



Riding the Waves

How pop culture has the potential to
catalyse social change in the UK

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Executive summary

Pop culture is a powerful vehicle for propelling progressive social justice narratives to mainstream audiences. Culture is a shared space where people make sense of the world, where ideas are introduced and values are inculcated. It is a key place for campaigners to win hearts and minds. Cultural change is often the precursor to political and policy change. Culture moves issues into the mainstream and provokes us to think about how we view the world. It may not write the legislation, but culture can create the conditions for political change to become inevitable. The UK has a vibrant pop culture scene, which is ripe for funders and activists seeking to catalyse social change.

“Until progressives make culture an integral and intentional part of their theory of change, they will not be able to compete effectively against conservatives.”

The Culture Group 2014

The current political and economic climate in the UK is unsettled and in flux. It is a challenging environment for communicating social justice narratives. There is heightened public anxiety about immigration and concern about loss of identity. But, this context presents opportunities too. Creative industries are responding to world events by engaging with social justice issues, young people are becoming more politically active in the UK and public figures are championing social justice causes. While politicians flounder and seek direction from the population at large, culture can be a driving force for change. Even with such a challenging context, art and culture can create issue visibility, increase understanding, and build attitudinal consensus precipitating political and policy change.

It is difficult to evaluate cause and effect in a diffuse area like mainstream culture. But there are ripples of progress, which appear

to be motivated by cultural shifts. LGBTQ rights (in the UK and Ireland) is one example and (to a lesser degree) disability rights, feminist campaigns and women's rights and mental health awareness are others. It is encouraging that there are messengers from across the cultural and media landscape that are motivated to take action for progressive social change.

In our research we came across understandable reticence from funders to invest in pop culture. It is perceived as an affluent industry with corporate and commercial input. It is challenging to evaluate impact and return on investment. There are reservations about investment going to messengers who fail to appear credible in the public eye. Nevertheless, given the extensive reach of British pop culture and its potential for communicating progressive narratives, we urge funders to consider avenues that shape mainstream cultural outputs and connect key players.

This report analyses six thematic features that catalyse social change across all aspects and genres of pop culture. These are: Representation; Authenticity; Normalisation; Narratives; Novelty and Relationships. There are crossovers but each section reviews case studies and illustrative examples. Below is a summary of the sorts of proactive actions that key players within philanthropy, the NGO sector and the media and entertainment industry could take to catalyse social change in each area, along with reflections regarding challenges and degrees of risk.

Representation

If your personal identity is not aptly represented in popular culture then you are more likely to feel marginalised. Poor representation breeds mistrust and lack of respect. Conversely, diverse representation in pop culture builds tolerance and understanding. There are many ways to promote diversity and greater representation in pop culture in the UK. Some opportunities are set out below:

- Creative writing and scriptwriting programmes for people with diverse backgrounds and/or from marginalised communities will help to ensure that talent is recognised and cultural outputs are more representative. This requires buy-in and support from broadcasters, production companies and media outlets.
- Funders could do more to support young people from diverse backgrounds interested in entertainment careers, both on and off screen. If representation improves, more young people will see the creative industries as a pathway open to them.
- Funders can also play a role in supporting content creation, by and about diverse groups of people (on traditional as well as on non-traditional media platforms). This might include direct grants for research to pursue passion projects, open idea pitches and providing opportunities to pair experienced writers with new, up and coming writing talent.

Challenges/risks:

Given the current lack of representation across many areas of pop culture, it will take time to make real progress. There are also risks and uncertainties for funders in working with non-traditional media platforms; outputs may or may not take off and evaluation of outputs can be challenging.

Authenticity

A healthy dose of British scepticism often stands in the way of efforts at persuasion. As a rule, we don't like to be told what to think and believe. This means that authenticity is fundamental if we are persuaded to feel differently about an issue. There is work to be done in boosting credible, authentic voices in pop culture:

- There is a role to play for an independent body to proactively approach and guide public figures willing to speak out authentically on social justice issues.
- Many public figures are keen to play a role in this area but may fear being lambasted publicly. Behind-the-scenes advocacy between public figures and influential cultural figures in media and entertainment may be a successful alternative approach, particularly aimed at advocating for more diverse representation on screen.
- Public occasions and platforms are opportunities for authentic voices to be heard, particularly festivals, memorial events and sporting occasions.

Challenges/risks:

Public figure communication on social causes can be a double-edged sword. Authentic, well-informed messaging can be powerful. But voices lacking credibility can be damaging to a cause. Some funders are understandably wary of investing in strengthening high profile voices for this reason. Proactive support and guidance can mitigate this to some degree. Behind-the-scenes advocacy would also be a more subtle and strategic move given the current climate of opinion on issues like immigration.

Normalisation

When pop culture becomes ingrained and embedded in our social spheres the messages portrayed become an established fact of life. Normalisation allows pop culture to generate long-lasting social change. But all parties (across media, entertainment, charity and philanthropy sectors) need to acknowledge that normalisation in pop culture takes time and happens gradually:

- This means that charities, and funders, will need to consider how they evaluate projects and campaigns that are attempting to normalise an issue in mainstream culture.
- Funders could also consider supporting efforts to carry out longitudinal research and evaluation assessing pop culture and its impact on social justice.

Challenges/risks:

Normalisation occurs gradually over an extended period of time and evaluation and assessment of social change needs to acknowledge this. There is value in exploring and learning from case studies to demonstrate how social change happens through pop culture over a longer time frame.

Narratives

Narratives weave a storyline together and convey messages. Narratives present opportunities to educate and to empathise. True narratives are powerful and fictional ones are too. Narratives have different effects depending on the context, the messenger and the receptivity of the audience. There are a number of opportunities in this area.

- Funders could provide seed-funding to catalyse new ideas, although we acknowledge that this could be a more risky strategy as content creation can sometimes be high cost, low yield.
- An alternative approach for funders could be to provide resource to creative projects already in development and to fund advocacy and capacity building for activists and campaigners to complement and boost the reach of creative outputs.
- There is merit in considering alternative methods of communicating narratives, such as leveraging the competitive nature of the advertising industry, for example.
- Funders could invest in tactical partnership building between NGOs and creatives, in order to catalyse effective, authentic narrative formation.

Challenges/risks:

Overt narratives can alienate audiences and risk only preaching to the converted. But there are many challenges associated with content creation, particularly when it involves more subtle narrative approaches, including prohibitive development costs and the need for concurrent advocacy etc. Charities and NGOs will need to understand and respect the creative control and direction of producers and writers. There is a role for mediators to support and facilitate this process.

Novelty

New pop culture gains ground when it is unique, refreshing and appealing to trendsetters, in many cases young people. An 'X-factor' or zeitgeist moment propels an issue into the mainstream presenting a catalytic opportunity for social change. Content with a social justice focus is likely to provoke a groundswell of support, particularly from younger audiences. For this reason, cutting-edge, innovative, media platforms are influential players in this field. Funders also have a significant role to play in supporting organisations and activists to ride the wave of popular opinion. We have identified the following opportunities:

- Nimble, reactive campaigns are effective when they sit alongside or follow mainstream cultural outputs with a social justice focus. These campaigns garner valuable public awareness and can weave in direct calls to action.
- There is value in funding rapid response grants to campaigners and activists riding on the wave of a new cultural phenomenon or news story.

- Independent journalism and credible news platforms play an important role in producing long-form, thoughtful coverage that can stimulate new ideas and spark future content creation. This work requires championing and sustained investment.
- Short form video creators and social media influencers are often at the cutting edge. Efforts to champion innovative players and give a platform to new, upcoming artists and activists should be welcomed, encouraged and funded.

Challenges/risks:

There is a risk that catalysing a new innovative output will backfire or fail to take hold. Campaigners, as well as funders, will need to assess whether they are prepared to take that chance. Mixed portfolios of investment would help to spread this risk between funders (i.e. a pooled funding model).

Relationships

Pop culture permeates our society in countless ways. Often it is as a result of intensive, sustained relationship building across and between sectors that movements coalesce around pop culture and push for social change. We have identified a series of opportunities in this area.

- Funders could consider 'grants +' or enhanced funding opportunities for grantees, such as making connections and providing legal or financial advice.
- There is a pressing need for independent advisers to act as brokers between industries. This will help to mitigate misunderstandings and manage expectations between charities and creatives.
- There is value in evoking a sense of community and connection across and between sectors. There is a role here for all sectors, but particularly broadcasters and funders in supporting and facilitating events that allow opportunities for inspiration and connection.

Challenges/risks:

Current relationships and networks between different sectors are often very weak (particularly between commercial production/entertainment/media and NGOs/community-based organisations etc.) This requires concerted effort to build up those networks and to resource trusted connectors who can play the role of bridging across and between sectors.

1

Introduction

This report shares findings from our research exploring how popular culture (pop culture) influences social change in the UK. Our work has been informed and influenced by the #PopJustice report series carried out in the USA.¹ Our aim has been to explore how pop culture is evolving in the UK, its influence and the role of philanthropists in leveraging pop culture to catalyse social change. We have carried out online research, media scanning and face-to-face and/or telephone interviews with people across a range of sectors (community and voluntary sector, philanthropy, and media and commercial sectors).

Our focus is on pop culture that influences narratives on migration and integration in the UK. But there is much to learn from other social justice areas (e.g. women's rights, mental health, disability etc.) and we review relevant case studies where there are lessons to learn.

This report is set out as follows:

- First, we reflect on the current political, economic and cultural context in the UK. We review the reach and influence of British pop culture and the ecosystem that currently exists.
- Second, we present a thematic analysis of the factors that are at play when pop culture appears to influence social justice. We draw on a range of case studies and quotes from interviewees to illustrate each area.
- Third, we reflect on the role of a range of key actors in addressing the challenges in these areas and we explore the opportunities for leveraging pop culture to generate social change in the British context.
- Finally we present our conclusions and propose a series of next steps for taking this work forward in the future.

Our assumptions and conclusions are drawn from our research findings (based on a comprehensive, albeit non-representative sample of interviews). Our observations stem from our experience and insight in this area (although we stress that neither of the authors are entertainment and media experts). Our recommendations are exploratory at this stage and we invite ongoing dialogue and discussion to develop these ideas and opportunities further.

¹ The term 'pop culture' is defined at length by the #PopJustice report series. For the purposes of this report we have relied on definitions provided by Wikipedia: 'Popular culture (or pop culture) is the entirety of ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images, and other phenomena that are within the mainstream of a given culture, especially mainstream Western culture', and by that given in the US #PopJustice report, i.e. that: 'Pop Culture is those elements of culture capable of sustaining and perpetuating themselves based on endorsement and participation by large groups of people through their own agency.'

2

Pop culture in the British context

2.1 The political, economic and cultural context in the UK

2016 and 2017 have been rollercoaster years in the UK both politically and economically and the reverberations are still playing out culturally. This environment influences how pop culture is produced and consumed. Standout contextual factors in the UK include:

A hung parliament in June 2017

The result of the June 2017 General Election has created political uncertainty due to a hung parliament and a weak Conservative majority. The high youth turnout is a significant political development.² Other world events, such as the election of President Trump in the US, are influencing how people in the UK feel about politics.

The referendum decision to leave the EU in June 2016

There has been an uptick in political reliance on large-scale quantitative polling to gauge public opinion and seek direction for decision-making. The EU referendum is an example of this trend in binary decision-making. The atmosphere in the UK has been febrile and disconcerting since the vote in favour of Brexit. There is no clear political plan in place for what Brexit might mean.

Inequality rising in the UK

The UK has a very high level of income inequality compared to other developed countries.³ This polarisation between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' has stoked discontent and was believed to be a major factor in the vote for Brexit.⁴ Some commentators regard the hung parliament as a rejection of the austerity agenda, which Conservatives have pursued in recent years.⁵

Refugee crisis in Europe and the Middle East

The death of Aylan Kurdi in September 2015 prompted widespread public empathy and charities were inundated with offers of support. Supportive public figures have responded practically and politically. Despite this upsurge in support, negative public attitudes have influenced political responses, such as indecision about the rights of EU nationals living in the UK and political intransigence on child refugees (the abandonment of the 'Dubs Agreement').

Rise of nationalism across Europe

The UK is not alone in experiencing a growth in nationalism in response to globalisation and large-scale movement of people. The same is true in countries throughout Europe. This has sporadically veered to militant and violent forms of protest. There was a 41% rise in hate crime in the UK after the Brexit vote.⁶

Vocal right wing media in the UK

You Gov polling in 2016 found that the British public perceive their press as 'the most right-wing in Europe'. The survey found that 18 per cent of Britons felt that the media was reasonable in its presentation of the refugee crisis, with 29 per cent feeling the media was too right-wing when dealing with questions of immigration.⁷

This contextual backdrop presents challenges for a positive, welcoming narrative towards refugees and migrants, and towards social justice in general.

