

Institution: Aberystwyth University
Unit of Assessment: 35
Title of case study: 'Tween Audiences and Welsh-language Television Production: Impacts on Economic Prosperity and Cultural Life'
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>The impact generated by the project outlined in this case study – a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) project between Aberystwyth University and Boomerang+ (now Boom Pictures) – relates specifically to issues of economic prosperity and cultural life in Wales, in the context of the media industries (especially television production) and the artefacts/texts they create for specific target audiences.</p> <p>The project, which focused on 7- to 13-year-old ('tween') Welsh children's media preferences and practices, helped to inform and shape the company's outputs by adding 'authority' to decision-making processes and enabling 'smarter' ways to tender for future contracts with their main client, S4C, the nation's Welsh-language broadcaster. This proved crucial for the company in economic terms, in a climate of significant budget-cuts and intensifying competition across the sector. S4C also took an active interest in the research findings.</p>
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>The main aim of the KTP was to give 7- to 13-year-old children an opportunity to respond to the Boomerang+'s creative work, whilst also generating meaningful data for the company. The research methodologies included an interactive online questionnaire, participatory performance/drama and art workshops, and focus groups. Emphasis was placed on issues of language, form and content, and multi-media engagement. The project had a Wales-wide scope, involved over 1000 children in schools across the country, and represented the first ever data-gathering exercise of its kind to be conducted with Welsh-speaking children. The emergent findings from various 'encounters' with the audience members produced a 'snap shot' of contemporary childhood in Wales (capturing issues of cultural life that were important to the children) and of the media's place within it, and was of direct relevance to Boomerang+'s creative practices and future strategic development (Reference 3.3).</p> <p>The research was conducted within two frameworks. The first was the Department's ongoing research and engagement with the cultural industries in Wales. Professor Tom O'Malley (Reference 3.1) and Dr Jamie Medhurst (Reference 3.6) both specialise in research on the media in Wales, Professor Martin Barker has a strong track-record of influential audience research, whilst Professor Elan Closs Stephens was formerly Chair of S4C (1998-2006) and is currently Chair of the BBC Trust (2010-present). Expertise in minority language media is exemplified by the work of the Mercator Media Centre, which is based in the Department. More broadly, Professors O'Malley, Pearson and Stephens are on the Editorial Board of <i>Cyfrwng</i> (Media Wales Journal). Finally, the Department's Stakeholder Advisory Board includes key members of the media industries in Wales, such as Peter Edwards (Film Agency for Wales), Huw Eurig (Boom Pictures), Tim Hartley (S4C), Keith Jones (BBC), Elis Owen (BBC), and Mark Reid (BFI). This distinctive, Department-specific research environment prompted the establishment of a strategic partnership with Boomerang+, which was launched in 2008. In turn, the KTP project outlined in this document grew out of this partnership, and ran from April 2010-12.</p> <p>The second, project-specific framework relates to Dr Merris Griffiths' work in the broad field of children's media and her expertise in media-related audience research with children, which provided a 'good match' for the company's specific needs in wanting to better understand their</p>

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target audience. The KTP offered Boomerang+ a timely opportunity to further strengthen their industry position as one of the main producers of original children's television content in the UK (Source 5.1, p. 5), by generating new data on children's media preferences and practices that could be tailored to the company's requirements.

Griffiths has published research on a range of relevant issues, including advertising to children (Reference 3.5), cross-cultural analysis of children's everyday lives (References 3.2 and 3.4), media literacy policy and practice in Wales, local audience reception of film production in Wales, and media-related audience research. Further, she is a board member of the Wales Media Literacy Network (co-founded by Ofcom and Niace Dysgu Cymru), on the Editorial Board for *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, and a peer reviewer for *Children & Society*.

