

# Delivering social impact in entertainment content

Priorities, approaches and challenges

**OKRE**





# Contents

Background and context	2
About OKRE	2
About this research	3

## Executive summary 3

Social impact priorities	4
Organisations want to deliver a positive impact	5
Organisations are generally aligned on areas of focus	5
Impact priorities	6

## Approaches to delivering impact 7

How entertainment organisations approach impact	8
The content development lifecycle	8
Netflix's <i>Sex Education</i>	9
The dramatisation of the Post Office scandal	9
Explicit or implicit social impact themes	10
Third party and internal team collaborations	11
Collaboration between entertainment organisations	12
Collaboration can drive better outcomes	12

## Measuring impact 13

Benefits of measuring impact	14
Most organisations do not measure impact	14
This lack of measurement is not driven by apathy	15
Challenges around measuring impact	15
Attribution is messy	16
Lack of standardisation	16
Approaches for measuring content	17
Absence of shared definitions	17

## Conclusions and recommendations 18

Organisations want better support	19
Conclusion and recommendations	19
An Entertainment Impact Index	20

## Background and context

Storytelling through entertainment content has the power to influence perspectives and shape culture. Conscious of their impact, entertainment organisations are keen to wield this power for good. While some seek to educate, amplify diverse voices and create inclusive narratives, others may support specific social changes.

Regardless of their goals, it is notoriously complex for organisations to measure the social impact of their content: time and resource intensity, coupled with an absence of industry standardisation around the very meaning of impact, means many

organisations avoid attempts to measure their impact altogether.

This report explores the following:

- The ways in which media and entertainment organisations are approaching and measuring the social impact of their content
- Common challenges associated with this endeavour
- Recommendations for establishing greater standardisation and knowledge sharing around measuring impact

## About OKRE

At OKRE, we know that entertainment content can change the world.

And we're not the only ones who think so. We bring together collaborations from across film, social media, games, audio, television, academic research and charities.

OKRE is an organisation at the heart of the entertainment industry. It was established in 2020 to help TV, film and games creators

deliver the best audience experiences by connecting them with breakthrough research and lived experience. OKRE has been supported by Wellcome, Unbound, UKRI, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

OKRE is a funded partner of Comic Relief's The Power of Pop Fund who supported this research.



# About this research

## Qualitative research

This research draws on in-depth qualitative interviews, conducted in the second half of 2023, with individuals from across the entertainment industry

Organisations include Netflix, ITV, TikTok, YouTube, Snap, Spotify, Amazon Games and the BBC (including its Media Action division)



## Quantitative research

The quantitative insights in this report are gathered from a survey of media professionals, including content commissioners, creators and producers

The survey represents individuals from organisations across the industry, including:

- Broadcasting
- Streaming
- Social media
- Video games
- TV/film production companies

Source: MTM quantitative research and analysis  
Base: Entertainment industry professionals n=123

# Executive summary



## Impact approaches

A variety of approaches to delivering impact emerged during the research. Variables include:

- When social impact is considered during the content development lifecycle
- How themes are surfaced in content (e.g. explicitly / implicitly)
- Level of internal and cross-industry collaboration. **More collaboration, earlier in the content lifecycle, can drive better outcomes.**



## Measuring impact

Measuring impact serves as a compass for strategic decisions and substantiates the value of content. Despite these benefits, most organisations do not measure the impact of content.

However, **hesitancy is not rooted in apathy; limited resources and the perceived complexity** of measuring are the key stumbling blocks. For **those that do measure, challenges abound.**

**A lack of standardisation in defining impact and how to measure it impedes meaningful comparisons.**



## Conclusions and recommendations

Organisations want support to better deliver and measure impact. We recommend the following:

- **Standardising definitions**, aligning on what “social impact” means and the key metrics to track
- **Industry-wide collaboration** to share best practices – from internal impact teams to measuring methodologies and third-party partnerships
- **Pooling resources** to develop cross-industry impact measurement tools.



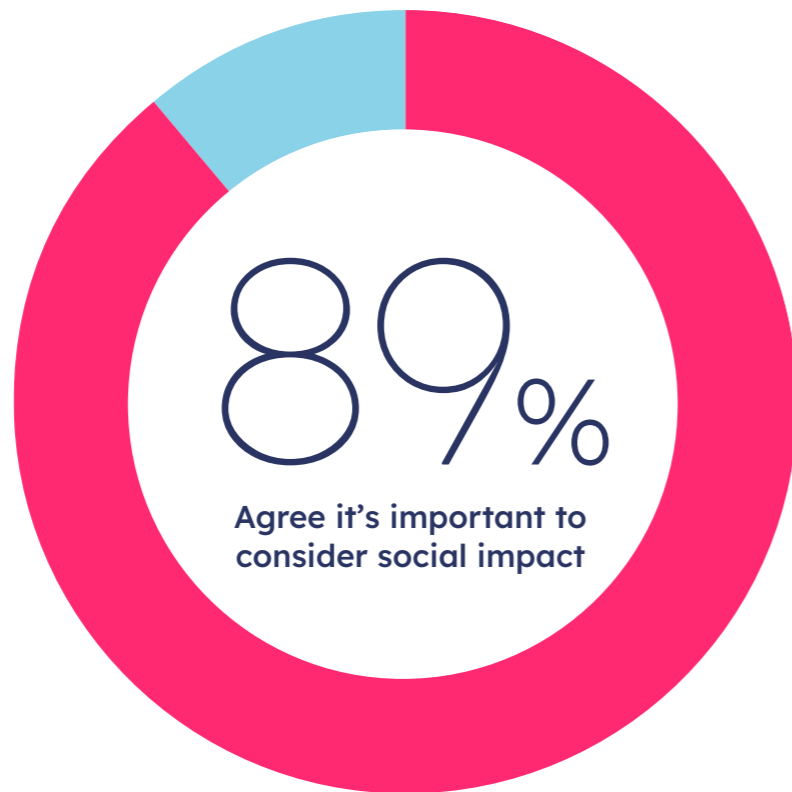


# Social impact priorities



# Organisations want to deliver a positive impact

When creating or commissioning content, how important is it to consider its social or societal impact?



