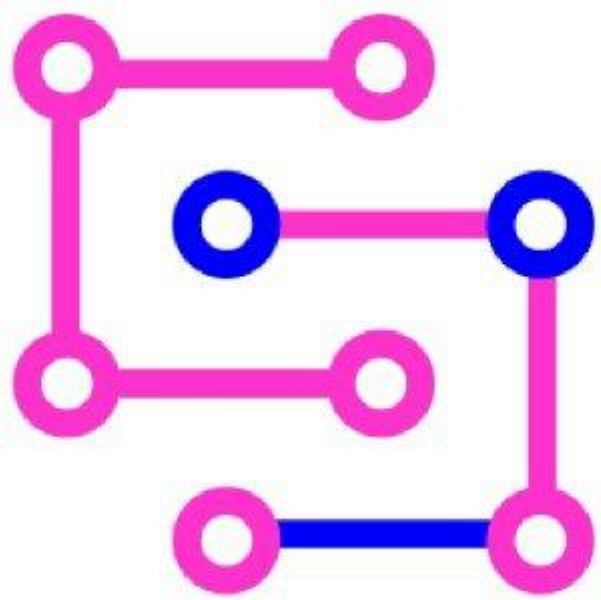
SCOTINFORM



Civic Digits:
Creative Industry Research

9 February 2023

Prepared by Helen Duncan

SCOTINFORM

Scotinform Ltd, 21 Young Street, Edinburgh EH2 4HU
0131 555 1104 | www.scotinform.co.uk | info@scotinform.co.uk

Contents

1. Introduction 1

1.1 Project Background 1

1.2 Research Objectives 1

1.3 Methodology 2

1.4 Reporting 2

2. Sample Profile 3

2.1 Creative Role 3

2.2 Artform 3

2.3 Geographical Spread 3

3. Experience of Digital Interaction with Audiences 4

3.1 Previous Experience 4

3.2 Engagement with the Audience in the Performance Space 4

3.3 Engagement with the Audience Online 5

3.4 Tools Used 5

3.5 Reflections on Experience 6

4. Future Demand for Interaction with Audiences 8

4.1 General Interest 8

4.1.1 Respondents who were interested 8

4.1.2 Respondents who were not interested 9

4.1.3 Respondents who didn't know 9

4.2 Benefits of Audience Interaction 10

4.3 Barriers and Concerns **11**

4.4 Interest in the Civic Digits Proposal **12**

5. Conclusions 13

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background

Civic Digits blends digital technology, gaming and live performance to create innovative and interactive experiences, to question what it means to be a digital citizen in the 21st century.

Civic Digits has developed an app that would allow content creators (artists or event organisers, for example) to interact with a live audience on their own devices. This interaction could take place in a venue or as part of an online experience (but not on the device on which they are watching the performance).

It would allow the audience to respond to what they are seeing, share opinions and experiences with each other and enable the content creator to respond to this as well. All of the data generated through using the app is anonymised and not able to be used in any way.

Civic Digits has identified an opportunity to develop this app as a tool that can be populated with the creators' own content, identity and branding and would like to test out whether there is demand for this product.

Scotinform Ltd is an independent research company based in Scotland. We work with artists, venues and festivals across Scotland and have extensive experience of undertaking new product research.

1.2 Research Objectives

The purpose of the research was to engage with the creative and cultural sector to determine:

- The extent to which creators are currently engaging with audiences on their own devices during performances
- What they have been doing and how they feel it has gone
- Whether they would be interested in engaging in this way in the future, and why/why not
- An understanding of the motivations for, and barriers to, engaging with digital audiences in this way
- The level of interest in the Civic Digits proposal specifically

1.3 Methodology

Scotinform designed an online survey, approved by Civic Digits and its communication partner, Eragona Communications. This was sent to a 'warm' database of contacts created by Eragona Communications and shared on social media channels. Respondents were invited to 'snowball' the survey distribution by sharing with their own contacts if they felt this was relevant. Scotinform also shared the survey to its own clients where relevant. As an incentive, Civic Digits committed to sharing the results of the research.

The survey opened on 16 January 2023 and closed on 1 February 2023. During this period 32 responses were received.

Further insight into the response of the sector was gathered through a series of depth interviews with representative organisations (see separate report).