2 The youth turnout at the 2017 General Election was the highest in 25 years: www.ft.com/content/6734cdde-550b-11e7-9fed-c19e2700005f?mhq5j=e1

3 www.equalitytrust.org.uk/scale-economic-inequality-uk

4 www.ft.com/content/24e88c30-bc5f-11e6-8b45-b8b81dd5d080

5 www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/24/reject-austerity-brexit-left

6 www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/brexit-hate-crimes-racism-eu-referendum-vote-attacks-increase-police-figures-official-a7358866.html

7 www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/british-media-is-the-most-right-wing-in-europe-yougov-finds-a6859266.html

But the fact that politicians are attentive to fluctuations in the public mood means there is scope for political change, stemming from cultural shifts in the population at large.⁸

There is awareness since the US election and the EU Referendum that Hollywood and the cultural industries need to get outside their echo chambers, and there is a thirst for activism.⁹ The context may be challenging, but this desire to act is generating fertile ground for social change and movement building across multiple sectors. The political and economic context is driving people to say and do things with a degree of boldness they were less likely to express before. There is a growing appetite to research and tell different stories within our pop culture in the UK.

2.2 The influence and reach of British pop culture

Despite being a relatively small country, the UK has a prolific and deeply influential pop culture industry. From Monty Python, the Beatles, James Bond and Adele to Harry Potter, Downton Abbey, Sherlock and Doctor Who, to name but a few, the UK continues to influence global pop culture. The influence is wide-ranging across age ranges and genres. The UK has many established forms of pop culture, such as long-running television and radio dramas (soap operas), artists producing popular music, lifestyle and reality television shows, comedy programmes and film series. Many British programmes and shows have large audience numbers sustained over long periods.

The UK was ranked number two on the 2016 Soft Power Rankings¹⁰ (second to the USA), which records the value of the positive perceptions consumers worldwide have of individual countries. London has been named the most influential city in the world on Forbes.com for its combination of “efficiency and access to capital and information” as well as its concentration of media, culture and business power.¹¹

“The UK is seen by trend forecasters as a key market; if trends do not take root in the UK, they are unlikely to be considered truly global.”¹²

British television, film, sport, fashion and comedy command widespread interest and appeal, throughout the UK and abroad. As a result of the proliferation of widely watched and shared material (as well as the rise in social media), the UK also has an ever-growing number of well-loved media, sports and music personalities that play an influential role in public life.

Some key data and figures across a range of UK pop culture industries include:

Television:

- The BBC reaches a massive global audience on TV, radio and online. More than 308 million people access its services in some way every week, largely paid for by the British license fee.¹³
- Between 2012 and 2014 the UK exported more than 600 television shows, around six times as many as Germany.¹⁴

8 By example, the first refugee march in London was attended by many thousands of people (in September 2015). At that time the UK had resettled 216 Syrian refugees. Following the demonstration, the UK government committed to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020 (although a lack of momentum means there is weak political will to follow through on this pledge).

9 See, for example leading playwrights creating Brexit dramas: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jun/19/leading-playwrights-create-brexit-shorts-david-hare-abi-morgan>

10 softpower30.portland-communications.com/ranking/

11 www.forbes.com/sites/joelkotkin/2014/08/14/the-most-influential-cities-in-the-world/

12 www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/uk-creative-overview/why-the-uk

13 www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-33654279

14 www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/why-british-tv-rules-the-world-9590481.html

- One popular soap opera, *EastEnders*, became the most watched TV drama programme of the year in 2015 with more than 10 million people tuning in during a key episode in February 2015 where the show also elicited more than a million Twitter posts.
- Reality TV and lifestyle programmes are a key pop culture development in recent years. Shows like *The Great British Bake Off* (14 million people tuned in to watch the final show in the series in 2016) and *Strictly Come Dancing* (audience viewing figures peaked at 13.1 million, with average viewing figures of 11.8 million) have grown in popularity and reach.

Music:

- Over the past four years the music industry has grown by 17% and contributes £2.2 billion in exports. The UK attracts 27.7 million visits each year to live music events and venues, such as Glastonbury Festival and the O2 Arena.¹⁸
- Ed Sheeran's new album set a new record by achieving 375 million streams on Spotify in its first week of release and is dominating music consumption around the world. Adele's third album *25* sold in excess of 20 million copies worldwide since it was released in November 2015 making her one of three British acts in the top five biggest sellers globally in 2016, along with Coldplay and the late David Bowie.¹⁹
- The talent of black British music artists is being hailed as a major new development in the music scene in the UK. Grime has been billed by the head of music at BBC Radio 1 as Britain's next big cultural export.²⁰ Artists such as Stormzy and Skepta are enjoying deserved recognition for their creativity and reach, taking the home-grown genre of grime to the world.

Fashion:

- The UK fashion industry has huge global influence. It is worth £26 billion to the UK economy and is a major export industry. As a global, international industry its key players hold significant sway in influencing trends in pop culture. Recent awareness about rights of transgender people has been accelerated via the fashion industry.²¹
- Foreign investment has been rising with multinational conglomerates investing heavily in young fashion businesses such as Christopher Kane and JW Anderson.²²
- British fashion has soft power benefits as well as economic ones. The UK is the world leader in fashion education, with six of the world's 20 leading fashion universities.²³
- London Fashion Week is itself influential, widely recognised as one of the 'big four' international fashion festivals and a vital showcase for the UK's industry and talent.

Sport:

- The UK is home to many iconic sportsmen and women. The Premier League is watched by 4.7 billion people and is one of the UK's most successful exports.
- Research suggests that as many as 10% of the world's population support Manchester United.
- Sporting events present opportunities to demonstrate the UK's values, demonstrated by Danny Boyle's opening ceremony at the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics.²⁴

18 www.ukmusic.org/policy/uk-music-manifesto/

19 www.ukmusic.org/assets/general/UK_Music_-_Manifesto_17.pdf

20 www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/12/bbc-radio-1-music-boss-grime-britain-chris-price-1extra

21 www.standard.co.uk/fashion/partiesandpeople/andreja-pejic-on-changing-the-face-of-fashion-as-a-transgender-model-and-why-one-day-she-would-like-a3213386.html

22 www.theguardian.com/fashion/2014/mar/08/british-fashion-invasion-uk-designers-taking-on-world

23 www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/insight/power-fashion

24 www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/insight/playing-game-soft-power-sport

Literature:

- Literature, while it still tends to be a more niche area, can tip into pop culture, particularly for young people.²⁵ British writers like JK Rowling (over 10 million followers on Twitter), Philip Pullman, Jacqueline Wilson and David Walliams have large influence among young people in the UK, and beyond.

The UK produces fresh and emerging contributions to culture that buck trends and cement new ideas (in the music industry, but also in areas such as spoken word, musicals and documentaries). While these areas might not be deemed pop culture, due to niche appeal, they sometimes 'tip' into pop culture (e.g. some popular podcasts²⁶ and spoken word artists²⁷, for example).

Some of our interviewees highlighted that 'the arts' have a symbiotic relationship with pop culture, and creatives work across these worlds. This means that a play or an art exhibition can penetrate popular culture through secondary media, even if the immediate direct audience is limited. There are current attempts to broaden appeal through initiatives such as National Theatre Live, taking theatre to a wider audience.

2.3 Pop culture distribution and consumption in the UK

The UK is a significant producer and creator of pop culture, but it is also deeply influenced by pop culture from a range of other countries, particularly the US (music, television, film and fashion are key areas of influence), Nigeria and Kenya²⁸, as well as Australia²⁹ and India³⁰ to name but a few.

In a fragmented media world, where prime time TV is not the only approach, micro-audiences and a multiplicity of new platforms play an influential role in shaping British pop culture. Social media and varied forms of broadcasting (such as YouTube channels and Netflix) are popular in the UK.

The UK's approach to broadcasting differs from the US because of its public service model, where a household licence fee, paid for by all TV viewers in the UK, funds public channels. This means that the BBC has social justice and equality commitments, unlike the commercial sector. For example, in 2016 the BBC made a pledge to ensure that by 2020 women will make up half its workforce on-screen, on-air and in leadership roles.

The BBC is popular in the UK and reflects the interests of its viewers. This presents opportunities to ride the wave of cultural interest and appeal, but it also presents challenges with concerns about bias within the BBC on both sides of the political divide.³¹ Concerns about impartiality are likely to increase as a result of Brexit.

"The great joy of having public service broadcasting is that it's a form of entertainment, information and education which is not determined by advertisers or government interests. It's determined, imperfectly, by what viewers and listeners want."³²

Channel 4 is another major British broadcaster, which operates in a different way to the BBC. It has a public service remit but it is

²⁵ www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/how-children-s-literature-with-a-social-conscience-galvanized-a-generation-and-changed-the-uk-a7142336.html

²⁶ The podcast 'Serial' has achieved cult status and has been downloaded millions of times: edition.cnn.com/2014/12/18/showbiz/feat-serial-podcast-btn/index.html

²⁷ See, for example, the Voices of the Nation project by Nationwide featuring adverts on prime time television featuring spoken word poets sharing the stories of ordinary people and what matters to them: www.nationwide.co.uk/about/media-centre-and-specialist-areas/media-centre/press-releases/archive/2016/9/14-voice-of-the-people

²⁸ See, for example: flamingogroup.com/modern-urban-africas-influence-on-uk-popular-culture-is-the-very-best "For brands looking at global youth trends, and trying to identify key movements and shifts in popular culture, maybe it's time to add Lagos or Nairobi to the list of places you should be exploring. The UK can't get enough of modern urban African music, and long may it continue."

²⁹ See, for example: www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/nickbryant/2009/06/the_pom_influence.html "In the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster, Australian television executives played a central role in rethinking and repackaging English football... As we approach that ritualistic period of mutual sporting antagonism, the Ashes will not only revive our long-standing rivalry but remind us how much we have in common."

³⁰ 2017 will be a UK-India year of culture to mark the cultural ties between the two countries. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-2017-uk-india-year-of-culture>

³¹ See, for example: Hard Evidence: How biased is the BBC? www.theconversation.com/hard-evidence-how-biased-is-the-bbc-17028

³² Former BBC World Service presenter, Robin Lustig: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-33654279>. Nevertheless, there have been calls for the UK to adopt a more commercial system that would convert the license fee into a voluntary subscription model, like Netflix or Amazon Prime.

commercially funded. It has a diversity charter which shapes its programming and as a broadcaster it seeks to represent a range of distinctive voices across its outputs.

British TV production companies are plentiful, but opportunities for pitching programmes are not growing at the same rate due to a finite number of channels. Production companies in the UK are increasingly making content for US channels like Amazon and Netflix. The industry is now no longer limited to BBC/ITV/C4 in the UK, but is still a narrow and competitive funnel.

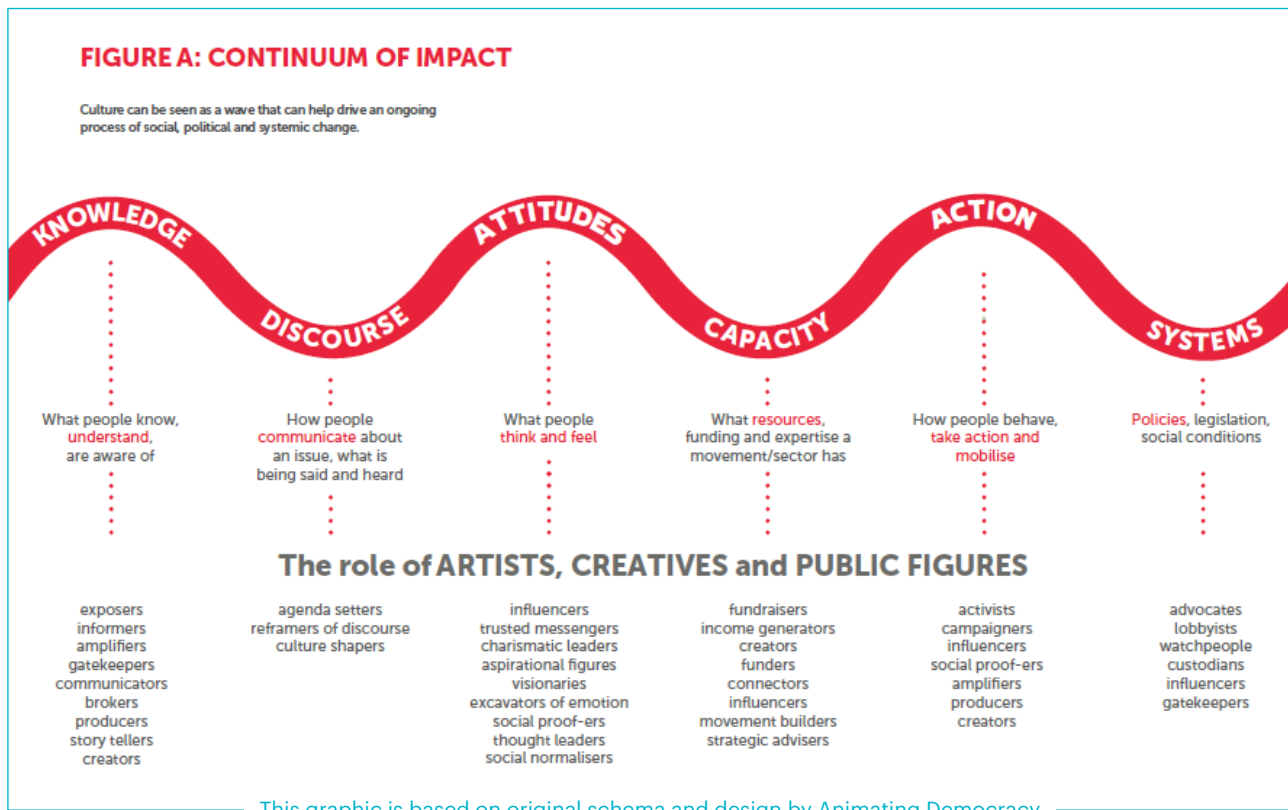
There are many US-UK collaborations in the television industry. This could be pre-sales or co-productions, channels/distributors might fund a show to put on own channels, or rights might be sold afterwards for other markets, or a US channel might buy the format (as in the case of Broadchurch and The Office). In general, a show has to have universality for it to appeal to a US (or other) audience so it can be sold externally. One interviewee for this research stressed that content does not need to be generic – a project can be rooted creatively in the UK and translate because it's a great show that says something universal about the human spirit, or tells a story people relate to culturally.

