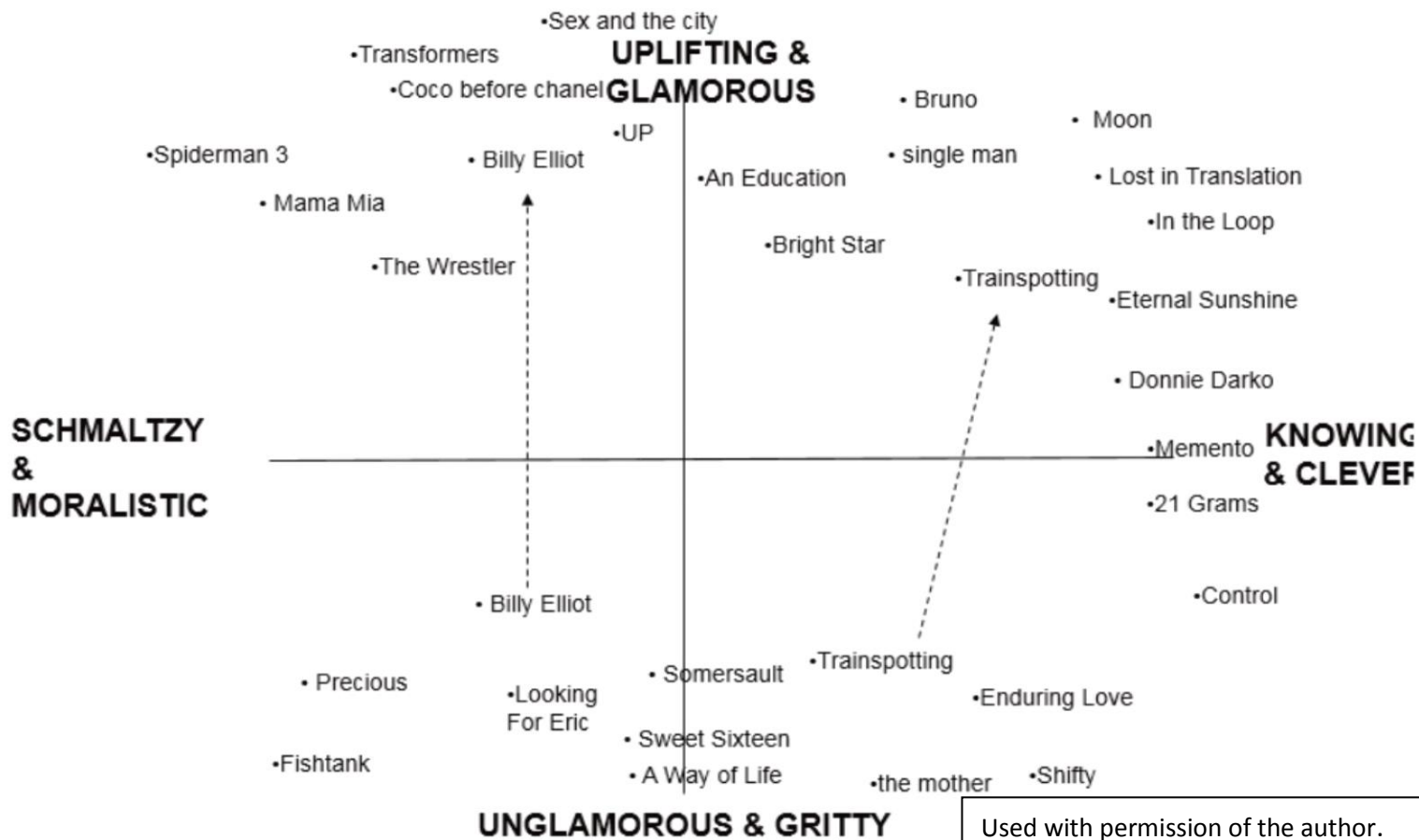
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Mapping Films