1.4 Reporting

Please note that this sample cannot be judged as being representative of the entire creative industry sector; rather it is an indicative overview of the response to the topic.

Due to the small sample size we have reported using actual values rather than percentages.

2. Sample Profile

2.1 Creative Role

The 32 respondents were asked about their role in the creative process (please note that some respondents selected more than one option).

- 16 were directors
- 14 were writers
- 9 were performers
- 4 were producers
- 6 were academics
- 3 were venue programmers
- 2 were venue managers
- 1 was a technician
- 1 was a composer
- 1 was a designer
- 1 was an animator

2.2 Artform

- 28 respondents worked in theatre, making this by far the dominant artform within the sample (again please note that respondents could select more than one option).
- 9 worked in digital art
- 8 worked in dance
- 8 worked in literature and the spoken word
- 7 worked in contemporary music
- 7 worked in film
- 5 worked in classical music
- 5 worked in visual arts
- 4 worked in comedy

2.3 Geographical Spread

22 respondents were based in Scotland, 7 were based somewhere else in the UK and 3 were based outside the UK.

3. Experience of Digital Interaction with Audiences

3.1 Previous Experience

11 of the 32 respondents said that they had previously connected or interacted with audiences digitally on their devices in a venue or performance space.

16 of the 32 had previously connected when the audience is online (it was made clear that this engagement had to be as part of a performance, not for communications).

9 respondents had not previously engaged with audiences in this way and 1 respondent didn't know.

It should be remembered that this is an engaged and 'warm' audience and the extent of past experience expressed here is perhaps higher than across the sector more generally. Nevertheless, it is clear that the growth and development of digital devices, alongside the social distancing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, appear to have resulted in some interest and activity in this area.

3.2 Engagement with the Audience in the Performance Space

10 respondents told us about their experiences of engaging with the audiences in a venue or performance space. The experiences were all very different but in many cases allowed the audience to provide feedback that then influenced the performance. In other cases the interaction provided a different viewpoint or experience, or allowed the performer to access an audience from a remote location.

Used an app to interact with the audience in the theatre

Audiences can access a webpage that allows them to interact together to control AV equipment and software via their mobile devices

Asked audiences to access a live survey through their phones during the show to answer questions that then influenced the performance

Made many shows for phones, shows where people are led on an adventure through their phones, listen to audio, play mini games.

It was a live theatre/film hybrid production where the audience wore headsets. This was then recorded for film circuit and TV distribution

We create a combination of live performance and projected animation. We have used live

camera inserted into live projections using the audience.

Taken part in literature and spoken word events virtually

3.3 Engagement with the Audience Online

16 respondents told us about their experiences of engaging with audiences online.

Ten of these had streamed live performances (including podcasts). In this case the online interaction is the means of reaching the audience rather than the audience necessarily influencing the performance itself in the moment.

The other applications were:

Used a QR code on screen to offer contextual information during a performance (2 respondents)

Invited remote audience interaction through video, audio and chat (2 respondents)

Developed a separate interactive page on a play's website designed for audience members who could not attend the play and required extra support to access it.

A late night zoom gathering where live and pre-recorded ambient outdoor sound from different parts of the world are broadcast. The audience participate from their room lit by just one candle and broadcast themselves (dimly lit) via a device of their choice (phone/laptop/tablet). It was done as an antidote to aggressive digital communication during the lockdown

Transmitted immersive audio experiences to people at home

Improvised show where the online chat would change the performance

3.4 Tools Used

23 different tools or applications were mentioned by respondents, ranging from familiar names from business or social media to bespoke applications developed by the respondent:

- Zoom (5 respondents)
- Teams
- YouTube
- Discord

- Facebook Live
- twitch
- Whatsapp
- Brick Moon (virtual venue)
- DARKFIELD Radio
- Game Engine Twine
- Game Salad
- Green Screen
- Incognito (to run live shows using a mobile phone app)
- OBS
- Plivo
- Remote Control (audience interaction app)
- soundalerts
- Streamelements
- triggerfyre
- veadotube
- Own software/app (unspecified) (2)
- App that allows audience members to control AV equipment and software

3.5 Reflections on Experience

Only six respondents provided any feedback on how the experience had worked for them:

- Two reported that it had worked as intended/went down well with audiences
- One said that it was successful in part
- Two reported difficulties in reaching new audiences (particularly when compared to the pandemic)
- Two said that they enjoyed it from an artistic viewpoint

- One did not collect data on how many audience members had interacted so felt unable to comment

4. Future Demand for Interaction with Audiences

4.1 General Interest

Of the 32 respondents:

- 22 would be interested in interacting with audiences through their personal devices as part of a performance in the future, in a venue/artistic space
- 20 would be interested in interacting with audiences through their personal devices as part of an online performance in the future
- Two would not be interested in this approach at all.
- 6 were unsure.