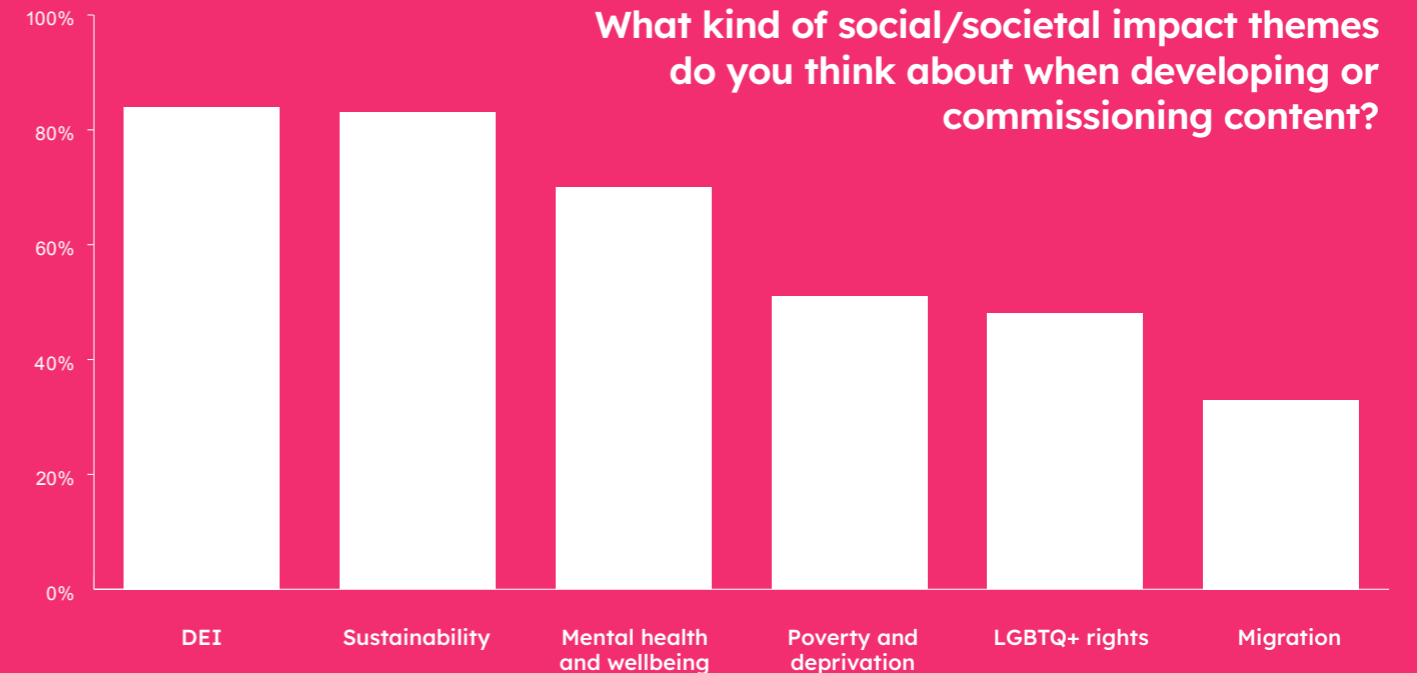
Having a positive impact is threaded into everything that we do. I think that's part of the DNA of Google, and in my experience, it's absolutely part of every conversation.  
MANAGING DIRECTOR, YOUTUBE

'Everything we broadcast has an impact. It makes a difference how you represent people and their experiences and how that plays out in people's lives.'  
GABY HORNSBY, BBC

Source: MTM qualitative and quantitative research and analysis  
Base: Entertainment industry professionals n=123



# Organisations are generally aligned on areas of focus



Entertainment organisations recognise the impact their content can have, **prioritising issues like diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) alongside environmental, climate, and sustainability initiatives** when commissioning and developing content.

Source: MTM qualitative and quantitative research and analysis  
Base: Entertainment industry professionals n=114

'It's quite easy to track representation compared to measuring how attitudes or behaviours have changed. For example, over the last few years, we've had more leading roles played by people of colour. While this is very clear from a representation point of view, you can also extrapolate the impact from that: it's easier to be something when you've seen it represented onscreen.'  
BENJAMIN KING, NETFLIX





# DEI is consistently identified as a top priority; organisations address this in a variety of ways



## Social media platforms have programmes dedicated to supporting marginalised groups and encouraging and amplifying their voices on their platforms

- TikTok’s Creator Diversity Collective and TikTok for Black Creatives
- YouTube’s Creators for Change
- Snap’s 523 programme
- Spotify’s Sound Up initiative



## Organisations across the broadcasting and streaming industries have initiatives in place to ensure on-screen diversity

- The BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Paramount, UKTV and Sky are all part of Project Diamond, which collects data about gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disabilities of people both on and off-screen in all UK-originated productions.



## Producing original content that highlight DEI issues

- Small Axe, created by Steve McQueen and broadcast on the BBC, details the stories of West Indian immigrants in London and explores themes of structural racism.
- Netflix’s Love on the Spectrum follows the dating lives of neurodiverse individuals, challenging notions around love and relationships and contributing to improved representation of those with autism.

**The ability to readily translate DEI priorities into trackable metrics (e.g. on-screen representation) can help to explain the prominence of this issue among entertainment organisations**

Source: MTM qualitative research and analysis

# Despite broad consensus on impact priorities, the specific issues within each category vary between organisations

Across the entertainment industry the constituent issues within social impact categories are highly individual. It’s important to embrace the full spectrum of topics within each category to avoid overshadowing particular issues. For example, our survey suggests that while 84% of respondents consider DEI when creating or commissioning content, only 48% consider LGBTQ+ rights, indicating that the latter issue is not necessarily defined as a DEI agenda for all individuals.

Even within organisations there can be uneven adherence to guiding principles. Where social impact teams may prioritise sustainability in content creation, commissioners may perceive it merely as a box ticking exercise. As a result, there is opportunity for better alignment within organisations on the social impact agenda.

DEI remit	
Org #1	Org #2
✓ Gender	✓ Gender
✓ Ethnicity	✓ Ethnicity
✓ Accessibility	✓ Accessibility
✓ Ageism and generational diversity	✗ Ageism and generational diversity
✓ Religion	✗ Religion
✓ Poverty and deprivation	✗ Poverty and deprivation
✓ LGBTQ+ rights	✗ LGBTQ+ rights
✓ Neurodiversity	✗ Neurodiversity

**‘As a writer, you’re sometimes smuggling in themes of social responsibility into your script – it’s not always producers’ or commissioners’ priority.’**  
 FREELANCE WRITER, OPEN SURVEY RESPONSE





# Approaches to delivering impact





# There are a number of variables in the way entertainment organisations approach impact

The more consideration given to each variable at the start of a project, the more opportunity there is to have a positive impact. Each variable is explored in turn within this section.