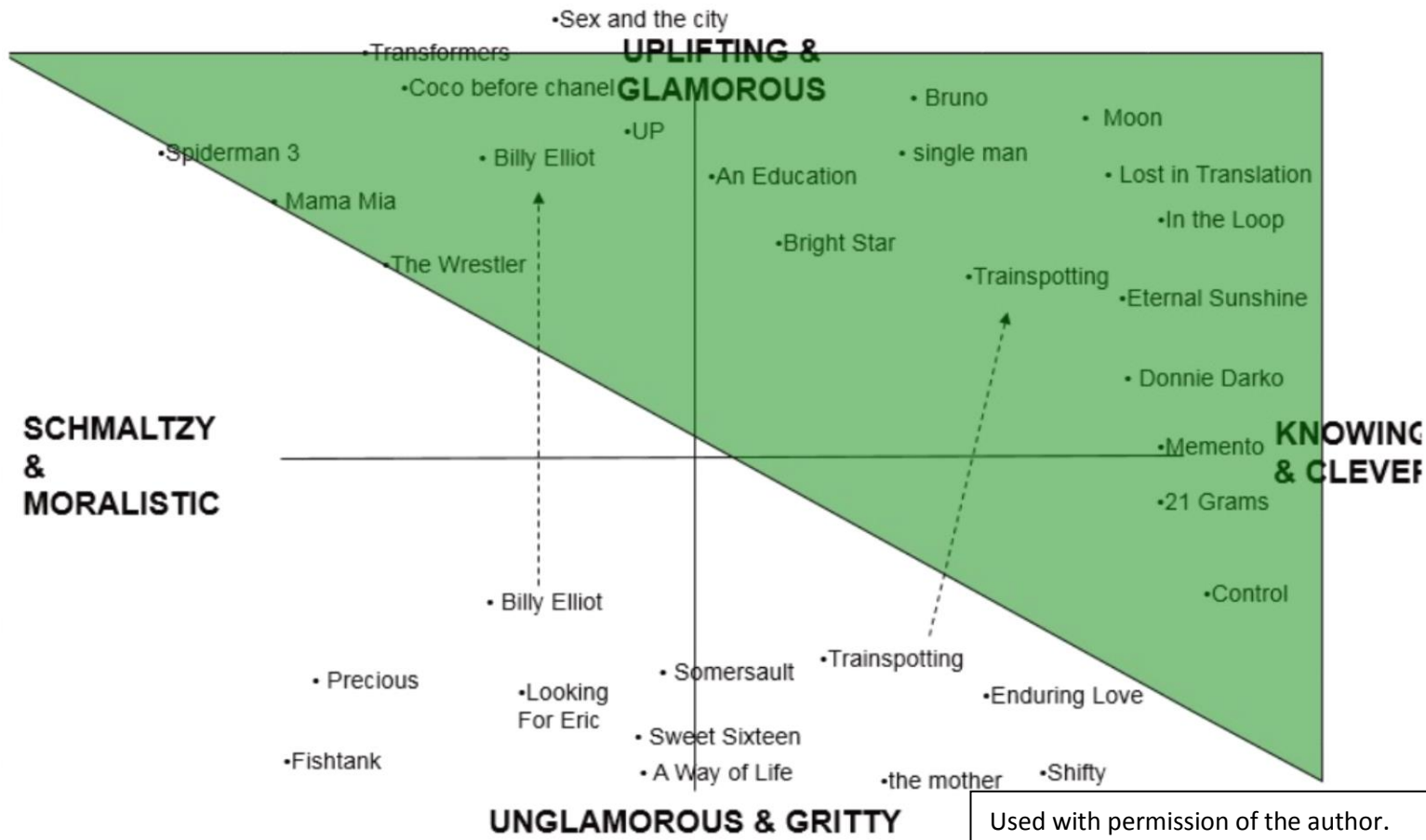


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What films are working for British audiences?



What films are working for British audiences?