Due to a multiplicity of platforms and channels, what is considered 'successful' as a show has evolved. Shows like Game of Thrones have huge pop cultural caché and mass awareness (most people know about the show even if they haven't watched it), but in terms of the number of viewers, their audience is actually quite small compared to what was considered 'mainstream' decades ago. The concept of building micro-audiences through avenues like YouTube and Netflix is interesting and worth considering for any funding programme that seeks to engage with pop culture. We now have a fragmented media landscape and tactics need to be diversified and targeted accordingly.

2.4 Role and influence of public figures

British public figures with a passion for activism and philanthropy have helped put marginalised issues on the mainstream agenda, rally new supporters, and raise valuable funds to deliver much-needed services and grow movements for change. Some of the UK's most star-studded cultural events such as the Glastonbury Festival have long-standing cause partnerships, and some of the world's best-known examples of entertainment and public figure-led advocacy and fundraising initiatives such as Band Aid, Red Nose Day, Children in Need, and Make Poverty History, were catalyzed in the UK, involving an extensive ecosystem of partnerships across broadcasters, the arts, sports and entertainment industries, and the NGO sector.

Culture is often depicted as a wave that can help drive a process of social, political and systemic change. Artists, creatives and public figures can create impact across the six dimensions on this wave continuum set out by cultural theorists: knowledge, discourse, attitudes, capacity, action and systems. Public figures play roles such as advocates, creators, multipliers, connectors, and fundraisers:



Numerous public figures have used their public platform informally and formally to deliver strong and consistent messaging on their passion points and create issue salience. For example, Joanna Lumley championed the Gurkhas³³ and Jamie Oliver campaigned for healthy eating,³⁴ leading to government policy change. Emma Watson was appointed UN Women Goodwill Ambassador in 2014 and serves as an advocate for its HeForShe campaign to advance gender equality. Her inaugural speech about feminism was viewed 3.2 million times and two million supporters have signed up to the campaign.

The music industry in the UK has begun to harness the power of music fans as a social movement in support of campaigning. Coldplay have taken Oxfam campaigns on tour with them for many years, generating tens of thousands of petition signatures and helping lobby targets such as the World Bank. The band members are patrons of MOAS, the Migrant Offshore Aid Station, which carries out humanitarian work supporting migrants and refugees.³⁵

With regards to immigration, the UK has to date lacked the continued advocacy of a high profile public figure at the level of someone like Angelina Jolie, who acts as the UNHCR Special Envoy. However, the refugee sector has benefited from some long-term British champions such as Juliet Stevenson, Emma Thompson, Colin Firth, Michael Palin, Michael Morigo, Zadie Smith, and others, with some serving as patrons to charities such as Refugee Council and Refugee Action.

The charismatic leadership of Helen Bamber always ensured that the Medical Foundation/Freedom from Torture was able to attract public figures, and the organisation continues to deliver innovative projects, such as the 2014 auctioning of character names in work by authors such as Margaret Atwood, Ian McEwan, Julian Barnes and others.

³³ Joanna Lumley turned the Gurkha's plight into a national debate. Her father had been an officer in a Gurkha regiment, so she felt a personal link and a powerful moral need to support the right of retired Gurkhas to settle in the UK. Her support ensured the story was front page news, and it embarrassed the government. The Gurkhas won the right to settle in the UK.

³⁴ Jamie Oliver's TV series led to a broader campaign called Feed Me Better to improve school dinners. After he took his school meals petition to Downing Street and met with MPs, the government pledged an additional £280m for three years, a trust to allow schools without kitchens to build, a pledge to consider a series of training kitchens across the country, and creation of a voluntary code of conduct re: advertising junk food to children.

³⁵ www.moas.eu/patrons

Similarly the creation of Women for Refugee Women, founded by writer Natasha Walter, saw an increase in public figures attracted to the issue - leveraged by personal networks in the arts.

In the noughties, British directors such as Michael Winterbottom and Stephen Frears also brought refugees and migrants to our screens with critically-acclaimed films, and writers such as Jimmy McGovern integrated refugee storylines into primetime TV dramas like *The Street*. In the same decade, authors such as Benjamin Zephaniah and Chris Cleave translated refugee stories into the mainstream reading culture of the UK, and the 2010s saw other successes from literary public figures penetrate the mainstream from spoken word artist Hollie McNish's viral video *Mathematics*, to recent anthologies such as *The Good Immigrant*.

The recent refugee crisis has prompted more domestic public figures to advocate or fundraise for refugees. Well-resourced INGOs such as Save the Children and UNHCR were better equipped to capitalise quickly on new public consciousness than the domestic refugee charities whose communications capacity has been heavily scaled back since 2010. However as events evolved, public figures were often drawn to the British civil society responses to the crisis. Nimble and passionate organisations founded by young, well-networked volunteers from the creative communities, such as Help Refugees and Good Chance Calais, and community organising bodies such as Citizens UK, have attracted significant influencer support.

In autumn 2015 writers Peter Paphides and Caitlin Moran rallied within days to create a charity single for Save the Children in response to the refugee crisis. They worked to secure rights from Crowded House, enlist pro bono PR support, and develop a video featuring Benedict Cumberbatch. Caitlin worked with producer Sonia Friedman to agree to collections in theatres and Benedict was inspired to initiate collections after his performances, raising more than £150,000 at his shows. Tennis player Andy Murray was also moved by the child refugee crisis, and decided that for every ace he served to the end of 2015 he would donate £50 to Unicef's work for children caught up in emergencies. Donations were matched by his partner Standard Life and by the LTA and ATP and raised over £83,000. Similarly Riz Ahmed used awards season to launch a social media powered crowdfunder in January 2017 for the Karam Foundation to support Syrians caught in conflict, raising more than \$165k in donations in less than two months, and artist Jake Chapman donated a lifeboat for a rescue organisation working in the Med.

In recent years, the work of high profile British creatives has also integrated imagery or messaging raising awareness of the refugee crisis – with examples including fashion designer Ashish Gupta's iconic IMMIGRANT t-shirt, Massive Attack's use of Giles Duley's photography in its tour set, PJ Harvey's use of similar material in her forthcoming video for *The Camp* and MIA's video for her track 'Borders'.

Public figures have also rallied politically around the resettlement of Syrian refugees, the demolition of the Calais camps, the plight of unaccompanied refugee children and family reunion. Many people including Jude Law, Miranda Hart and Lily Allen visited the Calais camp, others such as Gary Lineker and JK Rowling provided social media support, hundreds of public figures from Anish Kapoor and Coldplay to Steve Coogan and Chiwetel Ejiofor have added their name to petitions and open letters, and creatives such as Ken Loach have used their award speeches to highlight this issue.

Whilst some small or short-lived gains have been made, for example in relation to Syrian resettlement and child refugees, large-scale and durable shifts to government policy have not yet occurred and some temporary achievements have even been rolled back, as schisms in public opinion and media commentary pulls politics in different directions. NGOs have however suggested that without this level of popular public figure intervention, even the small gains that were made may not have been achieved.

Despite many positive examples, interventions from public figures have not been uncontroversial. In the UK especially, critiques of public figure advocacy have challenged its efficacy in aiding causes. In some cases, these arguments are well justified – such as the debates around Band Aid and the representation of Africa. In other cases public figures communicating their support for refugees have been dismissed as ‘sanctimonious’, ‘righteous’ and celebrities are labeled ‘luvvies’. The oppressive and negative political climate has made it more challenging for public figures to communicate their support for a cause and use their influence and connections to positive effect.

3

Thematic analysis of how pop culture catalyses social change

This section explores how pop culture catalyses social change. We explore six thematic areas: Representation, Authenticity, Normalisation, Narratives, Novelty and Relationships. There are crossovers between the areas, but a thematic analysis helps to identify key catalysing features. We draw on influential, predominantly British examples for illustration. Subsequent sections explore the role key actors could play in supporting efforts to mitigate challenges and catalyse social change.

3.1 Representation

Diversity in the cultural industries, both behind the scenes and on screen, is woefully inadequate in the UK. People with a BAME (black, minority, Asian, ethnic) background direct on average 1.5 per cent of UK television.³⁶

“Sustaining a [directing] career is difficult enough as it is, but when the perception of BAME directors is that they are less able, less experienced and less competent then it becomes virtually impossible, regardless of talent.”

Menhaj Huda, Diversity Chair at Directors UK

The BBC is attempting to make progress in this area, stating that it wants 15 per cent of its workforce to be drawn from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) backgrounds for staff and leadership roles by 2020.³⁷ Broadcasters know they need a diverse workforce and more on-screen representation but they sometimes struggle to achieve this.³⁸ Lack of representation amongst writers, producers and directors has a knock on impact on the depiction of characters and the types of stories portrayed on our screens.

“Diversity off screen at decision making level is just as important as diversity on screen, the two must go hand in hand if we want to achieve greater representation on screen.”

Broadcasting executive

There is growing awareness of the need to address the structural imbalances that exist. BBC and Channel 4 are working to level the playing field but there is still much work to be done. Several of our interviewees highlighted the significance of championing people who do not have a typical industry background and need support to get a sense of what they could do in the industry. As one interviewee noted, “if you don’t have any family in the industry, why would it ever occur to you that you could make a film or be a producer?”

Diversity should be considered across a range of dimensions. For example, LGBTQ BME voices are often not heard, and working class writers from all ethnicities are missing from the UK creative industry landscape.

Advances made in the 1980s and 90s to represent a more ethnically diverse audience hit on successes with programmes like ‘Desmond’s’ and ‘Goodness Gracious Me’,³⁹ but recent progress is painfully slow and minority ethnic writers are beginning to turn to the internet as an outlet for their work due to lack of interest from mainstream television outlets.⁴⁰

36 www.directors.uk.com/news/bame-directors-discuss-their-experiences-in-the-uk-television-industry

37 metro.co.uk/2016/04/23/bbc-promises-to-hire-more-women-and-ethnic-minorities-5837023/#ixzz4k4HYAT3C

38 See for example a critique of the BBC’s approach of advertising training placements for minority ethnic applicants only: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/03/bbc-criticised-by-mps-and-job-applicants-over-training-placement/>

39 www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1108234/index.html

40 www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/02/black-british-tv-drama-online

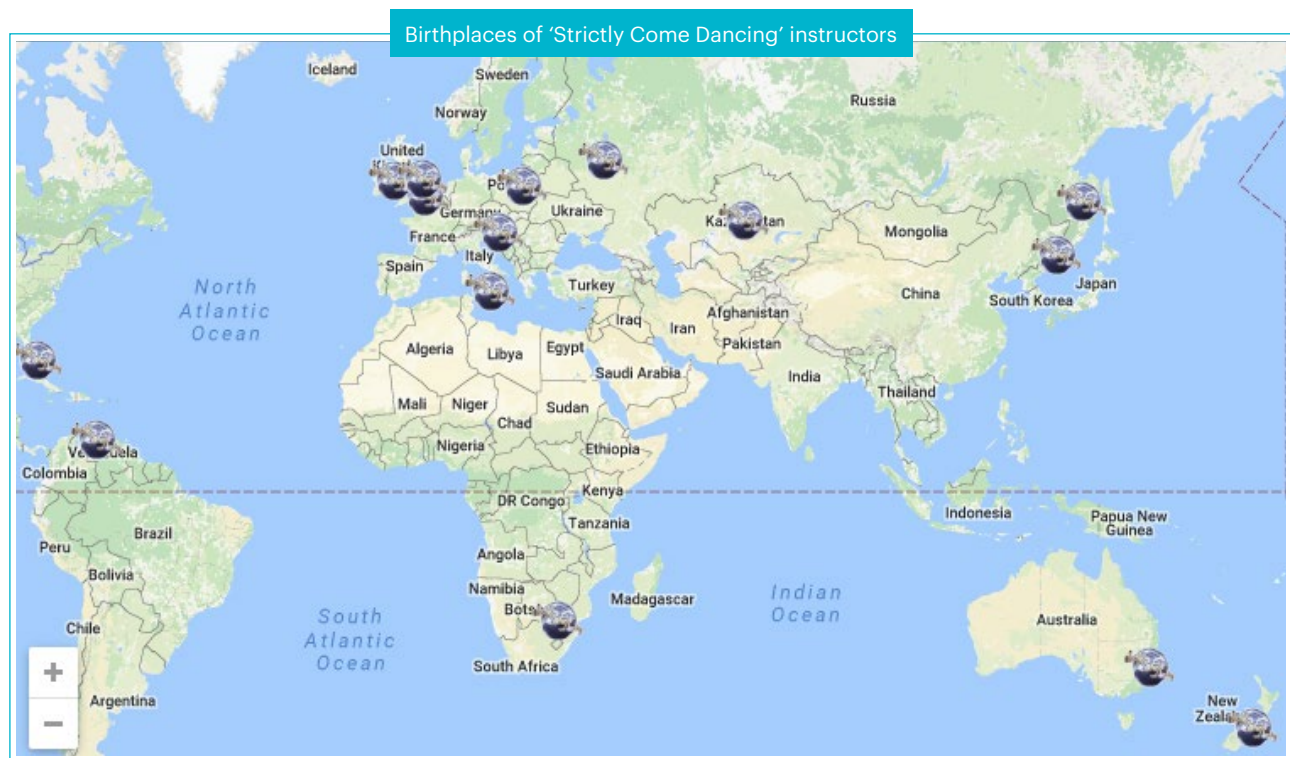
The actor Riz Ahmed recently made an impassioned plea during a Channel 4 diversity lecture to parliament for broader representation within British pop culture. He makes the case that if pop culture represents a range of diverse identities then it can help to diffuse tension and breakdown stereotypes.