In terms of the KTP specifically, Griffiths' (References 3.2, 3.4 and 3.5) innovative approaches to developing multi-mode audience research methods suitable for work with (bilingual) children, which she has developed over a period of about fourteen years, was of central importance to the project. The 'knowledge transfer' that occurred as a result of the KTP project related primarily to methodology, but was also anchored in Griffiths' considerable knowledge of the children's media landscape more generally.

Without Griffiths' input, Boomerang+ would not have had the knowledge or capacity to design and implement such an extensive and complex data-gathering exercise using a range of interlocking approaches. The research was designed in such a way as to build a range of datasets that could be compared, in order to highlight and 'test' various emergent patterns of audience response. As such, Griffiths' expertise – as arguably the only person in Wales conducting this kind of research – fed directly into the KTP and enabled a raft of impacts and benefits to be generated.

The KTP enabled the company to avoid the pit-falls and concerns often associated with child-related research (in terms of ethical considerations, research design, and access to participants), radically enhancing their capacity to undertake such work, and the project became a crucial link between the company and its intended target audience.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Where relevant, these references are referred to by number in Section 2, above.

- 3.1 Barlow, D., P. Mitchell & T. O'Malley (2005): *The Media in Wales: Voices of a Small Nation*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press
- 3.2 Griffiths, M. (2013): 'Locating Commercial Media in Children's Everyday Lives: A comparative study of children's free-time preferences in the UK and USA'. *Participations* 10(2) (<http://www.participations.org/>; REF 2 submission)
- 3.3 Griffiths, M. (Co-authored with a Boomerang+ Company Director) (2012): 'KTP (Ref: KTP007568) Final Project Report' (Confidential, submitted to KTP; available as PDF only)
- 3.4 Griffiths, M. (2011): 'Favoured Free-time: Comparing children's activity preferences in the UK and the USA'. *Children & Society*, 25(3), 190-201 DOI: 10.1111/j.1099-0860.2009.00273.x (REF 2 submission)
- 3.5 Griffiths, M. (2005): 'Children drawing toy commercials: Re-imagining television production features'. *Journal of Visual Communication*, 4(1), 21-37 DOI: 10.1177/1470357205048934
- 3.6 Medhurst, J. (2010): *A History of Independent Television in Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The economic and cultural impacts generated by this project were complex, multi-faceted and intertwined, and brought both real-time and longer term benefits to the company. In addition to the expected outcomes at the end of the two year period (mapping the research results and making

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recommendations), the project also – uniquely – generated significant impacts *during* the course of the project, specifically relating to programming form/content, modes of audience interaction, and strategic development.

The project placed Boomerang+ in a unique position, because none of its competitors had undertaken an audience study of this scale or rigour (Source 5.1, p. 4; Sources 5.2 and 5.3); the insights generated by the project gave the company a marked ‘edge’, enabling them to ground and justify their market position by drawing on concrete and current audience data (Source 5.1, p. 5).

Impacts *during* the research process

The impact of the project on practitioners was instantly meaningful to the company’s creative outputs and played a positive role in the development of current programmes. Throughout the research project, the company pro-actively responded to feedback from the target audience and (where appropriate) made agile, innovative and immediate adjustments to their production work. Examples of the project’s impact on creative practice included:

1. Adjustments to the form and content of continuity links: The research revealed that audience members often had strong opinions about the presentation styles of the on-air talent and the content of continuity links (also referred to as the ‘wrap-around’ service that the company provides for S4C), so the company was able to quickly respond by making subtle changes to scripts/tones (See: Source 5.1, pp. 6-7; Source 5.2).
2. Adjustments to existing methods of audience interaction and the introduction of new innovations: Boomerang+ often invited text message participation during their continuity links and live Saturday-morning broadcasts, but the research revealed that the target audience preferred the more tangible sense of interaction created by phone-ins. The research also generated valuable feedback on competitions (especially in relation to prizes) and indicated enthusiasm for ‘dual-screen’ formats. The company responded by making appropriate changes to their modes of audience engagement (cf. Sources 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3).
3. Underpinning decision-making, strategic development and new content ideas: Boomerang+ was able to use the KTP as a means to gauge audience response to its ‘tween’ provision. The research revealed that the company’s newly launched programme, *Stwnsh ar y Ffordd*, was favourably received. The first series had focused on primary schools, because the company had predicted that the content would appeal mostly to younger audiences. However, the appeal was broader than anticipated, with unexpectedly enthusiastic responses from 11- to 13-year-old children. So, Boomerang+ decided that the second series should involve both primary and secondary schools, and adjusted the filming schedule accordingly (cf. Sources 5.1 and 5.2).

