

## **Special Section Introduction: “Moving Targets”**

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The influence of audiences on the design and development of digital content, and the nature of the relationship between audience and producer, continues to grow and adapt in response to the emergence of new digital platforms and adoption of new engagement activities by commercial and cultural content producers. As a result the line between audiences and creators has been blurred and in many cases has disappeared completely. The articles presented in this *Participations* Special Section explore and discuss a range of approaches developed by researchers, companies, cultural organisations and audiences to engage and collaborate in the creation of digital products and services. These examples are aimed at developing audiences not only for the product but also for the experience of collaboration, co-creation and community that surrounds it.

These activities have been the subject of “Moving Targets”: a three-year project conducted by a consortium of Scottish universities, small to medium sized digital media companies (SMEs), and cultural organisations. “Moving Targets” is a demand-led knowledge exchange project that seeks to promote audience collaboration and development with SMEs and stakeholder organisations across the digital media and cultural sectors. The project culminated with a mixed academic and practitioner conference held in Dundee Contemporary Art Centre in October 2013. New behaviours, creative and collaborative practices and audience expectations that have been promoted by technological developments, direct publishing practices and collaborative platforms on the web are discussed across three broad themes; co-creation, audience engagement and understanding audiences. Where these themes are used to organise the discussion they are not mutually exclusive. In many cases discussion in one theme raise interesting questions that are addressed in others.

Co-creation involves audiences in the design and development of media content, facilitating the development of, and engagement with audiences. It invites user generated content to be incorporated into projects in an effort to build social networks and online communities around media products and companies. These papers present approaches to audience collaboration with media products and organisations to build a sense of community, shared value and personal loyalty through the shared experience of co-

creation. Case studies of projects delivered in partnership with audiences are presented to highlight the benefits and challenges of working directly with audiences in this way. The activity of co-creation in this context refers to the co-design of products and services and also includes the co-creation of experience and opportunities for participation. The discussion raises a number of definitive issues relating to audience collaboration and highlights tensions between authorship and ownership, enthusiasm and expertise, participation and production.

In 'Reflections on Co-creation', Mehrpouya et al. suggest a correlation between the tensions in creative collaboration and the Open Source Software (OSS) community. Drawing parallels between open source development and co-creation, the authors suggest that the adoption of principles developed in the open source community could be applied to creative collaboration to help define relationships between collaborators and resolve questions around authorship and ownership. Alternately in 'Practicing Equality', Fremantle & Harris present a case for locally negotiated participation as a vehicle for the empowerment and engagement of excluded groups in creative practice. Somewhere in the space between, von Jungfeld et al. promote a co-creative approach that brings a range of practices and disciplines together to promote a new approach to craft production (3D printing). 'Crafting Public Space' asserts that the combined expertise across individuals promotes confidence in the group to achieve the project aims.

Interestingly, each of these approaches seeks to develop strategies for co-creation. However, the strategies diverge in response to the nature and desired outcome of the group experience rather than the production process. This leads to the assumption that co-creation may be more effective as a community building practice than a functional creative practice, and raises questions about the purpose of co-creation and the motivations for participation and collaboration.

The theme of engaging with audiences explores ways in which audience responses can be interpreted and deployed to improve products and services through an understanding of audience motivations. Measuring engagement involves research into modes, frequency and depth of participation, and the nature of audience behaviour as an indicator of the fecundity of opportunities for interaction. Models for new digital marketing, informed by effective data gathering, web analytics and sentiment analysis alongside traditional audience development strategies are discussed. Articles cover a range of examples of online and location specific audience behaviours elicited in response to cultural and media products or events, and the methods developed to interpret audience responses for use in audience development.

In 'Documenting Debate', Galloway & Donald present an analysis of online audience participation in an online debate that responds to a broadcast documentary. The analysis highlights the risks of failing to design audience engagement that ensures the quality of audience engagement, and mismanaging audience participation to allow full participation when a vocal minority dominate the discussion. The paper follows up on the lessons learned and changes implemented by the programme makers.

Licia Calvi explores the nature of assumed roles in performance spaces and the challenges associated with breaking audience out of the established role to become participants in the authorship and evolution of interactive performance. 'Performative Interactions' searches for design strategies and a theoretical framework for the development of engaging experiences and embodied interactions that can catalyse participation and expose the audiences role in authoring the meaning of digitally mediated cultural outputs. In 'Playing outside the box', Mavridou & Sloan discuss participatory culture through the burgeoning phenomenon of fan art relating to video games. The authenticity of the participation in the recreation or adaption of original works and the unspoken collusion of the authors flies in the face of the copyright and IPR laws that protect them. This paper highlights ways in which fandom extends the longevity of games and other media and how new media created in response allows the audience to continue to engage with the characters and narratives of the original work.

The final theme, 'Understanding Audiences', explores the evolving nature of the relationship between content creators and their audiences that is characterised by a shift from product to service and is a result of new direct publishing business models. New digital distribution platforms such as Apple's iTunes and app store, Microsoft's marketplace and similar services provided by Google and Amazon. These developments demand an increased understanding of consumer behaviour and have resulted in the development of skills and knowledge in production teams that was previously the domain of publishing and distribution professionals. This discussion presents a number of approaches to engaging audiences across new approaches to market research, community management and data analysis.

Audience research is often characterised by unknown unknowns, and in congested and dynamic markets it can be very challenging for studios and companies to keep up with audience demand. In 'Understanding Audiences' Prior et al. present a model for working across collaborating and multidisciplinary groups of stakeholders including, entrepreneurs, designers and customers to discover new challenges and opportunities and way to innovate solutions within the group. 'Stop just making stuff', by Taylor et al., and 'What metrics really mean' by Michael Franklin, investigate different ways in which production companies and games development studios have worked with audiences to inform their processes.

'Stop just making stuff' describes the learning journey being undertaken by Denki, a casual games development studio as they seek to establish a reliable and reproducible approach to the games design and development process. Starting from an established development model Denki develop a only far enough to test the game with a small user group. Testing against indicative criteria that the audience response must fulfill, the studio continues to develop and iterate the design in an attempt to develop content with a higher chance of market success resulting from continuous user feedback. Michael Franklin has also undertaken an extensive study of the use of audience metrics to inform distribution decisions in the film industry. The paper demonstrates ways that audience data can be used by distribution companies to tailor decisions about distribution and marketing investments

for film releases. Both papers make explicit the limitations of raw user data in making informed decisions. Although user data, analytical metrics and algorithms can offer insight into user preferences and help to predict audience responses on their own they don't offer the whole answer.

Viewed together, the articles included in the special section combine to make explicit the complex interdependence of information and relationships that constitute the creative spaces where audiences and content creators work together. While exposing the tensions that characterise the challenges of working collaboratively with your audience, the articles suggest a range of approaches and methodologies that will facilitate participation, help identify expectation and manage the co-creative process. The case studies present approaches to the design of challenging and rewarding experiences built on an understanding of audience that goes beyond merely knowing who they are but engaging with their creativity, motivations and enthusiasm. Successful audience collaboration in these cases is built on a respect for all participants that will help to transform audiences from passive consumers to an active, committed and engaged community that will return to products and companies through a sense of loyalty, ownership and personal investment.

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More information about the project can be accessed at [www.movingtargetgets.org.uk](http://www.movingtargetgets.org.uk), and Stiki, the open access collaboration tool developed by the project, can be accessed at [www.stiki.co](http://www.stiki.co).

### **Biographical note:**

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