“Every time you see yourself in a magazine, on a billboard, TV, film – it’s a message that you matter, you’re part of the national story, that you’re valued ... You feel represented.”⁴¹

Riz Ahmed

British reality television programmes are widely enjoyed (with formats being sold overseas increasing their reach), such as the Great British Bake Off (see case study below) and Strictly Come Dancing. The producers purposefully include people from a broad range of backgrounds – including gender, ethnicity, sexuality and religion. These programmes serve as a subtle but welcome reminder of diversity within the UK.

Strictly Come Dancing is a popular format featuring dancers with diverse backgrounds. The 2016 winner, Ore Oduba, is a British news presenter and sports reporter with a large fan base. The map below illustrates the different birthplaces of all the different Strictly Come Dancing instructors, which span all over the world:



Source: <https://www.indy100.com/article/guess-what-theres-something-very-wrong-with-this-daily-express-story-about-economic-migrants--ZJymrf6cUl>

Television programmes like 'Extremely British Muslims' (a 'fly on the wall' programme broadcast on Channel 4) and 'Muslims Like Us'⁴² (billed as 'Muslim Big Brother' broadcast on BBC2) are recent attempts by broadcasters to represent minority communities on television.

41 www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/riz-ahmed-warns-parliament-that-lack-of-diversity-in-tv-leads-people-to-isis-a7610861.html

42 www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/dec/04/muslims-like-us-bbc-gives-big-brother-a-twist-out-go-evictions

“The characters in *Extremely British Muslims* were engaging – they were shown as they are – Brummie boys laughing and joking like any others. It normalised a whole section of society.”

Broadcast executive

These sorts of programmes have mixed degrees of success in fostering acceptance of diversity. *Extremely British Muslims* was an attempt to offer an antidote to the mis-representation of Muslims as terrorists or ‘un-British’. But an approach of singling out groups can risk making them feel exceptional or exotic, rather than integrated and represented. These sorts of shows can court controversy due to their overt nature and sometimes sensationalist content, diminishing their effectiveness as a tool of social change.⁴³

Representation is an important goal across all pop culture arenas. British sport is a stronghold for diversity and public figures such as Sir Mo Farah, CBE (Somali-British distance runner) command much respect from the public. The fashion industry is making progress towards greater diverse representation. Examples include: the appointment of Ghanaian-born Edward Enninful as *Vogue*’s new UK editor (the first black, male editor of the magazine), the success of Andreja Pejic, a transgender Bosnian refugee⁴⁴, Nike’s ‘Pro Hijab’ sportswear for Muslim women⁴⁵, and Halima Aden, a Somali-American model and refugee who featured in Kanye West’s fashion shows wearing a hijab.⁴⁶

“I hope to show Muslim women and young women of all backgrounds that they are represented in the world of fashion ... I truly believe diversity is beauty.”

Halima Aden, Somali-American model

It is difficult to assess how and whether broader representation in the sport and fashion industries fosters greater openness and acceptance of diversity. There is a long way to go to achieve a sufficiently diverse representation in the consumer, advertising and media worlds overall. But it is a step in the right direction and may be a sign of a welcome shift towards more diverse representation in the future.

3.2 Authenticity

Public figures speaking authentically about a subject can benefit a cause. But celebrity involvement can be double-edged, particularly if the messenger lacks credibility. Many public figures are acutely aware of being accused of preaching or being self-righteous, and it makes many risk averse in relation to using their platform for controversial issues. Several of our interviewees stressed that actors are all too aware of the stigma attached to being outspoken and often hold back to avoid the backlash that can ensue.

It was also flagged by some interviewees that we are living through a uniquely toxic time where there is a broader cultural agenda attached to decrying the political pronouncements of ‘luvvies’. This goes beyond healthy British cynicism and is part of a wider attack on public intellectuals and artists from all over the world. While this heightens the moral imperative for this kind of work, it also highlights the political challenges that funders, and other influential players, might face when proactively rallying the cultural industry.

⁴³ See for example: www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4026804/Bigoted-Nasty-Cynical-BBC-s-Muslim-Big-Brother-won-t-unite-cultures-ll-divide-CHRISTOPHER-STEVENSON-reviews-reality-TV-Muslims-Like-Us.html

⁴⁴ www.standard.co.uk/fashion/partiesandpeople/andreja-pejic-on-changing-the-face-of-fashion-as-a-transgender-model-and-why-one-day-she-would-like-a3213386.html

⁴⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/fashion/brands/nikes-first-high-performance-hijab-coming-female-muslim-athletes/>

⁴⁶ www.thesun.co.uk/living/2886153/halima-aden-muslim-model-kanye-west-yeezy-5-new-york/

Public figures with personal experience or long-term commitment to a social justice issue are more likely to be applauded and respected. Their interventions are deemed credible and authentic which strengthens their message. Emma Thompson's support for the Helen Bamber Foundation and Lenny Henry's role as co-founder and supporter of Comic Relief are two such examples. Conversely, inauthentic public communication can cause more harm than good. This is relevant in the case of celebrity involvement or endorsement. There is a risk of a message failing to resonate or backfiring if the messenger is deemed inauthentic.

With respect to migrants and refugees, public figures with personal experience are more likely to receive positive public attention because of their authenticity. In this way they can become powerful advocates with a crucial messaging role. The Olympic swimmer Yusra Mardini, a refugee from Syria, has been featured in hundreds of media features and attracted a bidding war over her life story from film companies, with British production company Working Title securing the rights and British director Stephen Daldry attached to direct. Yusra is a UNHCR ambassador and UNICEF have recently followed suit by appointing a Syrian refugee as an ambassador, alongside its roster of celebrity ambassadors like David Beckham and Shakira. Hassan Akkad, a Syrian refugee who was featured in the BBC documentary *Exodus*, has also achieved a level of media attention and took to the stage at the TV BAFTAs to accept the award for the series. Public figures with refugee heritage have also spoken out in support of refugees, including Noma Dumezweni, MIA, Rita Ora, and Neil Gaiman.

Authenticity in relation to this issue is not simply depicted as a function of a migration history, but could also come from a credible white working class voice appealing to a different audience/media outlet ensuring that a movement for migrant rights is not framed as a 'luvvie middle class' issue.

Authentic portrayal in fictional stories and in reality television helps to shape public perception. This is linked to the point above about diversity in production and programming, as much as in writing and on-screen. There is a concern amongst white writers that they may be accused of cultural appropriation in telling other people's stories. But by having diverse cultural producers, the chance of credible and authentic content increases.

Insufficient research and preparation from scriptwriters and screenwriters can result in loss of credibility and authenticity, which can do more harm than good. In some cases research and planning for dramas is ad hoc and informal. As a result, it can be at risk of peddling stereotypes or misrepresenting the issues at hand. There is a real risk of victimisation if stories are not represented authentically.

Case Study: The Great British Bake Off

Nadiyah Hussain, the 2015 winner of the television programme 'The Great British Bake Off', is a British Muslim woman who has since gone on to produce a series of books and television programmes showcasing her work. The producers presumably knew that she would resonate with the British public and presented her story authentically. The result was widespread public approval. The show's final attracted viewing figures of around 14 million. The programme is now available internationally via Netflix.

The advantage of authentic representation in pop culture is that it provides avenues to ride a wave of popular opinion. The Daily Mail recognised the public approval of Nadiyah and celebrated her success, describing her as: 'a heroine in her home town of Luton where she's seen as a glowing role model for young Muslims'.

The Mail quoted her stating: 'I'm just as British as anyone else, and I hope I have proved that.' And in response the paper wrote: 'She certainly has, amassing a devoted fanbase who call themselves 'Nadiators'. She now has 22,100 followers on Twitter.'

The Mail reported favourably as it knew the public regarded her as authentic and appealing. This presents a catalysing opportunity – any association with Nadiyah Hussain is likely to be favourable with the general public due to her appreciative fan base. She has also been vocal in speaking out against Islamophobia in the media. This example highlights the significance of culturally impactful programming before a show is even aired.

Source:

www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3259908/Nadiya-Jamir-Hussain-feared-Bake-fans-write-wear-headscarf-Inspiring-story-unlikely-favourite-won-Britain-over.html

www.independent.co.uk/news/people/nadiya-hussain-recounts-islamophobic-abuse-and-claims-it-gets-worse-after-terrorist-attacks-a7053931.html



Image credit: ©BBC Photo Library

3.3 Normalisation

Scriptwriters (particularly in soap operas) like to feature characters with unconventional or controversial backgrounds, but they become normalised once they are a regular feature of the programme. Fictional stories and drama series featuring diverse casts are a welcome vehicle for normalising social justice narratives.

Coronation Street is an interesting case in point. One of the characters appears to have Asperger's Syndrome, but this has become normalised over time, rather than being a main feature or plot line.⁴⁷

"It's never mentioned in the story though and it shouldn't be – Roy is a human being, and a label doesn't help him. But I think he's got it. It gives him reasons for his behaviour and gives me something to play. I enjoy idiosyncrasies in people and Roy is full of them."

David Neilson, Actor

British soap operas took the lead in the 80s and 90s with storylines that featured gay and lesbian characters.⁴⁸ The actress Anna Friel recounted her role in a lesbian kiss that took place in a drama before the watershed (9pm) on Channel 4's soap Brookside in 1994⁴⁹:

"I am proud we took on such controversial storylines and it was new and innovative. I'm proud to be part of that movement. I am proud we got it in the contract that Beth would always stay gay."

Anna Friel, Actress

Ensuring Beth remained gay normalised her status and created a subliminal message living beyond the sensationalist 'first kiss' moment. Normalisation in pop culture alongside sustained political and social campaigns was a contributing factor in the acceptance and legalisation of same sex marriage in the UK and Ireland. The Irish referendum in favour of gay marriage (despite being a devoutly Catholic country) is an example of how a groundswell of popular opinion can sway political decision-making.⁵⁰

"A young person growing up gay can find a meaningful reflection of how he feels at the multiplex and in long-running popular or family TV series without too much difficulty ... Russell T Davies used the revival of Doctor Who as a Trojan horse to smuggle stereotype-destroying characters and stories into mainstream television."⁵¹

Philip Hensher, journalist

Pop culture can create a culture of permissibility in areas that are taboo. Normalisation is a key goal in mental health campaigns. MIND's Time to Change initiative created a climate of openness about mental health through the #inyourcorner campaign.⁵²

Heads Together has worked with public figures to speak about mental health, including Prince William, the Duchess of Cambridge, Prince Harry, Stephen Fry (who suffers from bipolar disorder and depression) and Alistair Campbell. Features in popular men's magazines like GQ, promotes a more open public conversation about mental health.

47 www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/coronation-street-i-secretly-made-roy-427471

48 www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/soaps-lgbt-gay-characters-storylines-robron_uk_5722107ce4b0a1e971cb2b03

49 www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/2016/06/17/lesbian-kisses-nudity-and-sex-groundbreaking-british-tv-moments/brookside-1982-2003/

50 www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/23/gay-marriage-ireland-yes-vote

51 www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/move-over-mr-humphries-the-changing-face-of-gay-culture-1867904.html

52 www.time-to-change.org.uk/what-you-should-know/be-your-mates-corner

There is some evidence to show that attitudes towards people with mental health problems are more positive and discrimination is reducing.⁵³

3.4 Narratives

Narratives weave a storyline together and convey messages. Narratives present opportunities to educate and allow us to empathise or fantasise about an issue or idea. True narratives are powerful, but fictional ones are too. This section focuses on four different types of narrative: 'overt narratives', 'non-victimisation narratives', 'values-driven narratives' and 'subtle narratives'. These have different effects depending on the context, the messenger and the receptivity of the audience.