Respondents were asked to explain their answer.

4.1.1 Respondents who were interested

6 respondents felt that the creative sector needed to embrace the digital world as part of the space that artists and audiences inhabit:

> Technology is at the centre of our everyday lives, so I think it should be central in our art too.

> I think we live our whole lives on our smart phones and it feels obvious that performance should also be looking to exist in that space.

> I think if Covid has taught us anything, it is that performers and theatre makers need to think beyond the physical black box.

5 respondents felt that this kind of work would be exciting for the performer/creator of the work:

> It's another way to tell stories, and have huge creative potential

> The intersection between live, physical, and digital is a fascinating space that provides the potential for increased audience agency and the ability to tell new stories and in different ways.

3 said that it would increase access for audiences:

> It offers new ways of connecting with audiences that wouldn't otherwise be available to me

3 said that it would be enhance the experience for the audience:

> I'm interested in working on a show that uses devices for voting and gaming during a live show, running two experience as a parallel to create a unique experience and have audiences question how they relate to both.

1 said that there was a need to increase engagement when streaming performances:

> Audience engagement during performances was missing - how can people interact online while watching an online performance all within the same experience? How to make it feel like part of a whole experience so people can share like they would at a live in-person event?

4.1.2 Respondents who were not interested

One of the respondents who would not be interested said that they felt that audiences already spent a lot of time on their devices and that they have a preference for focusing on the live experience:

> I'm most interested in the live event that, for its duration, doesn't use digital or screen based methods. Nothing against them, but in my practice I'm particularly interested in avoiding them, and what it means to do so in a world where outside of that space and time, they are pretty ubiquitous.

4.1.3 Respondents who didn’t know

Four of the respondents who didn’t know whether they would be interested said that it would depend on the performance in question and that digital engagement should not just be applied to all artforms or experiences.

> I'm not against it, but I would want this form to follow from the content of the piece rather than aiming to fulfil a digital brief.

> It's not something I'm currently thinking about but if a creative idea came along that linked to working in this way I wouldn’t be opposed.

One respondent felt that some audiences might be excluded from the experience.

> Interesting idea, would like to explore but would be concerned that it excludes some audiences.

4.2 Benefits of Audience Interaction

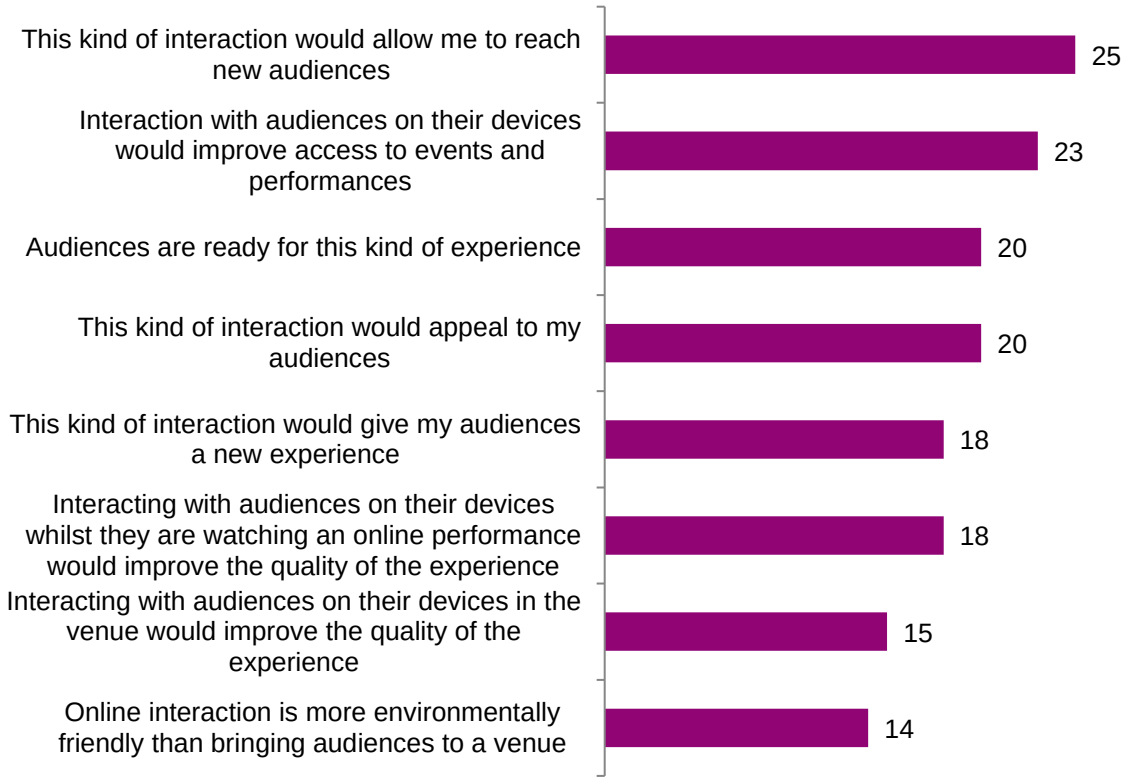
Respondents were presented with a list of possible benefits of interacting with audiences and were asked whether or not they agree with them.