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Summary

In order to draw on the strengths of British film and have a truly competitive edge:

MUST BE

Must have a critical mass of:

- Clear genre (will answer the male/female issue)
- Great hook and ideally a great twist
- Great soundtrack
- Well known story, actors and producers
- Cinematic (theme/way film looks and feels)
- In the knowing and clever/and uplifting (life affirming) quadrant

MUST NOT BE

- Genre unclear
- Poor hook and poor/no twist
- Poor soundtrack
- Not a well known story/actors and producers
- *"Could be watching this on T.V"*
- Schmaltzy and moralistic
- Or in the depressing quadrant (unglamorous and gritty take out)

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British Films 2000-2004 key stats

- 388 films released
- Total Box office £572m
- Average £1.4m
- 21% over £1m
- 33% 100k to £1m
- 46% (184 films) under 100k

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Year of certification % of s.48 films not released in the UK

Of 808 s.48 films certified between 1998 and 2004, by 2 July 2006 :

- 442 had **not** been released (54.7%)
- 366 had been released (45.3%).

s.48 film: a film certified by DCMS as British (either as Schedule 1 or co-production) with a budget of £15m or less

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-
- 535 UK films were produced between 2003 and 2006.
 - 236 films were released theatrically – 44% - within 2 years of completion.
 - 47% have NEVER been released.

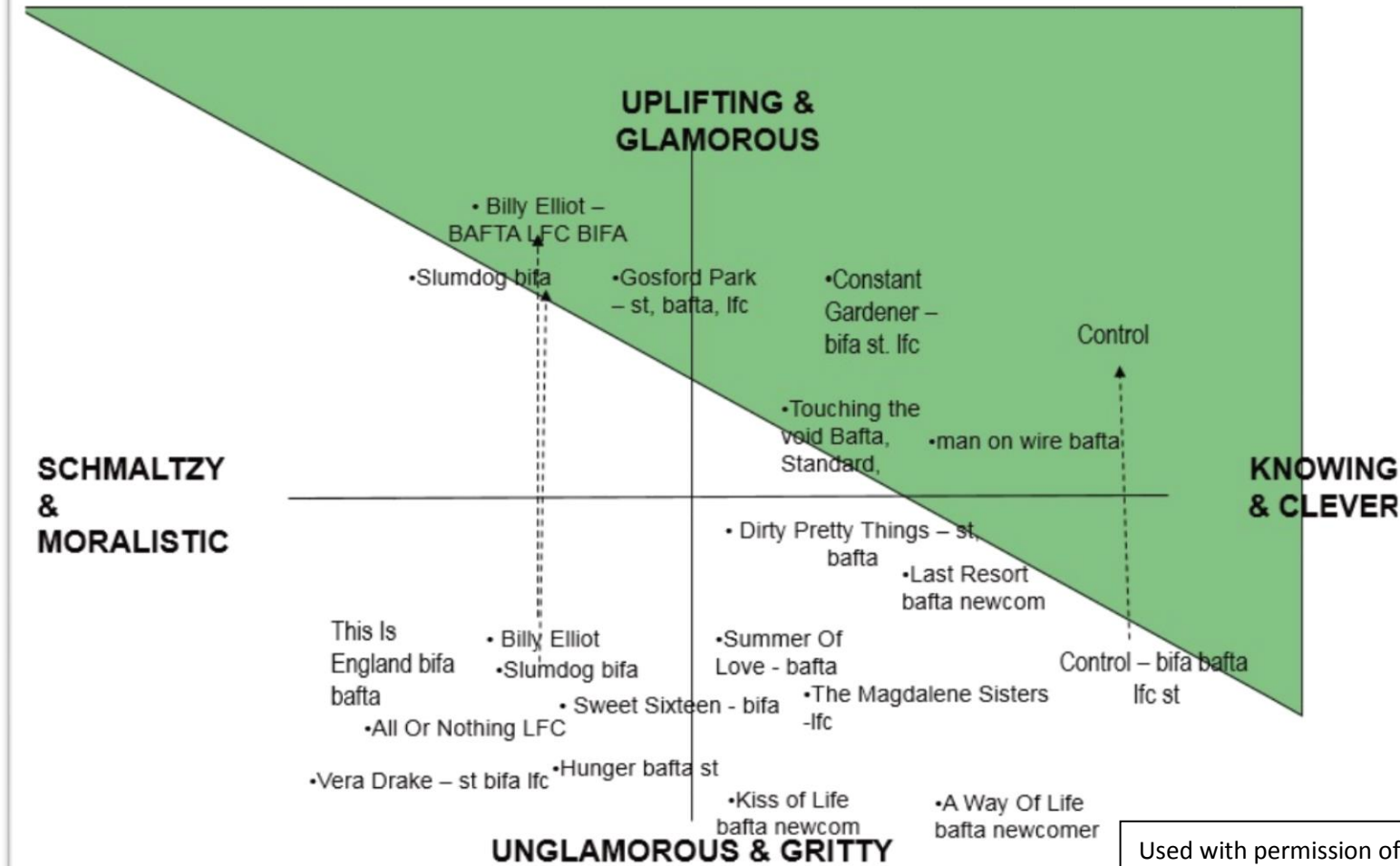
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Year of certification % of s.48 films not released in the UK