Point at which social impact is considered during the content development lifecycle



Treatment of themes in content, e.g. explicit or implicit



Level of collaboration with third parties and other entertainment organisations



Level of internal collaboration to embed social impact into content



# Organisations consider social impact at different stages of the content development lifecycle



## Commissioning

Organisations may commission content that is specifically designed to deliver a social impact.

Example



Spotify partnered with Unicef to support the mental health of young adults affected by the war in Ukraine, creating a new podcast, On My Mind, in collaboration with individuals from Ukraine and Poland.



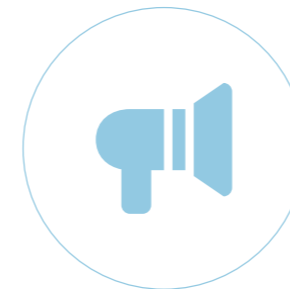
## Development

As content is developed, producers and scriptwriters may recognise the importance of handling themes with sensitivity.

Example



Amazon Games works with LGBTQ+ charities when developing LGBTQ+ characters in its games to ensure authenticity.



## Amplification

Impact themes can be amplified as part of the content marketing strategy.

Example



Disney partnered with the Lion Recovery Fund, a lion conservation charity, when marketing the rerelease of The Lion King.





**Netflix's *Sex Education* was designed to entertain; its ability to deliver impact became clear during content development**



**The dramatisation of the Post Office scandal prompted political action, despite being public knowledge for years**



### Commissioning

Netflix's primary objective when commissioning content is to entertain audiences. It does not commission content with the aim to deliver positive social impact themes.



### Development

During the content development stage, it became clear that *Sex Education* could have a positive impact on its audiences, promoting open and honest conversations about sexual health.



### Amplification

Netflix partnered with Brook, a sexual health charity, as part of the show's marketing strategy and Le Planning Familial, a French family planning agency, also launched a campaign inspired by the TV show.

Source: MTM qualitative research and analysis

**'With *Sex Education*, Laurie Nunn created a brilliant concept and script. As it took shape, we realised there was an exciting opportunity to launch the show and amplify the conversation around these themes. We developed a partnership with an organisation called Brook, a sexual health charity, to amplify awareness around the show, its themes, and to help give them a high-profile platform for things they wanted to talk about.'**

BENJAMIN KING, NETFLIX



### Commissioning

*Mr Bates vs the Post Office* details one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in British history, resulting in the wrongful convictions of hundreds of sub-postmasters due to faulty technology.



### Development

Investigative journalist Nick Wallis has been reporting on this case for over a decade and acted as a series consultant for the programme. The titular Alan Bates also collaborated with the production company.



### Amplification

National outcry following the programme's airing expedited the government's response to overturn the wrongful convictions, highlighting the power of drama to affect change.

**'In most of the political upheavals in history, not least ancient Greece and revolutionary Russia, drama has been at the centre of political change, that people have used it to humanise, dramatise and bring forth change.'**