3.4.1 Overt narratives

Overt narratives are candid portrayals that expose a social justice issue as a pressing, shocking concern. These narratives are double-edged – sometimes garnering greater awareness, but are in danger of leading to compassion fatigue or preaching to the converted.

Overt re-framing of issues that are grossly unequal/de-humanising can propel an issue into the public consciousness. This can open up public conversations and push politicians into action. But without a groundswell of popular support there is a danger of 'here today, gone tomorrow empathy'. There is also a risk of over-stereotyping. For example a drama about a destitute asylum seeker could provoke outrage that leads to campaigning success, but at the same time it might peddle a disempowering, stereotypical image of refugees.

Well-regarded artists, writers, directors and documentary filmmakers who command respect for their work best own this space. Director, Ken Loach, is known for his thought-provoking dramas. His 1960s BBC television play, *Cathy Come Home* has been watched by over 12 million people and ignited a nationwide debate about homelessness, resulting in the founding of campaigning charity, Shelter, several weeks later.

"[Cathy Come Home] ensured public empathy and support for Shelter from our very beginning".

Shelter's website

Ken Loach's recent film, *I Daniel Blake*, about the UK benefits system opened up a public conversation about benefit claimants. Some film critics criticised its depiction of claimants⁵⁴, but it has also triggered waves of empathy⁵⁵ and a government consultation on the reform of the controversial Work Capability Assessment, which assesses whether people are able to carry out work.⁵⁶ The exposure continued when *I Daniel Blake* won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes film festival and 'Outstanding British Film' at the Bafta Film Awards.

Some interviewees expressed apprehension about creative content catalysed by a cause-related imperative rather than artistic merit or commercial viability. There was concern that this might lead to a poor quality creative output, which has no commercial audience or no halo PR effect that puts it on the wider public radar. With a few obvious exceptions such as Chris Cleave's *The Other Hand* in the literature world⁵⁷ and Channel 4's documentary series *Exodus*, this is often the case with refugee-issue related arts in the UK. The quality and profile

53 www.time-to-change.org.uk/about-us/our-impact

54 www.vice.com/en_uk/article/i-daniel-blake-actually-change-something

55 www.wisbechstandard.co.uk/news/i_daniel_blake_film_screening_in_wisbech_sparks_interest_in_claimants_support_group_in_the_town_and_north_fenland_1_4899354

56 www.ibtimes.co.uk/i-daniel-blake-effect-government-announce-work-capability-assessment-reform-1589002

57 www.theguardian.com/books/2008/aug/09/fiction5

of these projects tend to be in the 'community arts' realm with their reach being restricted to niche audiences at local levels.

"Most of the philanthropy in arts and culture intersecting with migration has generally not reached beyond the liberal elite. Funding things that go wider and deeper has been difficult."

Funder

Some interviewees recognised that creatives are wary of initiatives to instrumentalise their work for political ends. Others highlighted ways that early-stage project collaboration with campaigns and charities can result in frustration on both sides. Producers and writers want creative freedom; they do not want to be dictated to. They are genuinely skeptical of charities and the fact that they are often pushing an agenda. Conversely, charities and campaigns often want too much control over the messaging and want their work/issues to be presented in particular ways. Charities might seek out high-profile collaborations on their issues but will not want the practices of their organisation or sector to be depicted in unfavourable ways.⁵⁸

Overt narratives can be shocking, jarring portrayals, as in the fictional case of 'I, Daniel Blake' above. But they can also portray true, positive stories with powerful effect, as the in the case of The White Helmets (see case study). Many successful examples of overt narratives can be found in the documentary world where investigative films often reveal an unknown issue to audiences, or cast a new spotlight on a familiar issue where there is still lack of public engagement. Films such as The Invisible War, Gasland, Virunga and No Fire Zone are all overtly issue-focussed film that educate, influence, engage and activate audiences on different social justice themes from rape in the military to fracking.

⁵⁸ For example, in 1969, Ken Loach made a documentary film in collaboration with and partly funded by Save the Children. The film depicted aspects of the charity's work in an unfavourable light and the charity later tried to ban it. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/sep/01/ken-loach-save-the-children>

Case Study: The Syria Campaign and the White Helmets

The Syria Campaign has provided communications and public fundraising support to the Syria Civil Defence, a group of volunteer rescue workers, in order to demonstrate that Syria has heroes that should be protected and supported. This story of everyday heroes has inspired people all over the world.

Adopting the moniker of 'The White Helmets', The Syria Campaign helped build their profile in the media, pursue creative partnerships and develop crowdfunding platforms to collect donations, thereby shining a spotlight on a story of hope from a region where such stories are often in short supply. In 2016, this culminated in a Nobel Peace Prize campaign which saw them go from rank outsider to bookies' favourites in weeks, endorsement by public figures from Justin Timberlake and Ben Affleck to George Clooney and Daniel Craig, and prestige media such as the cover of Time Magazine and a feature on 60 Minutes. A public petition for their nomination garnered 350k signatures and their crowdfunding page has raised millions since April 2015 – with donation spikes correlated to key broadcasts and media moments.

Social video collaborations with Viral Thread and others have generated hundreds of millions of views - for example, a Facebook video the organisation helped Viral Thread create which covered the recent chemical attacks on Khan Sheikhoun using the White Helmets' footage and reports generated more than 94 million views, half of which were accrued in less than 24 hours.

2016 also saw the release of a short documentary film, which allowed the story of the rescue workers to reach 100 million Netflix subscribers in more than 190 countries. In the first six months of the film's release over 600 individual media articles were generated, and the film went on to win an Oscar in 2017. The film-makers' speech which asked Hollywood to stand to remember Syrians, was broadcast live to more than 33 million people in the USA alone, and reached wider audiences in more than 225 countries. During the ceremony, the White Helmets became the most Googled term in the USA. With their elevated profile, the White Helmets have also won numerous awards – from the prestigious Right Livelihood Award to TIME 100 Person of the Year.



3.4.2 Non-victimisation narratives

In contrast to the overt narratives described above, non-victimisation narratives can lead to greater normalisation and acceptance. There is a crucial point when people in a historically marginalised social group are no longer portrayed as victims, but are seen in a true, human light. Humour is a powerful way of shifting negative perceptions. Non-victimisation fosters greater public acceptance and promotes positive attitudes.

Non-victimisation narratives are being used to powerful effect to promote disability rights and awareness,⁵⁹ perhaps in part due to pop culture interventions around the Paralympics (see case study). There is a widely held feeling that the Paralympics seem to have changed public perceptions for good. The All About Trans case-study also demonstrates how humourous material can transmit positive messages.

One of our interviewees stressed the need to feel uplifted, rather than being ‘bashed over the head’ with a message about a particular social justice issue. Non-victimisation narratives embracing humour play a significant role in boosting the profile of other social justice areas, as one scriptwriter explained in relation to refugee stories:

“The Other Side of Hope is a film about a Syrian refugee moving to Finland. It’s sad, but it’s very funny too. That’s exactly the way to tell these stories. The humour needs to come through.”

Scriptwriter

Broadcasters can influence how an issue is represented through its coverage, particularly when it is normalising and empowering. There is still a long way to go to challenge negative perceptions and generate lasting political and policy change in this area, but progress to date is heartening.

59 A 2012 survey of 10,000 people conducted after the Paralympic Games found that more than two thirds of people believed attitudes towards disabled people had improved. See: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-28175349

Case Study: The Paralympic Games

Channel 4 aimed to make the coverage of the London 2012 Paralympic Games the biggest event in Channel 4's history and, by doing so, took Paralympic sport to a whole new level. The end result was a powerful campaign at the heart of which sat a 90-second TV ad, 'Meet the Superhumans'. This approach showed Paralympians as powerful warriors rather than people to pity, which was a striking break with convention.

"We made the Paralympics an absolute priority. We put all our advertising and marketing weight behind it. Our Creatives thought it was about time."

Broadcast executive

The comedy sports programme 'The Last Leg' was broadcast during the Paralympics. Its nightly shows averaged 1.8 million viewers and it was credited with achieving a breakthrough on a subject that's notoriously difficult to tackle. Humour is a powerful way of diffusing tension and creating awareness, as demonstrated by Channel 4's coverage.

"The Last Leg was successful ultimately because it was Friday night entertainment. You could watch it when you came back from the pub and you didn't feel like you were being preached at."

Broadcast executive

Channel 4 also devised a competition for their big name brands. They offered £1 million worth of airtime for a brand that could come up with a winning commercial featuring a disabled cast. The winning Maltesers advert featured a disabled actress joking with friends. It caused an Internet sensation and featured favourably in the British media.

Sources:

www.dandad.org/en/d-ad-meet-the-superhumans-case-study-insights/

www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/sep/17/how-the-last-leg-had-last-laugh-paralympic-games

www.thesun.co.uk/news/1748119/maltesers-advert-shown-during-paralympics-includes-a-disabled-sex-gag-and-viewers-loved-it/



Image credit: [wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paralympic_Athlete.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paralympic_Athlete.jpg)

Case Study: All About Trans

On Road Media, who manage All About Trans, focus on nurturing collaborations and positively changing how the media understands and portrays people in the UK.

In January 2012 the Trans Comedy Award was born at Trans Camp, an 'innovation camp' run by On Road Media. The event brought together over 60 trans people, journalists, digital experts and innovators to come up with creative solutions to several predefined problems. One of which was: "How do we make producers of comedy aware of who they are making comedy about?" A team was established with, amongst others; comedians Claire Parker and Shelley Bridgman (who are both trans and give the project a real sense of credibility), journalist Juliet Jacques, activist Jo Shaw, actress Milanka Brooks and BBC Head of Creative Resources, Ian Critchley. They came up with the idea of launching a scriptwriter's competition that would challenge writers to come up with funny material that contained positive portrayals of trans people.

Following the camp, the team carried on meeting and secured the support of the BBC Writers Room. The Award offered scriptwriters up to £5000 for the best script that promoted a positive portrayal of transgender characters. BBC Writers Room received 320 script entries for the award – the first of its kind. The selected scripts were chosen by a judging panel that included Ian Critchley, Jon Plowman (Executive Producer, BBC Comedy), Sophie Clarke-Jervoise (Head of Comedy, Tiger Aspect) and the BBC's Creative Director of New Writing, Kate Rowland.

"I saw the Trans Comedy Award on the Writers Room website and I know how important it is to see your life shown on TV in a positive and progressive way. A TV show like 'Will And Grace' meant and still means a lot to me. I could watch it with any member of my family and not feel awkward or like I wanted to watch it by myself in my room. We would never laugh at Will or Jack. We would laugh with them. That's the kind of show I wanted to write."

Elliott Kerrigan, scriptwriter

Elliott Kerrigan's winning script "Boy Meets Girl", was then made into a pilot and showcased at the 2014 BBC Salford Comedy Festival. The comedy drama about two people who fall in love was very well received by an audience from the television industry. Following the pilot, the BBC commissioned Tiger Aspect Productions to make two series that were broadcast on BBC 2.

Sources:

www.allabouttrans.org.uk/how-bbc-two-came-to-commission-the-first-uk-trans-themed-sitcom

www.onroadmedia.org.uk

www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqbdvWOji-s



3.4.3 Values-based narratives

A values-based approach to narrative formation is effective because it forges connection over commonly held human feelings. Values-based narratives appeal to our intrinsic beliefs, rather than seeking to change our mind by persuading us about a cause. The example of The Glasgow Girls (see case study) is a good example. The documentary (and subsequent musical and drama) promoted commonly held values of friendship, community and coming together in the face of adversity, which is likely to have contributed to the story's widespread appeal and popularity.

The Common Cause Foundation takes a values-based approach to understanding and shifting public opinion on social justice issues. Their report, 'No Cause is an Island' explores ways to identify the values that motivate people's concern about social justice issues.⁶⁰ Crucially it finds that values-based narratives are effective not only in making us thinking differently about one social justice issue, but about social justice issues overall.

Music and fashion are valuable channels for communicating universal values like love and unity. Designer Katharine Hamnett's iconic CHOOSE LOVE t-shirts designed for Help Refugees in 2015 brings in much-needed funds for the charity. The merchandise has proved popular among public figures with celebrities from Dermot O'Leary to Sophie Dahl pictured wearing them. U2, Massive Attack and Roger Waters have used political and cause-based messaging at their gigs. John Legend's Love Me Now from November 2016 focused on love as a lens (spotlighting issues like refugee camps, Orlando, Iraq, Standing Rock etc. in the process).⁶¹ Unity is another shared value, for example Coldplay's Up and Up video from 2016 (focusing on a variety of issues in the fabric of life including climate change, refugees, war, conservation etc.).⁶²

⁶⁰ The report is available at: www.valuesandframes.org/no-cause-is-an-island/

⁶¹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmCFY1oYDeM

⁶² www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPNTC7uZYrl

BBC drama of The Glasgow Girls

The Glasgow Girls is an influential documentary, musical and BBC drama. It came about because a documentary maker wanted to produce a short film about migrant integration in Scotland. She approached some school children who agreed to use cameras to film their experiences. In the course of the filming one of the group was taken into immigration detention, which then became the new subject of the documentary. The local community supported the girls and rallied around them and they managed to successfully mount a campaign to have their friend released.