- 1998 37.7%
- 1999 36.8%
- 2000 50.8%
- 2001 60.5%
- 2002 58.0%
- 2003 59.9%
- 2004 60.5%

**Bafta, Bifa, London Film Critics, Ev Standard Best
British film awards 2000-2009**



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Critical Success factors....your turn.....

| TITLE | CLEAR GENRE? | ACTORS WELL CAST?/ WELL KNOWN 'PRODUCE RS'? | KNOWN SOURCE? | POTENTIAL BUZZ? | HOOK/ TWIST? | NEW/ DIFFERENT? |
|------------|--------------|--|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| A NEW FILM | ✓✓ ✓✓✓ | ✓ | | | ✓✓ ✓✓ | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

If the genre is not obvious there needs to be an appealing hook to compensate eg 'Ballet Star in a macho mining community'. If neither the genre and the hook are clear or motivating the film will struggle to be selected. If 2 or 3 of the criteria are satisfied then word of mouth/media hype can be optimally achieved. Soundtracks are also increasingly important these days.

Specialised film audience data from CAVIAR Film Monitor

| Title | Male | Female | 15-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55+ |
|------------------------|------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| <i>Downfall</i> | 78 | 22 | 20 | 24 | 23 | 14 | 19 |
| <i>Pan's Labyrinth</i> | 52 | 48 | 39 | 12 | 25 | 11 | 13 |
| <i>Volver</i> | 50 | 50 | 20 | 24 | 10 | 24 | 22 |
| <i>This is England</i> | 60 | 40 | 59 | 12 | 13 | 12 | 3 |

Source: CAA CAVIAR Film Monitor

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Exit Poll data – *The Lives of Others*

- 263 people surveyed; 51% male; 42% aged 25-34
- *Sources of information:* 100% reviews (all media); 35% word of mouth; 35% trailer in cinema; 22% posters; 17% newspaper/magazine advertising
- *Baits to attendance:* Good reviews (56%); Story appealed to me (52%); Genre/type of film (42%); Award win/nomination (28%)

Exit poll data – *Man On Wire*

- 69 people surveyed; 57% male; 54% under 40
- *Sources of information:*
Newspaper/magazine articles (27%);
Reviews (27%); Posters (16%); Television news and talk shows (13%)
- *Baits to attendance:* The story appealed to me (50%); Good reviews (43%); Genre/type of film (16%)

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Exit poll data - *Adulthood*

- 157 people surveyed; 55% female; 80% under 24
- *Source of information:* Posters (64%); Online (56%); TV adverts (56%); Word of mouth (47%); Radio (29%)
- *Baits to attendance:* Sequel to *Kidulthood* (66%); The story appealed to me (44%); Story set in UK/London (40%); The genre/type of film (39%); My friends are talking about it (25%)

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Thanks.