TOBY JONES, LEAD ACTOR IN MR BATES VS THE POST OFFICE

Source: MTM qualitative research and analysis  
BBC interview with Toby Jones

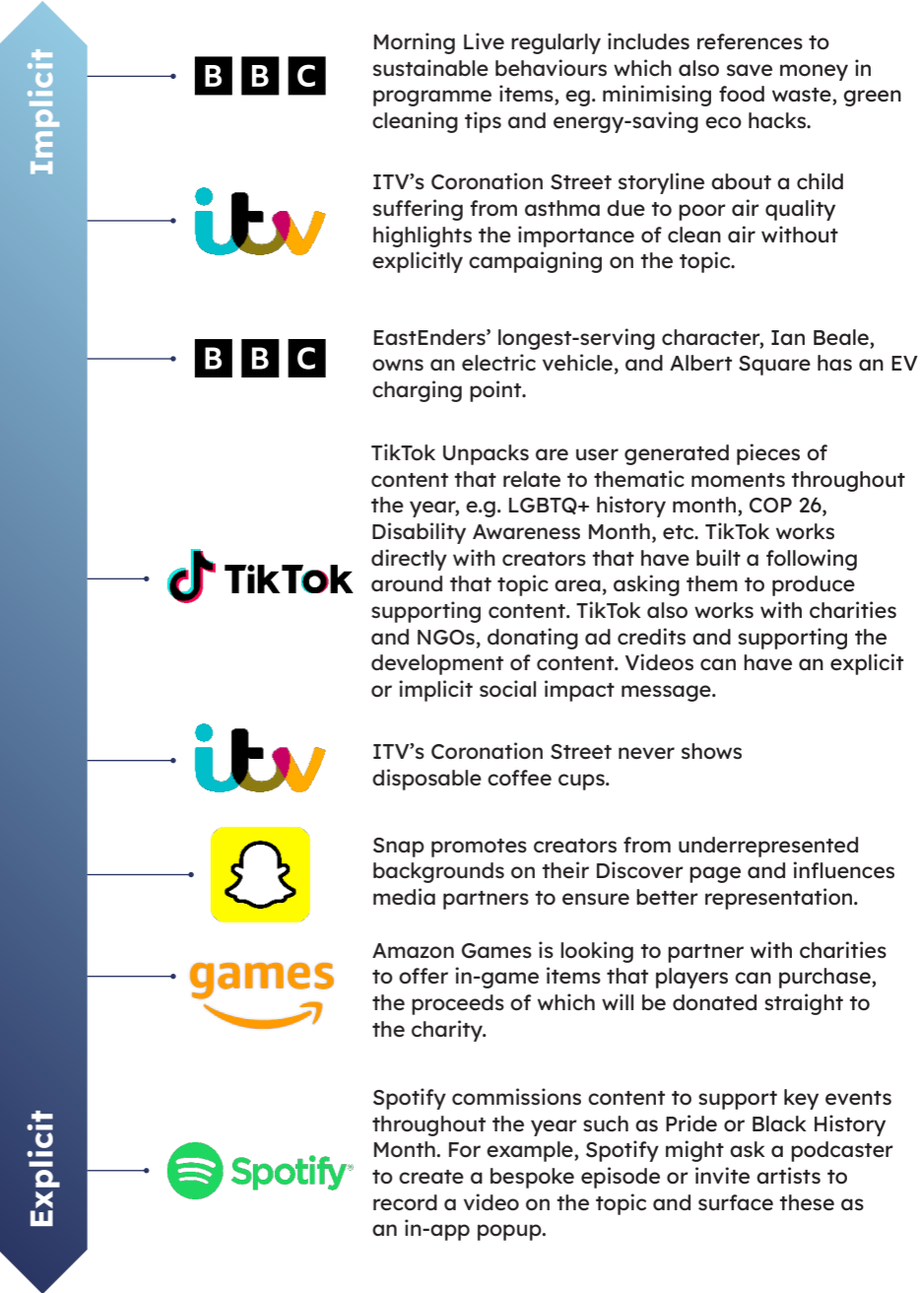




# Social impact themes can be explicit or implicit in content



Social impact themes can be explicit (central to the piece of content) or implicit (subtly referenced in content)







# Organisations often collaborate with third parties across the content development lifecycle

## Entertainment organisations can benefit from third party collaboration across the entire content creation process



At **commissioning**, third parties can offer specialised knowledge and diverse perspectives to provide insights around important, absent or harmful narratives.



During **content development**, third party input can help creatively inform stories, inspire fresh ideas, and ensure authenticity and sensitivity around the portrayal of issues and people.

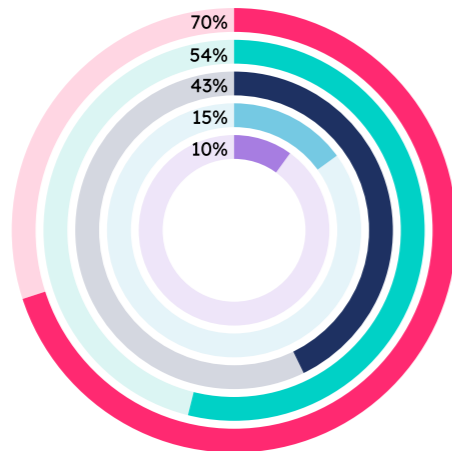


In the **amplification stage**, partnerships can allow content to reach a wider audience and enable entertainment organisations to refer their audiences to specialised resources, e.g. charity helplines. Third parties also benefit by broadening their typical reach.



**Collaboration at all stages builds trust** with affected communities, **enhancing the overall authenticity and credibility** of the content, whilst also helping to identify and avoid potential pitfalls where themes aren't treated with sensitivity.

Considering the last three projects you've worked on, which of these have you consulted with during the development phase?



- Individuals with lived experiences
- Academics
- Charities
- No collaboration with third parties
- Other\*

Source: MTM qualitative and quantitative research and analysis  
 Base: Entertainment industry professionals n=123  
 \*The 'other' 10% includes industry specialists such as ScreenSkills and Exposure Labs, as well as practitioners/experts with specific knowledge (e.g. medical professionals), government agencies, lobby groups and local authorities.



# Some organisations have coordinated efforts between internal teams to deliver impact



ITV's Social Purpose team has quarterly meetings with the genre commissioning heads to discuss how they can explore social impact themes through upcoming content, and monthly Commissioning Green Team meetings.



The BBC has dedicated leads on Sustainability and DEI in Editorial that regularly engage with commissioners, in addition to a formal sustainability evaluation during content commissioning. Furthermore, leads (sometimes in collaboration with third parties) run workshops, empowering commissioners to address issues in content without the need for direct input from topic leads.



Spotify's social impact team leads and supports campaigns and programmes around social impact themes. Where they lead, the team will develop the idea, then brief and coordinate with multiple teams, including comms, marketing, brand, creator and editorial.



TikTok's social impact team's remit covers app content, campaigns and philanthropic activity. This team liaises directly with NGOs or charities to support on campaigns, providing ad credits and connecting them with TikTok's Creator Management team to find the right creators to develop content on their behalf.

**'We meet every quarter with all the key commissioners across different genres to talk about purpose and upcoming content so we can keep that connection going. This means we have great cross organisational conversations around similar themes, which is always really encouraging to see.'**  
 SUSIE BRAUN, ITV

**'We have internal events, workshops and conversations to enable commissioners to commission better climate content. We should be considering if and how we can authentically incorporate the environment into everything, just as we should with DEI. It's a matter of upskilling editorial teams to think about social impact in their work, fostering better awareness across our creative community to do better.'**  
 GABY HORNSBY, BBC





## Collaboration between entertainment organisations is rare but impactful

In the midst of the cost-of-living crisis in 2022, ITV, BBC, Sky, C4 and C5 collaborated with The Climate Change Committee, Energy Saving Trust and Nesta to develop five consistent energy saving tips.

One week post-launch, over 50% of the population reported seeing tips from a broadcaster and 38% said they acted as a result.

In the first week of the campaign's launch, one tip alone – turning down the thermostat by 1 degree – meant that broadcasters helped over 4m people save energy, thereby saving an estimated 1 million tonnes of carbon emissions.

**‘The different broadcasters aligned around energy saving tips. We knew we would all be talking about it because that’s what our audiences cared about. If we were all going to be talking about it anyway, we agreed that it would help audiences if we were aligned. We took advice from the Climate Change Committee, Citizens Advice, the Energy Saving Trust and Nesta to agree on a set of five key tips with calculated energy savings against them. We all drew on those figures with a collective push at the same time. Using an external online panel, we calculated that we saved around 1m tonnes of carbon emissions from one energy saving tip alone. So those moments where we align, within the boundaries of impartiality, are helpful.’**

GABY HORNSBY, BBC

## Collaboration – both internal and across the ecosystem – can drive better outcomes



When social impact is considered early in the content creation lifecycle, this enables more opportunity to collaborate with third parties, bringing fresh insights, as well as authenticity and credibility.



Regular collaboration between impact and creative teams, along with external topic-specific experts, can drive a more consistent and robust approach to positive social impact in content.



Cross-industry collaboration can achieve an amplification effect, with cumulative exposure to core ideas delivering an impact that’s greater than the sum of its parts.