These illustrative examples indicate the importance of the KTP project findings, in terms of scaffolding and enhancing the company’s broader understandings of their target audience, and helping to shape their abilities to recognise and respond to the needs of their viewers within a unique socio-cultural, minority language community.

Longer-term impact: Economic benefit & influence on practice

Whilst the short-term benefits were clear during the course of the project, Boomerang+ also anticipated a longer-term positive impact (See: Sources 5.1 and 5.2). The three-year S4C contract period within which the research was conducted, worth in the region of £4.8m per annum to the company, was due for tender in April 2013. The company have since had that contract extended until April 2014. Boomerang+ estimates that 20% of any new contract would be directly attributed to the KTP project results, representing a significant economic contribution to the company specifically and the Welsh economy more generally. Further, the company estimates that, over three years, their turnover will increase by £1m as a direct result of the KTP (Source 5.1, p. 8).

More subtly, the company regarded the KTP project as having longer-term benefits in relation to building their Welsh-language children’s content production business, increasing sales to network broadcasters of children’s programmes (in the region of £0.5m), generating £40k through

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syndication, and improving general operations (Source 5.1, p. 8). 'Facilitation' became a key word, in terms of developing creative ideas into production concepts, re-directing existing creative production practices, and improving the management, analysis and distribution of knowledge and information relating to cultural trends. The impact of the KTP exceeded the company's expectations in this respect (Source 5.1, p. 13).

General benefits of the research

The future availability of contracts for the production of children's television content may be limited, mainly as a result of the UK government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) which saw significant reductions in expenditure and a new funding regime for S4C (Source 5.1, p. 6). Since children's programming is one of the largest single S4C contracts held by Boomerang+, and accounts for 200 jobs, it is economically imperative that the company continues to secure work.

As a direct result of the project, Boomerang+ enjoyed the benefit of being able to test its creative ideas in a low-risk context before pitching to S4C and/or broadcasting live, and gauging the reception of current programming. As indicated in Source 5.1 (p. 10 and p. 12), the KTP project has enhanced the company's credibility and reputation within the creative industries sector in Wales (also see: Sources 5.2 and 5.3), by demonstrating their commitment to producing the highest possible quality content.

More recently, on September 25th 2013, Boom Pictures' Children's Department hosted a Royal Television Society special event – "Not in front of the Children': Can Quality and Originality Survive?" – focusing on the future of children's television in the context of increased competition and decreased funding. The event included presentations from S4C's Commissioner of Children's Content, a producer from CBeebies (BBC), a managing director from the independent production company Ho Ho Entertainment, and Head of Boom Plant (who was also Company Supervisor of the KTP project). The results of the KTP research featured prominently throughout the event, as 'evidence' of the target audience's current characteristics and a key source of information in thinking about future strategies for those working within children's television production. As such, the project is continuing to 'impact' on the industry.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Where relevant, these sources are referred to by number in Sections 2 and 4, above.

- 5.1 A confidential written report, submitted to the KTP, detailing the benefits that the project generated for the company.
- 5.2 A letter of support from the Chair of the KTP Local Management Committee and Company Director at Boomerang+, outlining the immediate and on-going benefits of the research.
- 5.3 A letter of support from a Development Advisor at Boom Pictures and early contributor to the KTP project bid.
- 5.4 A letter of support from the Head of Research at S4C.