The number of respondents (out of 32) who 'strongly agree' or 'slightly agree' with each statement is shown in the chart below.

The feedback largely reflects the open-ended responses to the previous question. Respondents felt that audience interaction would be most likely allow them to reach new audiences and improve access for audiences. They also felt that there was demand from audiences for this kind of space.

They were less likely to agree (although agreement overall was still relatively high) that there were environmental benefits, or that the online performance experience would be enhanced.

Figure 1: Agreement with suggested benefits of live audience interaction (base: 32 respondents)



When asked if they could identify any other benefits of this kind of audience engagement:

- 9 respondents said it would make the performance more dynamic and responsive
- 4 said that performances could be better tailored to audiences

- 2 felt that it could support/develop particular communities of audiences
- 2 felt that there would be opportunities to be gained by collecting audience data
- 1 felt that audience engagement would increase
- 1 felt that it would provide audience members with a way to feed back anonymously

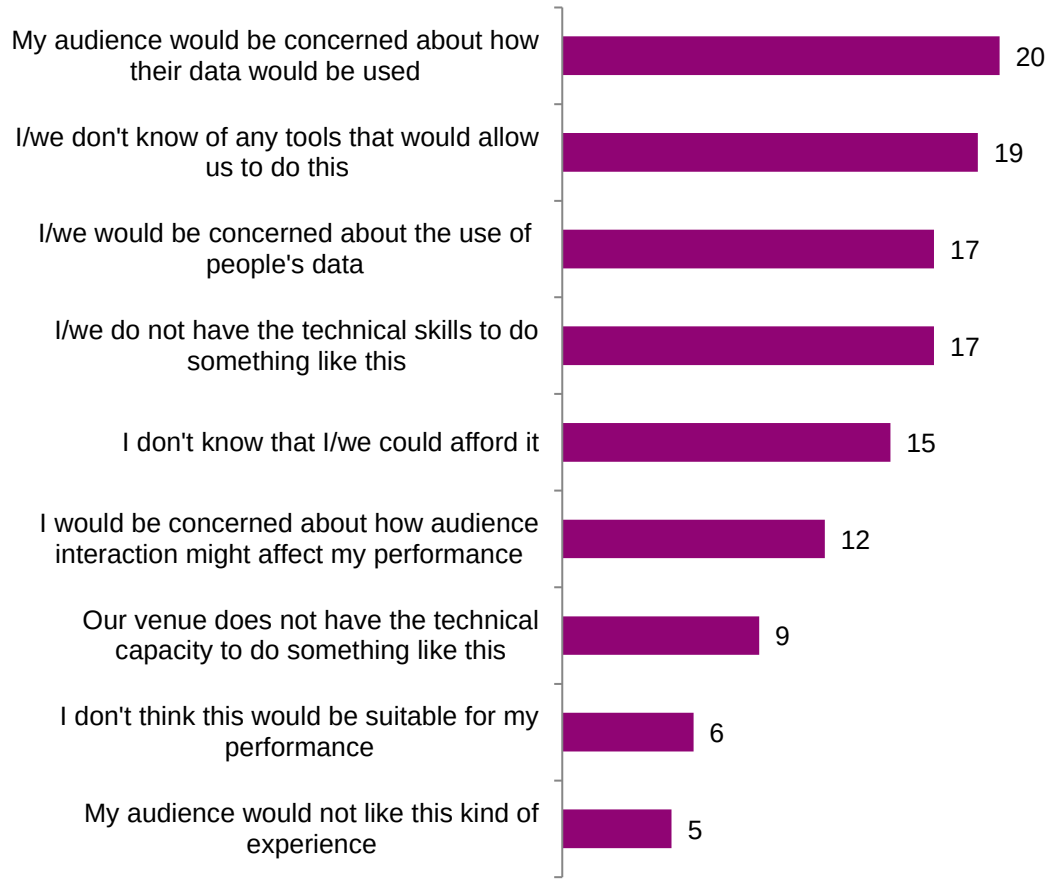
It should also be noted that three respondents were cautious about identifying benefits, saying that it would depend on the show/circumstance, and that it should not be assumed that this will always be a successful approach.