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Appendix 6

The development of the iFeatures scheme from 2012- 2016.

This thesis has been concerned with the first iteration of iFeatures including the production and the distribution and three films from 2009 to 2014. As the case study for *8 Minutes Idle* showed, the iFeature1's management was already planning the second and third iterations within this period. This brief overview aims to describe and evaluate how the changes to the scheme indicate what lessons were learned from the first iteration, and what changes were made to the subsequent versions.

iFeatures2, 2012 - 2015

iFeatures2 launched in March 2012 with a submission deadline for applicants of 8 May 2012. Chris Moll handed over the day to day running of the scheme to Tristram Goligher, producer of the low budget success *Weekend*. The plan was to recruit sixteen teams of producer, director and scriptwriter into the initial development programme for eight weeks to develop a detailed treatment. After a pitch in August 2012 and evaluation of the treatments, eight teams would go forward to develop their scripts up to December 2012. At this point all the projects were reviewed by the stakeholders made up of Creative England, BFI and BBC Films (and importantly without any commercial partners such as Matador pictures and Content International) and three projects would be greenlit with the remainder put into 'turnaround' and encouraged to be developed outside of the scheme. The main difference was that more teams were included in the development process, so there was a greater pool of projects for the selection panel to choose from and develop through into production. This could be interpreted as a response to iFeatures1. The process of selecting projects focused

on those that developed fastest but that subsequently required extensive rewrites after issues surfaced during filming *In the Dark Half*. Therefore having more projects to develop before the greenlight decision could have prevented similar issues. However, the application process still required only a submission of a written portfolio which included a 2,000 word outline of the film that indicated its vision and structure rather than a more worked out treatment. The scheme was still focused on the accelerated script development process which was iFeatures major differentiation with other low budget schemes such as Microwave, which required a full script in its application. However, the main requirement of submitting an idea for a feature film rather than a script itself still remained and this appeared to allow the problems of iFeatures1 to continue.

The clearest change to recruitment into the scheme was the need for previous experience in filmmaking, to attempt to ensure commercial success. The guidelines stated that 'iFeatures is not for the inexperienced. It is aimed at people who have demonstrable ability to deliver a feature length film on £350,000, of a scope and quality that has the potential to *break out* nationally and internationally.' (iFeatures2, 2012 p. 7 *my emphasis*). The films were still intended to be strong enough to compete in the mainstream as the guiding ethos was to make 'Stories of England that can reach the world' (ibid., p. 1). As a result, each member of the team needed to have had two pieces of work recognised professionally, produced or commercially released rather than a two examples of work from the whole team. Clearly, there was a greater emphasis on having a proven ability to deliver films.

The three films that were finally shortlisted, produced and finished but have had limited success. *Norfolk*, a story about a mercenary whose past life catches up with his him and his family, had not received distribution by the May 2016, but has made some impact in six

festivals such as Dinard, Rotterdam, and Edinburgh. *The Goob* was released by Soda Pictures after good performance at festivals in 2015 such as Venice, and SXSW. It was nominated at the British Independent Film Awards (BIFAs), National Film Award and Cineropa awards, and won The Golden Hitchcock prize at Dinard, and Best Music award at Stockholm. It went on release in the UK in May 2015 and made £22,847 in four weeks from four screens (BF1, 2015). The third film, *Spaceship*, about a father's search for his daughter after an apparent alien abduction, was in post-production for 12 months with no indication of a distribution deal although it was premiered at SXSW festival in March 2016 (iFeatures, 2015).