# Measuring impact



# Measuring the impact of content offers organisations several benefits



## Pinpointing tangible results

Measuring impact helps organisations to demonstrate the societal value of their content



## Guiding strategic decisions

Understanding what resonates with audiences enables organisations to tailor future programming



## Demonstrating mission alignment

Staying true to the organisation's goals and values drives greater trust and accountability



## Influencing the prioritisation of issues

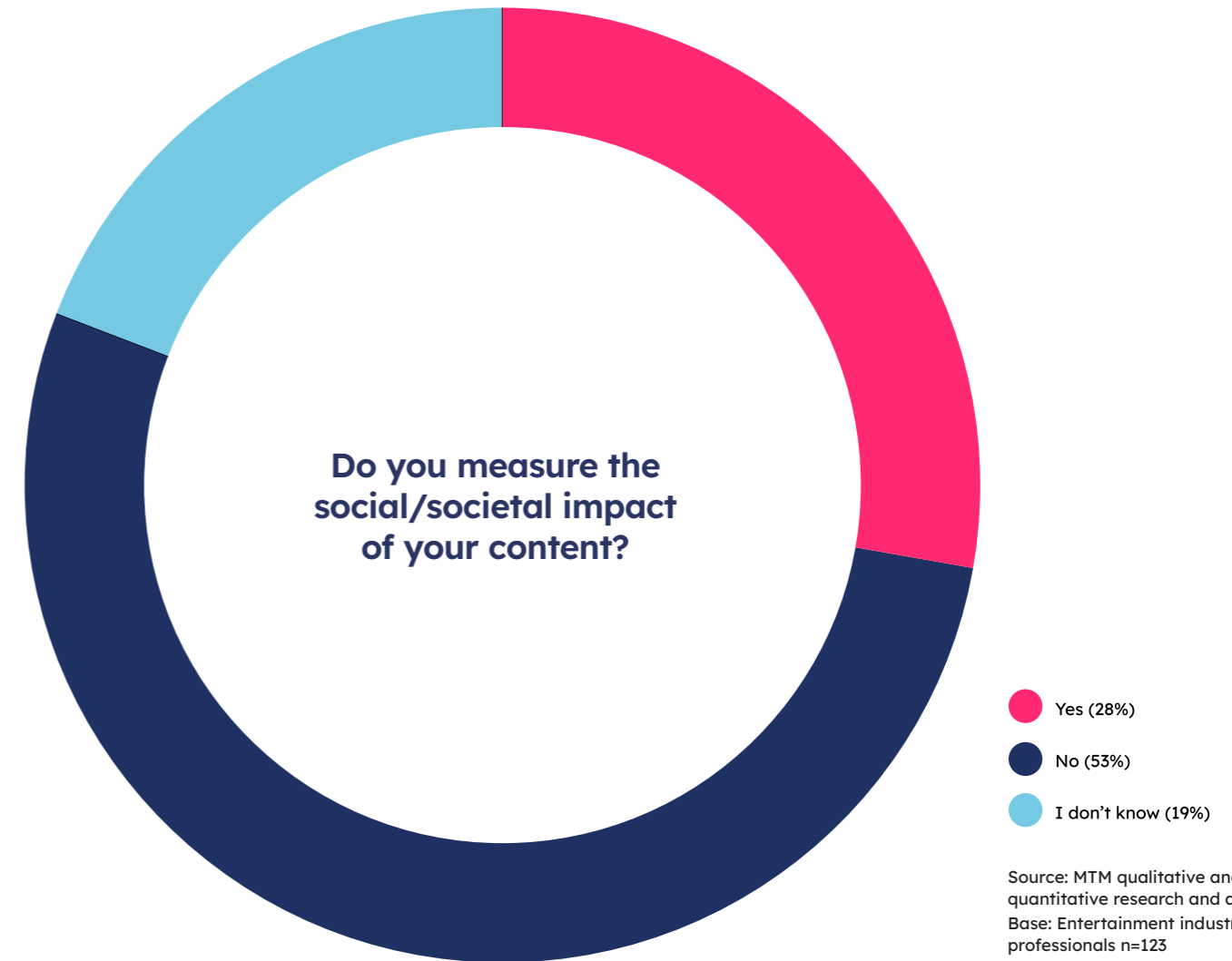
Identifying content that drives meaningful engagement can inform public discourse and influence conversations



## Proving accountability

Publicly funded organisations have a responsibility to demonstrate the impact of their content

# Most organisations do not measure the impact of their content...



Despite the myriad benefits to be gained from measuring impact, only 28% of respondents reported doing so and almost a fifth aren't even aware if their organisation does measure impact.

This knowledge gap, likely due to survey respondents' focus on production, hints at potential communication issues and opportunities within organisations.

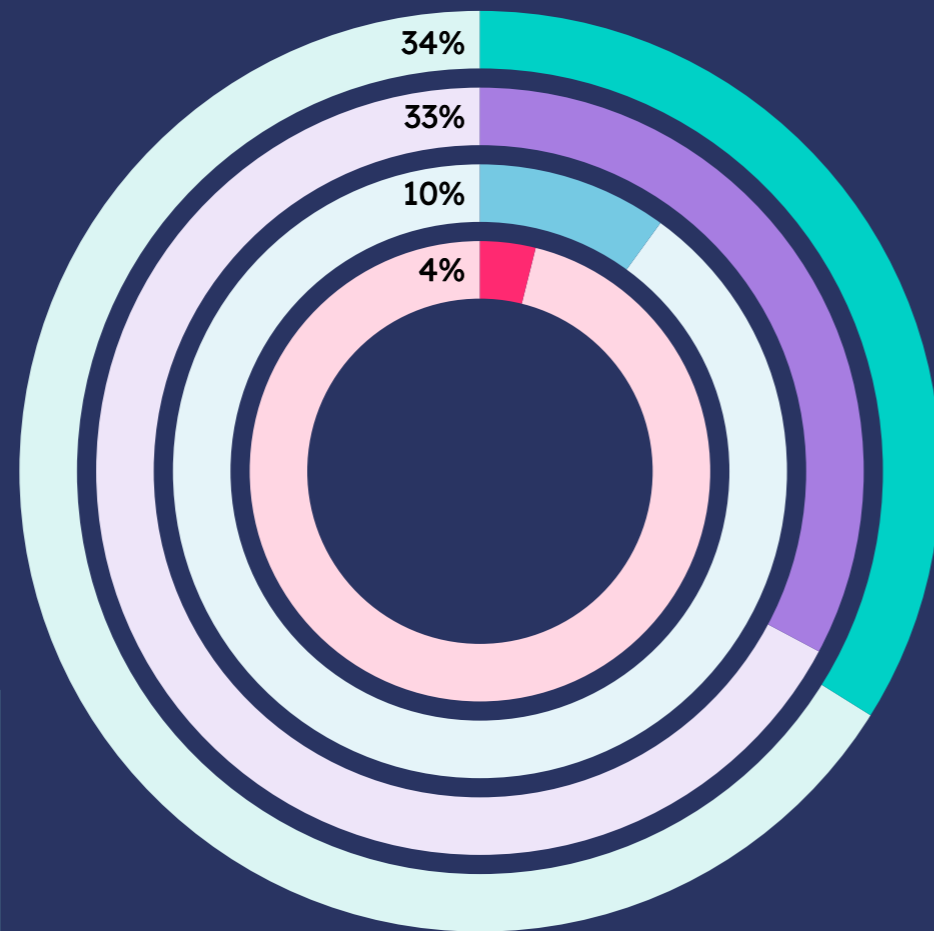
Sharing work and achievements could unite staff around the value and practice of measuring impact.