The Glasgow Girls was successful, not so much because it was a story about asylum seekers, but rather because it powerfully demonstrated values of friendship and community and the act of people coming together in the face of adversity. These are values that many of us recognise and can connect over, regardless of our background or political affiliation.

“Music was a defining feature of the documentary, which is why it lent itself to a musical. It captured the spirit of the injustice. We received comments that people laughed and cried, but most of all they felt empowered. They felt a part of our humanity. People from all walks of life saw it. Much of the value stems from it being a true story. It shows a different side to our city. A city that is proud of its people. It showed asylum seekers and refugees in a positive light. We are hoping to keep inspiring young people to be activists. You don’t have to be in power; we all have power! We were innocent and we took on the Home Office, and we won. But the honest truth is that we just wanted our friend back.”

Amal, Azzudin, Glasgow Girl

The Glasgow Girls was a best seller at the Edinburgh fringe festival and has toured reaching 10,000 people over the summer (to Glasgow, Dundee, Stirling, Liverpool and Belfast). It was turned into a BBC drama in 2013. The documentary won the Amnesty International Scottish Media Award, which recognises significant contributions that make a difference to the Scottish public’s awareness of human rights issues.

The Glasgow Girls has been supported by the Scottish Refugee Council, The National Theatre of Scotland, The Big Lottery and The Lankelly Chase Foundation.

Sources:

The original Glasgow Girls documentary is available to view here: www.vimeo.com/47646327

www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/scotland-amnesty-celebrates-scottish-medias-contribution-human-rights

3.4.4 Subtle narratives

Subtle narratives are the ‘Trojan horse’ of communication. They operate in an unassuming, covert way to sow the seed of an idea, rather than presenting it in a lecturing or preachy way. These narratives are powerful because they resonate on a deep, emotional level. Becoming engrossed in pop culture can make us feel like we are personally connected to someone else’s story or experience. This is less acutely felt if we are being preached to, or coerced into thinking differently.⁶³

“Films that bring in social issues by stealth are the best – e.g. that new film with Michael Caine and Morgan Freeman is on the surface a heist film about old guys robbing a bank but it’s actually also about foreclosure, economic inequality, austerity etc.”

Talent manager

Domestic violence and sexual abuse have featured in a number of television dramas with subtle build up, but accurate portrayal and myth-busting approaches (e.g. The Archers – see case study below, Apple Tree Yard and Broadchurch). The effort to create a realistic portrayal is welcome, as are attempts to involve advisers from charities and frontline organisations to support and guide the process of crafting sensitively told storylines. This visibility in television and media is having a significant effect. One rape crisis centre has experienced a 284% increase in service demand since 2013, citing the exposure in dramas as a significant factor encouraging survivors to come forward⁶⁴. But this needs to match the funding available for support once awareness is raised.

“The increase in referrals is a very positive thing. It means more survivors are reaching out and seeking the help they need. However, if funding continues to fall short, Rape Crisis centres will remain increasingly stretched and waiting lists unacceptably long.”

Rowan Miller, Somerset and Avon Rape and Sexual Assault Support

A more subtle narrative approach works well for a subject area like refugees and migrants where there is public scepticism and hostility.

“You can’t always get to know people, particularly refugees. But you can get to know people on your TV. They are in your living room; they become your friends.”

Activist

⁶³ Volume 3 of the #PopJustice report series explains this phenomenon in depth, with reference to ‘vicarious’, ‘parasocial’ and ‘imagined’ contact: www.unboundphilanthropy.org/sites/default/files/PopJustice%20Volume%203_Research%20Review.pdf

⁶⁴ www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/27/rape-crisis-funding-sexual-violence-rise

Case Study: BBC Radio 4, The Archers

The Archers featured a serialised fictional account about a woman experiencing domestic abuse. The women's charities Refuge and Women's Aid advised the BBC during the long-running storyline. The writers sought guidance in order to represent the story in a true light.

The effect was a realistic portrayal of a complex issue with a slow and subtle build up of the storyline over time.

One Archers' listener, set up a JustGiving page - The Helen Titchener (nee Archer) Rescue Fund - to raise money for Refuge. Several days later more than £98,000 had been donated and since then more donations have been made reaching over £135,000.

Many donors have commented about their own past experiences, particularly noting how authentic the portrayal was and how much it resonated:

"I was a victim of domestic violence 33 years ago. I can only say that it is [as] if the scriptwriter witnessed those scenes in my life all those years ago. My son and I survived and life became joyful again."

Sources:

www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2016/sep/08/my-donation-page-inspired-by-the-archers-has-raised-over-135000

www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35961057

3.5 Novelty

Ideas tip into the mainstream when trendsetters promote them. This is often how new movements start, as described with great clarity in Malcolm Gladwell's book, *The Tipping Point*. This 'cool factor' or 'zeitgeistness' is a crucial part of a movement taking hold.

"It needs to be cool to help people."

Scriptwriter

Funders are beginning to recognise that they could diversify the types of outputs they fund to explore new, innovative developments, but that this requires greater risk-taking on their part. There is also a need for capacity building so that the sector can capitalise on shifts and zeitgeist moments that are taking place within pop culture.

"We have supported groups using videos as evidence and campaigning material. We are always interested in innovation, video and visuals – moving away from written reports. New technology can amplify and improve the impact of advocacy material."

Funder

The fragmentation of entertainment platforms and the corresponding growth of micro-audiences present new avenues for content creation. Self-publishing and personal YouTube channels are phenomena that give diverse groups of people a platform, particularly if traditional channels are intransigent.

"We decided to make [new sitcom *The Ryan Sisters*] ourselves and put it up online because we just can't get TV networks interested. There really is a lot of racism in the industry: they're not ready for black women. Commissioners say: 'Can you make white people laugh?' Or: 'Middle England won't like you.'"⁶⁵

Angie Le Mar, British actor and comedian

According to one of our interviewees, a BBC Radio 1 survey found that the refugee crisis was the most galvanising social justice issue for young listeners. This presents an opportunity to capitalise on, using innovative and imaginative approaches that appeal to a younger audience to communicate messages on refugees and migrants.

New, innovative technologies provide opportunities to get closer to social issues and experience them in different ways. Virtual reality and mixed reality are ways of helping people to experience and empathise with issues more acutely.

"Prompted by its first ever Creative Director, the United Nations was greeting national delegates as they arrived with virtual reality goggles – which then transported them to meet refugees around the world. One of the UN team running the project observed that it was not uncommon to get the goggles back wet with tears."⁶⁶

There is a tendency to focus on traditional entertainment channels but other sources of media and distribution (for example Unilad, Here Now, Viral Thread, Facebook videos and YouTube channels) probably get more viewership than some mainstream TV channels.

⁶⁵ www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/02/black-british-tv-drama-online

⁶⁶ Alex Evans, *The Myth Gap* p.129 and creators.vice.com/en_uk/article/ez53ee/virtual-reality-unvr-refugees

They have quicker production lead times so might offer more return on investment for a funder trying to respond to changing events.

YouTube offers quick broadcasting opportunities that can suddenly go viral. An example is Firas AlShater, a Syrian refugee living in Germany who has produced influential YouTube videos that have attracted upwards of 300,000 followers. Opportunities like this provide a way for refugee's voices to be heard and talked about in society. Another is Jack Harries, an influential YouTuber whose YouTube channel has over 4,200,000 subscribers and has posted content and videos on YouTube, Instagram and Facebook about refugees after travelling to document the work of Help Refugees and its partners.

Creators for Change is a new initiative by YouTube dedicated to amplifying and multiplying the voices of role models who are tackling difficult social justice issues. YouTube has a dedicated fund for its Creators for Change programme aimed to promote the work of YouTubers using their platform for social good. The funds cover equipment and production costs for a cohort of Creators for Change Ambassadors and Fellows who YouTube have appointed based on their talent and commitment to social causes.⁶⁷

3.6 Relationship building

Movements come about because of well-established networks. Often this is down to the role of connectors across a range of different sectors: corporate, commercial, advertising, political, cultural, campaigners, voluntary sector etc. But these are sometimes lacking across and between sectors, particularly given the challenges faced by the charity sector.

"There is catalysing potential for bridging. Most people's networks are very narrow. They have limited capacity to form relationships. Their work [in the NGO sector] is predominantly crisis-driven and focused on their niche. It's not because they are not open-minded, it's because they are under-funded and don't get the opportunities. Funders could resource people to develop and cultivate their networks."

Funder

There are examples of efforts to bridge across and between sectors. Counterpoints Arts is playing an influential role fostering networks across and between the arts sector and the migrants rights sector. Their work has built up strong partnerships with major British cultural institutions such as the British Film Institute, the National Gallery, the Southbank Centre, Tate Britain and Dartington Hall. Counterpoints Arts are recognising the value of the role they can play in supporting leaders in the field to attend arts and social change retreats (such as the Dartington Hall retreat in autumn 2016), to become better connected and networked. Their efforts are also extending outside of London, connecting key arts and social change players in city regions, as well as the capital. Counterpoints Arts are planning to have a focus on pop culture at their next Platforma festival in Newcastle in autumn 2017.

⁶⁷ www.youtube.com/yt/creators-for-change/creators.html

Comic Relief recognises the power of well-connected relationships and has established longstanding partnerships with public figures, media representatives, NGOs and other funders. Comic Relief played an influential role in funding the work of women's aid charities during The Archers radio drama storyline (see case study above).

The documentary charity Doc Society (formerly BRITDOC) recently announced a three-year collaboration with the BBC to support production and social impact communication⁶⁸. The partnership will see Doc Society co-funding up to four BBC documentaries a year and provides the opportunity for the BBC to acquire the TV rights or stand-alone iPlayer rights of new and existing Doc Society-supported projects. As field leaders in documentary audience and community engagement, Doc Society will provide expertise to the BBC on a select number of films, a specialism the non-profit has been developing over the last eight years.

The success of Doc Society's outputs is often down to the time they spend fostering relationships, connecting key industry players and designing wrap around advocacy to accompany films (see The End of the Line as an example below). Doc Society has developed multiple and varied partnerships to extend the reach of documentaries through Good Pitch, a live event which brings together documentary filmmakers with foundations, NGOs, brands and media around leading social and environmental issues.

"The Good Pitch is a mechanism that brings round the table funders, NGOs and film producers. It's done in an open environment so immediately different objectives and interests come out including policy recommendations and campaigning. It does surface some of these things."

Funder

⁶⁸ www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2017/bbc-britdoc-partnership

Case Study: The End of the Line

The documentary film, *The End of the Line*, was the first major documentary to expose the dire consequences of over-fishing. A report by BRITDOC (now Doc Society) said that post-film campaign work meant that for each film viewer, a further 510 people had heard about it. A quarter of a million people alone watched the film's trailer on YouTube.

Sustained campaigns were run alongside the documentary. These included consumer focused websites ('Seafood Watch Widget' and 'Fish to Fork'), which allowed people to check on sustainability, a campaign to name and shame London restaurants serving endangered fish. This created momentum, which was a good point for public figures to becoming involved, including Stephen Fry and Prince Charles speaking up in support of the film.

As a result of this sustained coverage, supermarkets began to change their buying practices and expressed support for the film and a popular chef followed the film up with a successful TV series, *Hugh's Fish Fight*.

The film's executive producer Chris Hird said the film's success was down to timing and the large number of alliances they made with corporates, public figures, activists and NGOs such as with the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Marine Conservation Society (MCS).

"The documentary on overfishing, *End of the Line*, was a huge success. In seeking to replicate this engagement, we quickly realised that we had no expertise in the minefield of commissioning, production and editorial influence. BRITDOC brought in a critical oversight role."

Funder

Source

www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/feb/18/end-line-film-fish

Image credit: By Allen Shimada, NOAA NMFS OST - <http://www.photolib.noaa.gov/htmls/fish2565.htm>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/index.php?curid=19243629>

4

Opportunities to leverage pop culture for social change

4.1 Boost diverse representation

Lack of diversity and representation across media and entertainment is a longstanding, entrenched problem. Creating lasting change in this area will take time. But there are opportunities, which require sustained investment and buy-in from broadcasters and other media sector partners.

4.1.1 Support for creative writing and scriptwriting programmes for people with diverse backgrounds and/or from marginalised communities

Funding the development of new voices and talents from diverse backgrounds in the industry is vital. Entities such as BFI, BAFTA, and Film London have initiatives in this area, but funding from trusts with an interest in migration/racial justice issues could support and grow these and similar programmes over a longer time period. There is a real need for training courses and support, for BME media writers in particular.