iFeatures3, 2014 - ongoing

In January 2014, the third iteration was launched with a deadline for submissions of March 2014 under the guidance of Christopher Granier-Deferre, who has had a long career in features and shorts as an executive producer. The selection process was the same as iFeatures 2, with sixteen teams selected by submission of a written portfolio. Following this, eight teams went forward into the later stages of full script development, with three teams greenlit in January 2015 with a budget of £350,000. The main difference of iFeatures3 was the requirement to submit a full treatment for the finished film rather than an outline. This seemed to be a recognition that the accelerated script development process was counter-productive. The focus of the scheme emphasised international success with 'stories of England that can reach the world' (iFeatures2, 2012 p. 1) changed to 'stories that move, entertain and challenge' (iFeatures3, 2014 p. 1). The revised scheme also emphasised the requirement for the teams to be 'commercially savvy, who can envisage the audience for

the film and are capable of delivering sales/distribution strategy to maximise its reach and impact' (ibid., p. 7) through working with specialist distribution 'partners'.

Three films in the slate have not been finished as at May 2016. *Apostasy* is a story about conflicts between family life and fundamentalist religion and has not yet been released.

Lady Macbeth follows the sexual awakening of a repressed wife in 19th century England and her obsession with the object of her desire. By 25 June 2017 it had earned £799, 045 on the back of very positive reviews and potentially iFeatures most successful film. *The Levelling* tells the story of a family dealing simultaneously with the devastation of the floods in South West England and a family tragedy. It grossed as of 27th June 2017 of £79, 476. The teams had members with professional credits including Rachel Robey of Wellington films who produced the critically acclaimed low budget *London to Brighton* (2009), William Oldroyd, who had many theatre direction credits, and Andrea Cornwell as the producer of *Suite Francaise* with Kristen Scott Thomas (2014) and *Last Days on Mars* (2013).

iFeatures 4 – 2016 - ongoing

At the time this thesis was being revised, iFeatures4 was launched on 8 February 2016 and submission closed on 29 March 2016. The budget was still £350, 000 and the scheme's stakeholders were looking for 'ambitious stories well told [that] can break out to achieve critical and commercial success'. In other words, for films that are British films with universal themes that could appeal to mainstream audiences. The films would ideally also 'transcend low production budgets, and engage audiences in the UK and world-wide, regardless of the type of camera they are being shot on or the distribution platform they are

being experience from.’ (ibid., p. 2). This is an interesting development as it suggests that they are more open to projects that would offer filmmakers creative experimentation and recognise an outcome of peer approval as a success. The guidelines used *Weekend* (Haigh, 2012) and *Tangerine* (Baker, 2015) as exemplar films (iFeatures, 2016, p. 2) both of which received critical success and, later, commercial success.

The criteria for selection was still to be based on the ‘quality of the project, ability and potential of the filmmaking team, audience and market potential of the project.’ (ibid., p. 4). Applicants were required to apply with a treatment for their project of no more than 5,000 words. Scripts would be worked up to first and second draft through the process and training appears to be more focused on the development of the script and stories with ‘advance story structure and script development seminars’ (ibid., p. 5) as well as a selection of business orientated topics including ‘financing through to production, sales, marketing and distribution all designed to enhance the creative and commercial skills of each filmmaking team’ (ibid.).

There was, however, no indication that teams were expected to do any DIY marketing. As a result, the scheme has been adapted to build on the existing strengths and to mitigate its perceived weaknesses.

Conclusion

As has been shown, in the four iterations of the iFeatures scheme, there have been substantial changes. In the first scheme there was a clear expectation that digital marketing and distribution could overcome the limited budgets and experience to allow the low

budget films to reach an audience and recoup its budget. The ability for iFeatures 2 and 3 to continue to evaluate more projects as they developed allowed those which had a slower development trajectory to remain in the process and have greater choice and projects to reveal any issues before being greenlit. There was a subtle change in the expectation for the teams to market and distribute their films with an acceptance that established distribution systems were going to be necessary. It is not known what the income of each of the films that have been distributed as the author does not have the ongoing relationship with those projects and their distributors but if the BFI weekend box office figures are indicative then iFeatures1 has been successful than iFeatures2 as a slate due to fact that more of the films achieved theatrical distribution. However *Lady Macbeth* is on course to be a the one film that could justify the whole investment in the scheme.

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