4.3 Barriers and Concerns

Respondents were presented with a list of possible barriers to and concerns about interacting with audiences and were asked whether or not they agree with them.

The number of respondents (out of 32) who 'strongly agree' or 'slightly agree' with each statement is shown in the chart below.

Figure 2: Agreement with suggested barriers to/concerns about live audience interaction (base: 32 respondents)



The biggest concerns for respondents are questions (from the audience and the respondent) about the use of audience data, a lack of awareness of tools that would allow them to interact in this way, and a lack of technical skills to do work like this.

When asked to identify any other barriers or concerns:

- 9 respondents were worried about technological issues (for example, audience members not having smartphones, the wifi not working properly, an app not working on all types of phones, people being unwilling or unwilling to download any software)
- 5 felt that it could diminish the experience of a 'live' event and perhaps prevent audiences from escaping the real (and digital) world for a while
- 4 pointed out that the use of this kind of interaction is production/performance specific and should only be used where it will really enhance the experience
- 3 were concerned about the lack of control over the type of feedback received from audience members, particularly if there is no control or moderation of the content.

4.4 Interest in the Civic Digits Proposal

Respondents were provided with the following description of the product proposed by Civic Digits:

We are looking to develop an app that would allow content creators to interact with the audience on their own devices. This interaction could take place in a venue or as part of an online experience (but not on the device on which they are watching the performance).

It would allow the audience to respond to what they are seeing, share opinions and experiences with each other and enable the content creator to respond to this as well. All of the data generated through using the app is anonymised and not able to be used in any way.

Based on this description:

- 9 respondents said that this would be of interest to them
- 19 said that it would potentially be of interest but they would require further information
- 3 would not be interested
- 1 said that they didn't know

5. Conclusions

There is clearly an interest in digital audience interaction, both with an audience in a venue and in an online space.

Approximately half of this (engaged) sample had prior experience of interacting with audiences during an online performance, and approximately a third had experience of interacting with audiences in a venue or performance space.

In-venue experiences appear to involve the audience in the curation of performances and work to a greater extent than online performances, which are for the most part streaming of a live performance.

Respondents appear to be using either very mainstream communication apps (not necessarily designed primarily for this kind of content) or bespoke applications that may have been developed in-house.

Many respondents appear to be at an early experimental stage of introducing this kind of approach. A minority are much more expert and have often developed and tested their own solutions.

Approximately two thirds of respondents would be interested in engaging with audiences during a performance in the future.

The perceived benefits of such engagement are: reaching new audiences; improving access; reflecting the expectations and experiences of audiences; and enhancing the creative process.

The perceived concerns about/barriers to such engagement are: concerns around the use of audience data; a lack of understanding about the tools available; and a lack of technical skills. The Civic Digits proposal would be well placed to address most of these issues.

There is strong potential demand from respondents for more information about the Civic Digits proposal.

Overall, the research suggests interest in the product offer in general, and a warm response to the Civic Digits product in particular. There appears to be an opportunity in the market between general tools like Zoom or Teams and bespoke software built on an individual basis.