There is an appetite and an interest from broadcasters to be more representative, but there is often a gap in career pipelines, which hinders progress. Funding placements and scriptwriting programmes for people from diverse programmes would be beneficial and is likely to be welcomed by broadcasters.

“It would be great for us to work with a Muslim woman writer, for example.”

Broadcast executive

4.1.2 Fund projects supporting young people from diverse backgrounds interested in entertainment careers

Funders could do more to support people’s career cycles by funding arts projects with school-age young people from diverse backgrounds so they see the creative industries as a pathway open to them. It is a challenging area to fund as it does not necessarily yield immediate results and is more likely to have an impact over a longer timeframe. But with cuts to youth-focussed funding and a perceived devaluing of the arts in mainstream education, funders with an interest in social justice are essential champions of this work.

4.1.3 Fund content by and about diverse groups of people to feature on non-traditional media platforms

Writers were identified by some interviewees as a group of creatives who are key catalysers for issue-focussed content. As well as supporting development pipelines, which might include resourcing a writer to develop work on a script, supporting writers directly on their passion projects could prove fruitful. This could be in the form of direct grants for research, travel, development, as well as second-tier support – inspirational salons, access to expert advisors, access to archives.

“People from different backgrounds need chances to pitch scripts and get them into production pipelines – funders could fund script development.”

Writer

One group of writers suggested funding streams to invite open idea pitches from established writers, new writers and young creatives interested in this area. This might involve someone with a great idea from a non-established background being paired with an established writer – e.g. a young refugee who has a great idea for a story being matched with a writer to develop this further. Broadcasters and production companies will need to lead the way in promoting these sorts of opportunities and providing the necessary mentoring support to up-and-coming new writers.

4.2 Strengthen authentic voices

Some interviewees questioned how successful public figures were in driving social change and whether funders should play an active role in stimulating public figure advocacy at a time when there were high levels of cynicism around this.

Given the hostile environment towards immigration, it is necessary to consider how best to leverage the power and influence of public figures to ensure that messages are well communicated and have impact. Many public figures are keen to take action, particularly on issues relating to refugees, but do not want to stick their head above the parapet for fear of reprisals and backlash. But their involvement can be valuable, particularly when they have an authentic and credible voice on an issue. It is worth considering the value of behind the scenes advocacy, as well as authentic public messaging.

4.2.1 An independent body could play a valuable role in proactively approaching and guiding public figures willing to speak out

An independent body would be able to proactively prospect and approach public figures who have an interest in social justice issues due to their politics or personal history. This will aid public figures to develop their voice as advocates and role models. This will require sustained investment from funders and a sensitivity and level of trust on the part of the coordinator.

Migrant rights organisations have for decades tried to reach out to people with a migrant history with varied degrees of success. An independent funded body might have more traction. The approach would come unencumbered of an expectation to support a specific charity. This would be beneficial across a range of cultural areas including: fashion, art, literature, sport, music, television, film, social media and comedy.

4.2.2 Fund support for behind-the-scenes advocacy between public figures and influential cultural figures in media and entertainment – aimed at encouraging diverse representation on screen

Funding discreet initiatives, such as the groundwork needed to engineer meetings between high profile public figures with broadcasters and/or commercial production companies would be beneficial. Encouraging public figures to take an active ‘behind the scenes’ role in pushing for social change might be more appealing than encouraging them to be vocal, only to get slammed down in response. This could, for example, include working with public figures to leverage their contacts within the media and culture industry to encourage greater authentic representation of refugees and migrants.

4.2.3 Support platforms where authentic voices can be heard

Occasions and festivals that reach out to a broad audience are an opportunity for authentic voices to be heard in the mainstream. Events like Refugee Week, festivals in public places (for example the Women of the World festival at the Southbank Centre which has a diverse audience) and public art projects provide opportunities to share stories and invite public discussion.

There is scope for ensuring that social justice narratives are built into mainstream public events, such as World War I and II memorial days or other national events, such as sporting occasions.

“The World War I centenary was an opportunity to have an open discussion about being British. Positive stories were reported in the press, like British Muslim women wearing Remembrance Day poppy hijabs. Sport also presents opportunities, like Euro 2016 when the Daily Star featured young Muslim English kids supporting England. It’s important to show Muslims sharing British identity.”

Communications director

4.3 Explore evaluation and impact measurement

Funders, and other stakeholders, particularly in the NGO sector, need to be aware of the importance of long-term approaches to influencing culture, alongside other immediate, reactive measures. ‘Cause-focused’ art tends to reach those that are already converted. It is more challenging to demonstrate and evaluate impact at scale among mainstream audiences over the longer term.

But it is important to be aware of the challenges and risks in attempting to influence mainstream culture. There is understandable scepticism about prioritising efforts to influence pop culture above funding direct services to migrants and refugees, especially given the current funding climate.

Another risk is the potential backlash when projects fail or are evaluated and deemed ineffective. For example, Britain was heavily criticised when it abandoned its plans to offer development aid to the Ethiopian girl band ‘Yegna’ given prior investment from UK taxpayers⁶⁹. Even though funders are not distributing public money, there is a risk that negative attention could be damaging to their credibility and public image.

4.3.1 Activists and funders seeking to work towards longer-term cultural change will need to consider how they evaluate projects and campaigns that are attempting to normalise an issue in mainstream culture.

Cultural change is gradual and sometimes intangible, making it much harder to evaluate. Activists will need to consider what they wish to ‘count’ as relevant and impactful outcomes from this work. Funders will need to determine which dimensions of social change they wish to prioritise in resourcing cultural activities and cultural influencers.

⁶⁹ www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4095882/Britain-scraps-5million-foreign-aid-Ethiopia-s-Spice-Girls-Mail-revealed-blood-boiling-waste-taxpayers-money.html

Funders will also need to consider how flexible to be in evaluating project outputs, in order to allow activists and creatives the opportunity to collaborate without the pressure of achieving pre-set targets, which may or may not be possible to achieve.

4.3.2 Fund longitudinal research and evaluation assessing pop culture and its impact on social justice

Some of our interviewees were reticent about attributing impact because they feel their personal cultural circle isn't indicative of 'the mainstream' and because there is little research or analysis they are aware of which evidences the impact of pop culture initiatives. Funders also expressed concern about impact and evaluation challenges, noting that trustees might be hesitant if it is not straightforward to prove impact. The degree to which public figures can shift opinion or open up political space for productive discussion was also questioned.

It would be beneficial to support the collation of an evidence base of case studies and examples that demonstrate shifts in behaviour or changes of attitudes, where they can be measured. Funding further analysis and distribution of best practice examples within and between sectors would be useful for others interested to work in this space.

4.4 Influence narratives

Narrative approaches vary in efficacy depending on the type of story, the context and the receptivity of the audience. Funders will need to carefully consider whether they want to enable the engineering of content or dabble in the creative process itself.

In order to shift attitudes, it is important to move beyond a narrative that frames immigrants as a positive product you need to 'sell' to an unconvinced audience. Concern about migration is an expression of many things: economic disenfranchisement, white entitlement, sense of identity dislocation in a globalised world, etc. Hostile attitudes will not be 'cured' by a diet of cultural products focused on empathy-generating storylines. Indeed, cultural content that is overtly 'about' migrants or 'an issue' will not attract the audience you most need to reach in the first place.

Instead, it may be more fruitful to pursue projects that explore identity, sense of belonging and focus on broader intrinsic values such as community, love, unity and friendship, rather than being solely issue-focused.

Interviewees stressed that this was not to say that a sitcom about e.g., a Muslim family could not play a useful role. This kind of programming would also help dismantle prejudices and stereotypes amongst liberal viewers and ensure that diverse populations feel represented, heard, and culturally visible. Their point was more that it was unlikely that this kind of programming would attract the viewership whose attitudes most needed changing, especially in an era of multi-platform viewing and self-curated programming where a primetime 'captive audience' no longer exists.

"If we want to really impact public attitudes, what's needed is not a sitcom about immigrants. Hostile people aren't going to watch that. The issue here is white identity. Cultural content needs to start

unpacking this. If I were going to commission a TV show now to increase understanding, it would be more like a Roseanne (rustbelt America) or a Golden Girls (white privileged older women in Southern states). A programme for the people who think they are not being heard or represented. So they feel the content is for them. Then, you get stories about Muslims, gay people etc woven into that fabric so messages do reach them but in a backdoor way and once you've built your loyal audience who will be receptive to it rather than alienated by it."

Screenwriter

4.4.1 Seed-funding to catalyse new ideas

Interviewees from the film and TV world highlighted that new sources of funding for developing projects would be welcomed and could help circumvent long development processes. This is especially useful for social justice projects that seek to tackle 'live' issues. Film production is a costly process and development money is difficult to access. Projects have a better chance of success if the research and development process is well resourced and a good writer is secured early in the project.

With a great deal of development funding coming from Creative Europe, there was also concern that streams of public funding previously open to British creatives might dry up in the future. Interviewees suggested that trusts could explore opportunities to be more proactive, rather than reactive, i.e. to provide one-off seed funding to help catalyse relevant ideas, commission writers to move a project into its next phase, option books which have potential for films, and could also offer co-financing once a project moves into production.

4.4.2 Add funding resource and advocacy support to projects already in development

Due to the high-risk and long-tail nature of film development, a lower-risk option might be for funders to add additional resourcing to projects that are already in motion – identifying projects in development already, scripts that have been produced on spec, etc.

Funders new to this arena might 'dip their toe in the water' by collaborating with a project that is ready to go. Development costs could go towards covering legal fees, fees for writers, fees for contracts, producer time and research time for writers. One interviewee commented that '£5k can go a long way in this development space'.

4.4.3 Fund alternative methods of communicating narratives, such as competitions between advertisers

Leveraging the competitive nature of the advertising industry is a clever way of increasing engagement on a social justice issue (due to the exposure of adverts in public places and in cultural products like magazines and media outlets). It can save expensive advertising costs in the process. The Maltesers advert example (see Paralympics case study above) is one example, as was Elle magazine's Feminism issue where they asked three advertising agencies to rebrand feminism, giving each agency a full page spread in the magazine. One of the ideas #makethepay became a fully fledged campaign

that ended up contributing towards legislative change. These sorts of approaches (i.e. hacks and competitions) only work if there is a pipeline to take ideas forward. There is a role for funders in supporting these sorts of campaigns and concurrent advocacy running alongside.

“Well designed competitions are a neat and low cost way of using advertising; “#makethempay did very well and provoked legislative change. Generally you will need a funding stream to take the winning campaign to scale.”

Charity director

4.4.4 Invest in tactical partnership building

There is a place for overt exposure of an issue (particularly when gross abuses and discrimination are occurring), but most interviewees recognised that pop culture is most successful at bringing social justice issues to a wider audience when it operates more subtly. This might mean that a funding model that narrowly seeks to focus its grant-making on refugee and migrant issues will not foster projects of the kind of subtlety needed to secure mainstream audiences.

“The key is getting to the thought leaders and creative minds. Thinking about how to engage and build alliances is not the same as signing a public letter or doing a theatre production. We need a long-term, deeper approach.”

Funder

Funders will need to decide how ‘overtly’ a project needs to address these particular issues in order to secure the funding, and what percentage of the content needs to be focussed on these issues in order to qualify for grant-making – e.g. the extent to which the issues needs to occupy the primary storyline of a film. To allow the projects that might be most successful in changing hearts and minds to qualify, it is recommended that a broad view be taken. Funding choices might also need to contain a balance of catalyser grants for issue-focussed projects, and education/connection grants that support creatives to weave these issues into existing work in more nuanced ways (e.g. a secondary storyline in an existing series).

For a funding stream of this kind to be successful, creative selection and stewardship is paramount. Some interviewees expressed concern that funding entities specialised in the social justice arena would not have the expertise to identify viable projects with merit.

“It needs to have people with creative backgrounds helping make these decisions. Agents, film producers, plus connectors who can determine the legitimacy of an idea in terms of the issue.”

Talent manager

Suggestions for the film sector included funding a key partner to manage the process for a funder, e.g. Film4 Development Team, or choosing a small number of production companies and allocating them a sum a year to develop projects and guiding them as to what they want to fund.

If the desired objective is social impact at scale, funders working in this space will need to work with experts drawn from the creative worlds to make funding decisions that deliver a good return on the investment and apply careful commercial and artistic criteria to the types of projects that are resourced, rather than simply how well a project addresses a specific social justice issue.

“It has to be the best product it can be. It needs to be films you want to make, films you want to see.”

Talent manager

There was concern that an issue-focussed funding stream might mean that relevant projects have a longer lifespan than they really deserve in terms of their artistic merit or commercial viability. Rather than be quickly killed due to lack of commercial prospects/ audience/poor quality of work, issue-focussed funding might end up being a temporary life-support machine for projects that will inevitably die. As one interviewee commented, “You need to ask yourself if something isn’t getting mainstream funding, whether it’s a good enough project in the first place.” Funders could consider collaborative funding with distributors and channels, like Netflix/ Channel4/BBC etc. in order to ensure that funded projects have a production pipeline and a final ‘home’.