# ...However, this lack of measurement is not driven by apathy

Among organisations that don't measure the impact of their content, financial and time constraints are at the top of the list of hurdles, closely followed by the perceived difficulty of measuring. Only 4% express outright disinterest.

## Why don't you measure the social/societal impact of your content? Select all that apply



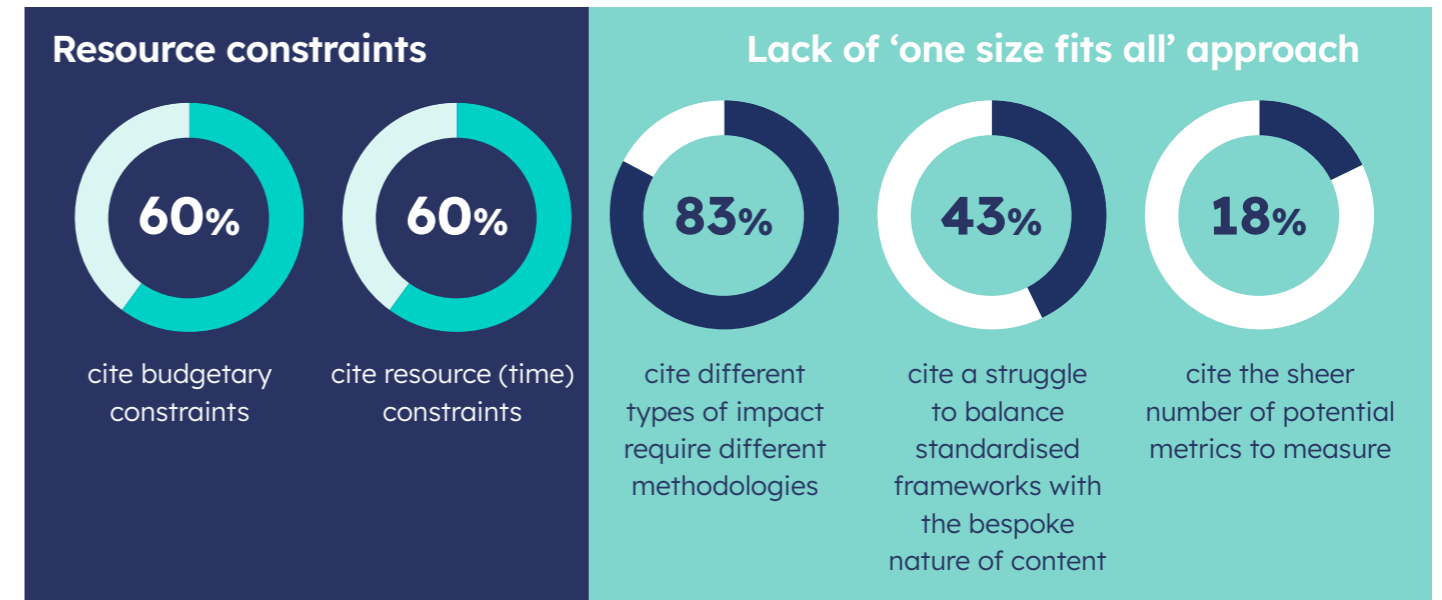
'I'd like to be able to do more to measure the social and cultural impact of our content. Although we do for some campaigns, there's scope to do more but limited resources makes this very challenging.'  
LORRAINE NÍ ANNRACHÁIN, SPOTIFY

- Financial / time constraints
- Difficulty of measuring
- Lack of senior buy-in
- No interest

Source: MTM qualitative and quantitative research and analysis  
Base: Entertainment industry professionals n=88

# Even for organisations that do measure the impact of their content, this is laden with challenges

There are two main categories of challenges - resource constraints and a lack of 'one size fits all' approach to measurement



'If we're measuring the impact of a programme, it would be because there's an overt purpose element to it that has been part of the planning and commissioning stage. Britain Get Singing, a singing competition that talked about mental health and wellbeing, was commissioned with mental wellbeing in mind. When we measure impact, we tend to follow a framework of awareness, understanding, intention and intended behaviour.'  
SUSIE BRAUN, ITV

'The way you measure impact depends on the type of campaign, partnership or initiative that we're running. If we're focused on fundraising through TikTok Lives, for example, these organisations will have fundraising targets that are very measurable compared to something like behaviour change.'  
BEN BRADLEY, TIKTOK

Source: MTM qualitative and quantitative research and analysis  
Base: Entertainment industry professionals n=35





# Attribution is messy, particularly where themes are not overt

Engaging and entertaining audiences is the top priority for entertainment organisations. Overt references to social impact in content can divert attention from the narrative or alienate viewers, and organisations often prefer to address themes more subtly, e.g. portraying diverse characters without explicitly tackling issues around discrimination.

However, measuring impact becomes trickier when themes are not overt. Gauging audience awareness or shifts in perceptions becomes difficult without directly querying audience reactions to specific messages, as doing so risks making these messages overt. This creates a tension for organisations seeking to measure impact while maintaining subtle, implicit references to social impact themes through their content.