4.5 Tap into the zeitgeist

The success of creative work is hostage to the vagaries of the cultural zeitgeist, which cannot be controlled for. This can be positive and can give a creative product a wide-reaching halo effect and open up opportunities to create political waves, or it can be negative and mean a product lands at a time of issue-saturation.

4.5.1 Fund rapid response grants to campaigners and activists riding on the wave of a new cultural phenomenon or news story

Funders might consider establishing funding streams that are not too narrowly focussed on a specific issue that it risks being shut out from the zeitgeist, and also ensuring it funds a mix of rapid-response short-lead projects that can react to the zeitgeist, as well as longer gestation projects.

Campaigning initiatives targeted at young people are also likely to be well received, particularly on the subject of refugees and migrants. This presents opportunities to inspire action and engagement amongst young people. Many young people want to play a more direct, active role, rather than to give money to charity. Culture is a powerful conduit for presenting opportunities for young people to take action.

4.5.2 Resource impact campaigns that sit alongside or follow mainstream cultural outputs addressing social justice issues

Interviewees suggested that resourcing the distribution/release campaign of a cultural product like a film or TV series could create social impact and would involve less financial risk to the funder. It is at this point that an output can have salience and wide interest. Distributors also have more of a throughput than production companies, which tend to have a number of different projects in development but only a limited number will ever convert. Offering funding to projects that have already been backed creatively by other funders, reduces the creative risk to the funder and focuses their efforts on maximising social impact from a given cultural product.

Some interviewees suggested that film distributors might put social messaging into the marketing campaign, or build-in an educational outreach strand, if it unlocks more resource from a funder.

Social justice TV content sometimes suffers from the fact that TV channels are often not the best at promoting a particular show, as they have a wide roster of content and have to use their resource and media opportunities strategically. This means that a production company might resource a separate PR push, and this could be something that funders contribute to, in order to ensure that the cause-related angle comes through in a film/TV series' marketing.

The model of funding impact campaigns around documentary content has been well established through the work of Doc Society, supported by the Bertha Foundation.

4.5.3 Support independent journalism and credible news platforms

Media stories and long-form journalistic story telling was identified as a key influencer of public opinion, inspirers of public figure advocates, and catalysts for creative content. In the current climate, it was felt that independent media platforms, long-lead investigative journalism, and long-form feature journalism were increasingly under threat. Some interviewees highlighted that funding in the pop culture world should not neglect funding to 'traditional' news outlets that are known for credible and emotive story telling about social justice issues.

"The biggest things that have affected change have been the death and injury and subsequent photos of Aalaan Kurdi and Omran Daqneesh. It continues to be the strong, real stories that need to be pushed out."

Artist liaison lead

"A lot of [film ideas] come from news features, human interest profiles, the story of such and such activist. These stories are optioned very often and from that comes a film. News articles are key - the film industry knows what to do with them. Something to think about is whether the lack of funding of independent journalism will effect these story pipelines - maybe funders need to think about putting funding into this kind of investigative journalism, deep media story telling in order to safeguard the story pipelines for popular culture down the line, especially in the current climate."

Talent manager

4.5.4 Invest in short form video creators and social media influencers

Arts funding is a risky business; it is high investment and low yield. For every one project that is realised, there are a host of unsuccessful ones and you need to invest in multiple different projects in order to ensure at least one gets off the ground. Foundations/trusts are not used to backing projects that are never realised, therefore funders would need to interrogate whether trustees would be able to understand the nature of risk in this industry and be willing to invest in projects when only a certain percentage will bear fruit. Similarly, unless someone has written a fantastic script on spec, the development process is very slow and a funded project could take up to five years to come to realisation.

Funders need to decide whether they are willing to fund work that operates to such long lead-times and if the slow-burn nature of many cultural industries lends itself to tackling the live social issues it wishes to address. This risk could be mitigated by supporting projects at different stages of development, and by diversifying the portfolio of funded projects – for example investing in video news outlets like VICE, in creative agencies and networks like Funny or Die and Don't Panic who can create rapid-response short-form content, as well as resourcing long-form narrative film projects. Several interviewees suggested funding unbranded short form video content by working with creative agencies, self generated YouTubers and digital platforms like Upworthy, Unilad, Viral Thread, Now This, might give quicker wins in terms of reaching wide audiences with shorter lead times and working nimbly with the zeitgeist. The audience is likely to be younger and more amenable to social justice narratives. This approach could be structured in the same way as project-based funding for TV/film development or investing in individual writers.

“YouTube held a Summit for Social Change in 2016. It's an interesting arena because they are self-appointed. Some have their own channels with a big following. It's a currently underdeveloped field but there's a willingness to push and nudge; it's an exciting area.”

Charity director

“Funders could invest in new spaces, young audiences - YouTubers etc. as the NGO sector not very innovative in that space. Could look at giving a pot of money to agencies like Adam and Eve, Fullwell 73 - they might relish some challenges like that.”

Artist liaison lead

4.6 Forge relationships across and between sectors

Funding challenges and cuts mean that the refugee and migrant sector is often struggling to carry out day-to-day work. Communications and campaigning functions of smaller refugee and migrant organisations are under pressure which makes it harder to build relationships with scriptwriters, commissioners etc. Some of the bigger international NGOs have this capacity, but sometimes lack trusting relationships with the populations they are seeking to support. There is work to be done in educating the NGO sector on being good partners, and managing their expectations of creative collaborations and the demands of their partners.

“There is potential for deeper, more thoughtful collaborations and alliances. Influencing messages, thinking and frames of reference. I think that would be more powerful than comment from celebrities - which is often either counterproductive or doesn't change that much.”

Funder

In terms of an effective funding mechanism, the Wellcome Trust is a relevant and successful model for an 'issue' funder looking to move into this space. Their programme of funding film and TV development is well respected, and in addition to grant making, they also offer access to their library, broker access to experts, and a series of talks/salons on areas of scientific developments.

“Writers can attend talks / salons that stimulate interest, and they can also hook you up with practitioners and give you access to a free library. This process inspired Tom Edge to create Lovesick - a series about a guy who gets an STD and has to go and tell all his exes. Wellcome sponsored the project at an early stage in the knowledge that it would get the issue out to young audiences. Channel 4 originally commissioned this for broadcast, and Netflix co-produced it. Wellcome also helped with funding development and then with its move into production. Wellcome also come on board pre-existing projects - you approach them, or they look at your slate with you and help identify what’s scientific and relevant to their funding stream. They contributed to the production funding of James Wood’s Quacks (a comedy about surgeons in 1800s), which was already at script stage when they came on board.”

TV producer

Funders working in the pop culture space will need to be comfortable with hands-off approaches to creative development.

4.6.1 Consider ‘grants +’ opportunities for grantees

Grants + opportunities can enhance grant-giving by including support with connections and strengthening of networks. This is beneficial in areas that cross between industries and sectors. Some trusts and foundations will be willing to provide extra help and support in addition to their funding offer. This might involve sharing their skill and expertise, or making introductions to people working in different sectors.

Funders could also help provide or fund legal advice to arts organisations on what they can and can’t say and do on particular issues – especially at election and referenda times. As charitable bodies that do often not have social change as part of their constitution principles/mission statement, arts organisations often have to be politically neutral. Many arts organisations feel hamstrung in having an overtly political voice, which might impact on their ability to engage.

4.6.2 Appoint independent advisers to act as brokers between industries

Public figure managers identified a need for independent advisors that are culturally bilingual brokers between the worlds of arts and entertainment and social justice. They would play an important role to inform and educate high profile creatives and public figures, and crucially, the teams that support them.

“Gatekeepers, i.e. TV commissioners, are an important part of the equation. We have to find ways of engaging with them.”

Charity Director

Investing in engaging with the gatekeepers to public figures (publicists, managers, agents) and offering them advice that can be flexibly delivered in an informal way (i.e. one-to-one meetings, visits

to their offices) were identified as useful ways to build the creative sector's capacity and appetite for this work.

"Relationships with agencies, management companies and PR companies are key. They are the ones specifically engaging talent. There is room for someone who could serve as a mediator between the philanthropy world and the agencies. People whose role it is to make that happen. A mediator between the two is really useful and much needed."

Talent manager

While artist liaison teams at larger NGOs offer this support, there is need for advice that is impartial, artist-focussed, iterative, and broad in terms of the issues it covers and the organisations it connects people to. An independent trust that services a movement could be well placed to provide this more impartial support in the form of a network of advisors that coordinate closely with the immigration and refugee sector and are tasked with outreach to the creative worlds. It would be valuable to fund intermediaries who can bridge between sectors.

"What's missing is the people in between. No one wants to fund the running around connecting and building partnerships. You can't build a movement if you don't fund the backbone."

Charity director

4.6.3 Create a sense of community and spaces for inspiration and connection

It would be beneficial to create spaces for education to happen and for relationships to forge between sectors and individuals. Building a community of interest and a network of allies would reduce risk aversion from creatives and public figures.

In getting cause content made, the news/media was cited as one of the key catalysts to inspire people, especially long-form feature content. The role of individual connectors was also emphasised in facilitating connections between producers and media communicators.

"The key thing is getting stories in the right hands – a producer or a high-level actor. The biggest hurdle is getting it seen, getting it to the person who will champion it."

Talent manager

There is an art to how this can be achieved, especially when you need to attract the most influential, highest-profile creatives and connectors in the industry, who are generally time-poor. One interviewee observed that networking events are not likely to be popular for people whose time is precious, but that a specially curated event by a respected forum would be worth attending. Suggestions included: partnering with and resourcing existing respected professional networks to play this role; exclusive curated study days for individuals and their friends; inspirational talks from experts (like the Wellcome Trust model); conferences, residencies; private dinners or salons hosted by high profile leaders in the sector⁷⁰ and retreats bringing together people from across a range of industries.

⁷⁰ A good example is the salon hosted by Cate Blanchett for UNHCR, which had a fundraising aim but succeeded in convening many key players passionate about this issue in a private home.

These events provide the chance to learn about issues and stories which might ignite an imaginative spark and act as moments of raw inspiration. They could connect writers with people working in the refugee and migrant sector who can support and shape material and storylines. This is not about the sector directing the creative process, rather about presenting an opportunity to share authentic stories that help to shape and bolster the knowledge of writers, as well as opening channels for advice and support. Convenings would increase motivation to engage and offer the chance to hear from those who have created impact through their interventions already.

“Funders can help get content into the right hands. They can fund mechanisms and structures that help do that. They need more people who straddle the two worlds and can be a bridge between them. There is a definite desire for these worlds to overlap, but people on each side don’t really understand each other. The people who are passionate about the cause don’t always understand the creative world – and vice versa.”

Talent manager

5

Conclusion

This report has focused on six thematic areas where pop culture can and does play a role in influencing social change (Representation; Authenticity; Normalisation; Narratives; Novelty; and Relationships). This categorisation came about due to words and phrases that our interviewees spoke about time and time again during our research. In particular:

- **Authenticity:** Authentic and diverse representation across a range of sectors is central to shifting public perception and normalising social justice issues.
- **Narratives:** Subtle narratives, messages and stories can change hearts and minds, particularly when using a 'show don't tell' approach. Sharing stories is a powerful way of bringing social justice issues into the mainstream, busting stereotypes and injecting pathos into the public debate.
- **Zeitgeist:** There is potential to tap into and/or respond to emerging trends, news cycles, the current political context and innovation. This involves riding waves of public opinion and reaching out to millions of people through the opportunities that pop culture bring.
- **Bridging:** We can do more to strengthen networks across and between sectors. This will allow us to foster relationships, spark new ideas and generate clearer, more coordinated and consistent messaging.

There are many opportunities for the NGO sector, funders and the media and entertainment industry to play an influential role in catalysing social change through pop culture. This is a diffuse area, but there are countless cultural avenues for influencing change in the UK, across a broad range of social justice areas.

Key players will need to carefully consider what goals they want to achieve and where they might want to focus their efforts and investment in the future. There are risks and challenges that need to be carefully considered and understood across each of the thematic areas. Long-term investment is crucial and evaluating impact is challenging. But, this area presents new and exciting opportunities to provoke deep and profound cultural shifts in behaviour. Our recommendations for advancing in this area are as follows:

- We encourage interested parties to convene and attend events to explore the potential of pop culture in catalysing social change. This will bring in key allies and provide an opportunity to invite input on where to prioritise funding moving forward.
- We urge UK-based funders to consider making pilot grants to test the water in this area. In the first instance, grants to build networks across sectors (with a view to shaping or influencing content in the longer term) and some rapid response grants to capitalise on cultural moments would be a promising place to start.
- Finally, we encourage wider discussion regarding opportunities for funders to collaborate with one another and make pooled investments in the pop culture space. This would present opportunities for a broader portfolio involving some riskier investments (i.e. working more closely within the content creation space, for example) as well as a greater focus on boosting representation and bolstering networks across and between sectors.

"The secret of change is to focus all of
your energy, not on fighting the old,
but on building the new."

Socrates

**Riding the Waves: How pop culture has the potential to catalyse
social change in the UK**

By Alice Sachrajda with Esme Peach
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