*'It can be incredibly difficult to measure and analyse the outcome of content. It's easier where the show has a specific focus. Love Island and eBay have a brilliant partnership where they're showing pre-loved fashion. You can measure who's watched Love Island, what their awareness was of eBay within Love Island and pre-loved fashion, and what the audience claims is a resulting attitude or behaviour change. What's much harder is measuring embedded long-term changes: you'll never see a disposable cup on Coronation Street, but it's not robust to ask audiences "you haven't seen people throwing away cardboard cups in the programme, has it had an impact on you?", because it's not explicit.'*

SUSIE BRAUN, ITV

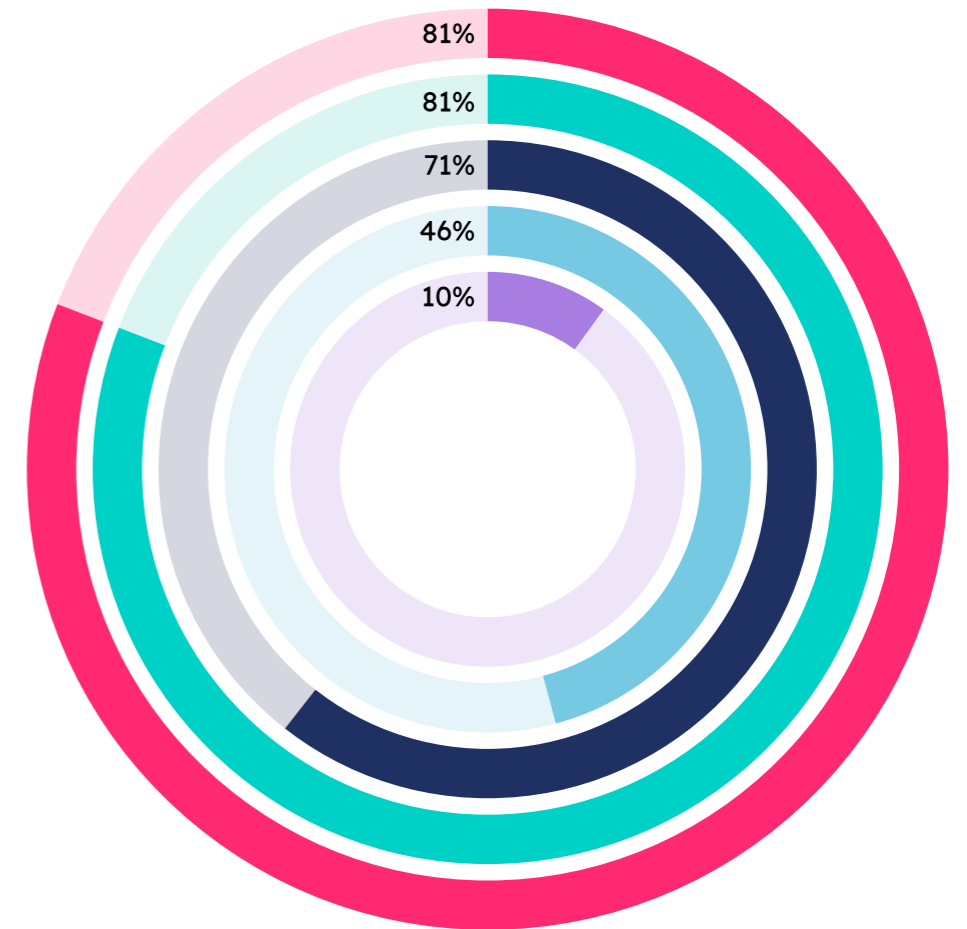
*'Broadcasters are all grappling with how to get a sufficient quantity of data to be able to measure what may be subtle, but hopefully far reaching changes'*

SUSIE BRAUN, ITV

# At an industry level, there is a lack of standardisation around the definition of 'impact'...

What does delivering social/societal impact mean to you? Select all that apply.

- Raising awareness
- Informing and educating
- Behavioural change
- Structural change
- Other



Source: MTM qualitative and quantitative research and analysis

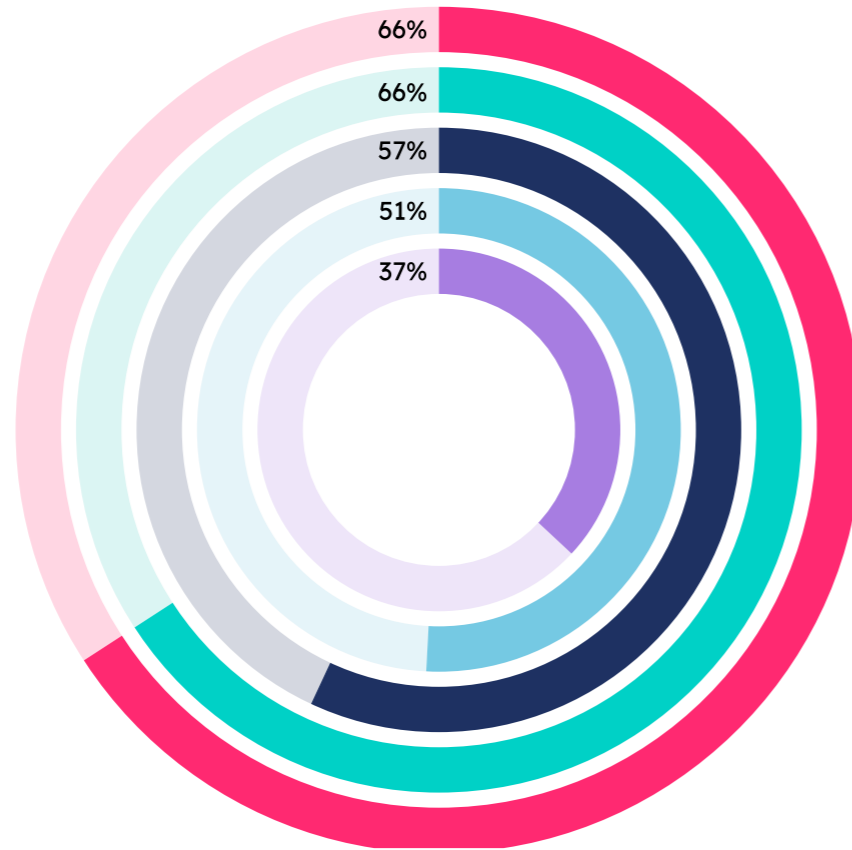
Base: Entertainment industry professionals n=114





# ...And a wide range of approaches for measuring content

How do you measure social/societal impact of content? Select all that apply.



- Surveys / questionnaires
- Statistical analysis
- Anecdotal evidence
- Interviews / focus groups
- Observational studies

Source: MTM qualitative and quantitative research and analysis  
Base: Entertainment industry professionals n=35

'We have a few imperfect proxies for measuring the number of conversations you're generating around a particular show, and you can measure a lot through social media channels, with all kinds of standard engagement tracking tools.'

BENJAMIN KING, NETFLIX

'We worked with HeadCount to develop in app pop-ups to encourage young people to register to vote, and through that we were able to measure the number of those that registered.'

LORRAINE NÍ ANNRACHÁIN, SPOTIFY

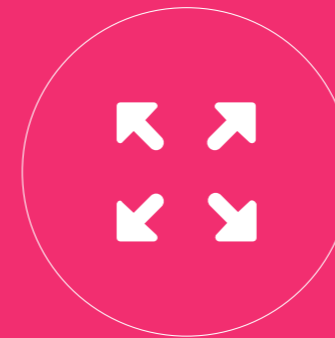
'We ran a survey through Oxford Economics, asking users what they do off-app as a result of engaging with in-app content. 15% said they had donated to a charity or a cause highlighted on TikTok, and 11% said they had volunteered for a charity or cause that they had seen highlighted on TikTok.'

BEN BRADLEY, TIKTOK

# ...The absence of shared definitions impedes cross-project comparisons, limiting the true understanding of impact



Defining 'impact' remains elusive. Most organisations prioritise raising awareness and educating their audiences (81% each), whereas only 46% believe that delivering impact means driving structural change. While impactful content can deliver a range of outcomes, a lack of shared definitions make meaningful comparisons difficult.



The lack of consensus around impact definitions also extends to measurement itself. Respondents are deploying a wide range of methodologies and only 14% are following an industry standard framework.



Without greater alignment, organisations are operating in silos and missing out on potential synergies. Working towards a common language and establishing best practices can foster greater understanding of the nature of impact across the industry.



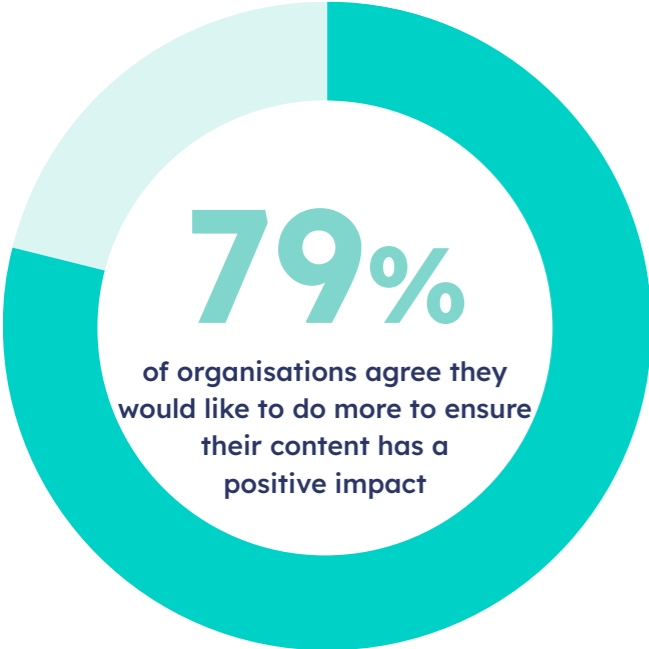
A group of diverse people in business attire are gathered together, celebrating. In the foreground, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a grey jacket and a blue patterned scarf, is laughing joyfully while holding a document. Next to her, a man in a suit and glasses is also smiling and holding a document. In the background, other people are clapping and holding up papers, creating a festive atmosphere. The scene is set in what appears to be a formal or office environment.

# Conclusions and recommendations





# Organisations want better support to deliver a positive impact and navigate the complexities of measurement



Source: MTM qualitative and quantitative research and analysis  
Base: Entertainment industry professionals n=123

‘It would be interesting to have a much clearer grasp of the social impact of the content we produce. Understanding the value of the output, helping policymakers and industry leaders to quantify the benefit of content for society more generally, would be hugely additive to the conversation around the value of our industry overall. Having more consensus and alignment around what those metrics look like would help, as it’s always been quite nebulous.’  
BENJAMIN KING, NETFLIX

‘Across different parts of the BBC there’s a growing interest in demonstrating impact which is prompting more conversations. In the wider industry too, there’s a general feeling that it’s something we need to try and get a better handle on.’  
GABY HORNSBY, BBC

# Conclusion and recommendations

The entertainment content sector including platforms, commissioners and creators are keen to deliver impact and want more support to do this. There is demand for tools that will enable them to measure all forms of impact more efficiently & effectively. There is an opportunity for greater collaboration in measuring impact, both cross industry and with external voices such as advocates, charities & academics. This will help to drive greater transparency, consistency and help organisations understand collective impact and establish synergies.

Developing, measuring and delivering impact are being held back by the lack of any shared language, common definitions and differences in meaning.

## The industry should establish alignment around:

- Definitions of social impact priorities that recognise the nuances and complexities within each category. Partnering with experts can help entertainment organisations to identify areas of greatest potential impact
- Standardised metrics for measuring progress towards key outcomes of impact, e.g. raising awareness, informing & educating, affecting behavioural / structural change

## Industry stakeholders should share best practices on:

- Delivering impact, including how to best mobilise internal teams
- Measuring impact, including appropriate methodologies for different types of content
- How, and when, to collaborate with third parties
- Pooling resources to measure impact across multiple media sources






## Working together towards an Entertainment Impact Index


Organisations have the opportunity to work together, along with external experts to develop an Entertainment Impact Index.

This would complement existing internal impact measurement efforts, while enabling greater collaboration and shared understanding of definitions and impact language.


### The Entertainment Impact Index would:




Simplify a complex space and be designed specifically for the needs and language of the entertainment industries.



Create a framework of definition that could enable organisations to categorise their content both in relation to subject matter and types of resultant impact.



Provide a framework for the sector to report against and promote greater collaboration across platforms and disciplines (academics/charities/experts).



Identify and highlight intersectionality across topics and provide clarity on issues falling through the gaps - avoiding overshadowing.



Surface trends to the wider sector and promote shared learnings.





**OKRE**

Opening Knowledge across  
Research and Entertainment

[okre.org](http://okre.org)