

Institution: University of Salford		
Unit of Assessment: 34		
Title of case study: Student Pulse: taking classical music to a younger audience		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: February 2012 – July 2012		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Prof. Garry Crawford	Professor in Cultural Sociology	January 2006 – Present
Dr Victoria Gosling	Lecturer in Sociology	September 2007 – Present
Dr Gaynor Bagnall	Senior Lecturer in the Sociology of Culture	January 2006 – Present
Prof. Ben (Brian) Light	Professor of Digital Media	October 1999 – December 2013; June 2016 – Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 – December 2019		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Classical music audiences in the UK typically reflect a narrow demographic, that is older, white, and middle-class. This is an audience that has been in decline, largely due to the sector's inability to connect with a younger market. For this artform, university students constitute 'a prime future market segment', especially if reached through a medium they are comfortable with, such as mobile applications (apps). Working collaboratively with the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO) and the software developer Kodime Ltd., Salford's research team led on the creation, testing and rollout of a new ticketing and audience engagement platform called Student Pulse. This was aimed at generating a new and younger audience for classical music in the UK and is now used by nine of the UK's leading classical music orchestras and venues, with nearly 2,500 active users, delivering approximately 11,000 ticket sales, for over 200 concerts annually. This has directly enhanced the vitality and sustainability of an important cultural form, increased the economic prosperity of the orchestras and venues, brought in a younger, more ethnically diverse audience and improved existing business practices, with associated cost and efficiency savings.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Classical music audiences in the UK reflect a narrow demographic that is primarily older, white, and middle-class [3.1]. In recent decades, this audience has been in steady decline, largely due to the sector's inability to connect with a younger audience [3.1]. Existing research has consistently shown that audiences for classical music events in the UK, as in many other countries, are primarily educated and middle-class, therefore, university students constitute 'a prime future market segment' [3.1]. Furthermore, research highlights mobile apps as an effective way to connect with new and in particular, younger, audiences [3.2].</p> <p>To this end, Salford's research team formed a collaborative partnership with a software developer, Kodime Ltd., and the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO), to work with, develop and test a mobile and web-based ticketing and audience engagement platform, aimed primarily at bringing in a new and younger audience for classical music. As the Senior Marketing Manager at the LSO stated, the drive behind Student Pulse was 'to remove some of the barriers to</p>		

attendance for students by discounting tickets, incentivising coming as a group of friends and increasing repeat attendance' [3.3]. This aimed to ensure the continued profitability and viability of an important cultural form in the UK, by allowing greater access to world-class events for a younger and more diverse audience.

A successful collaborative funding application (for GBP94,000, with GBP26,485 being awarded to the University of Salford) was developed and written by Salford researchers to the first round of the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts (funded by the AHRC, Arts Council England and Nesta). The research was conducted between February 2012 and July 2012, using a mixed-method approach. The main method of data collection was seven post-concert focus groups, with a total of 81 students. Additionally, questionnaires were completed by audience members, interviews conducted with LSO and Kodime staff, and observations recorded at several concerts. Data were also harvested from registration information provided on the app and website by users. Finally, the website and app interface, design and content were repeatedly analysed by the researchers using a 'walkthrough method' (see Light *et al.*, 2016). This study is, still to date, the largest qualitative or mixed-method study of a classical music audience in the UK. As the Assistant Principal of King's College London stated in [Art Professional](#) in her overview of the project in 2016, this '*importantly... adds to the existing knowledge about the ways in which users want to interact with cultural organisations via mobile technologies and will support the sector in connecting more effectively with new audiences*'.

The interviews with LSO and Kodime staff, the first two focus groups, and observations of one concert were all undertaken prior to initial development of the platform. Data gathered on audience and organisational desires and needs fed directly into the original design and content of the app and website. This initial research found that 76% of participants had smartphones, and all had easy access to an internet enabled computer, hence, this confirmed initial assumptions that developing an app and website would reach the majority of our target audience. This first-stage research also helped develop the focus and design of the website and app [3.3]. The research highlighted a key priority for the target audience was a simple and streamlined interface that allowed them to buy discounted tickets [3.3]. This then focused the designers on creating a simple platform that put ticket purchasing front and centre. The app and website were subsequently designed primarily as a discounted ticketing system, further incentivised through a reward system where points obtained through repeated purchases could be exchanged for gifts. The app also featured information on the concert venues, upcoming events, initially included audio clips, and allowed users to link the app into, and post directly from here onto, their social media accounts.

An iterative research process over subsequent months enabled further analysis and testing of the platform and audience attitudes to it and fed directly into refining the platforms' design and content [3.3]. The research suggested that users universally liked the reward system, but most were less interested in audio clips and against expectations, few were interested in linking the app into their social media [3.4]. These, and other findings, led to refining of the app's design, interface and content over the development period, as certain features were removed or scaled back over time. The research also explored the possibility of using the app as a concert companion, but the findings here suggested that the audience was strongly against this, so this idea was abandoned.

By August 2012 Student Pulse had 265 registered users and over our initial period of research (February – July 2012) sold 82% (318) of the available tickets [3.3]. In 2013 this figure rose to nearly [2,000 sales](#). It had always been the hope that Student Pulse could be extended to other orchestras and venues and there was also a clear steer from our research participants that they would like to see this happen [3.3]. After a successful initial piloting and development stage, Student Pulse was therefore rolled out to other London orchestras and venues in late 2012 onwards. In September 2013 they were joined by Britten Sinfonia and in 2016 St John's Smith Square. In 2016 a re-skinned version of the platform (Brum Pulse) was launched in Birmingham featuring Birmingham's four main orchestras.

3. References to the research

3.1. Crawford, G., Gosling, V.K., Bagnall, G., & Light, B., (2014) An orchestral audience: classical music and continued patterns of distinction, *Cultural Sociology*, 8 (4), 483-500. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975514541862>

Double blind peer reviewed paper published in the leading cultural sociology journal.

3.2. Gosling, V.K., Crawford, G., Bagnall, G., & Light, B., (2016) Branded app implementation at the London Symphony Orchestra, *Arts and the Market*, 6 (1). <https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/AAM-08-2013-0012>

Double blind peer reviewed paper published in a key journal in arts/culture marketing. Awarded 'Highly Commended' paper in the 2017 Emerald Literati Network Awards for Excellence.

3.3. Crawford, G., Gosling, V.K., Bagnall, G., & Light, B. (2012) *Pulse: The London Symphony Orchestra Student Mobile Project*, NESTA, London. http://usir.salford.ac.uk/29144/1/Academic_report_LSO.pdf

Final research report published by funder Nesta, outlining key findings of the project.

3.4. Crawford, G., Gosling, V.K., Bagnall, G., & Light, B., (2014) Is there an app for that? A case study of the potentials and limitations of the participatory turn and networked publics for classical music audience engagement, *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(9), 1072-1085. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.877953> (REF2)

Double blind peer reviewed paper published in one of the top journals in its field.

4. Details of the impact

Salford's research addresses the narrow demographics and declining audience numbers of live classical music audiences in the UK [3.1 – 3.4]. In particular, the research directly led to significant and demonstrable impacts around the development of a new entrepreneurial product; increased audience numbers; improved economic prosperity of orchestras and venues; widened audience diversity; and improved business practices.

4.1. Delivery of an innovative and entrepreneurial research-informed product

Salford's researchers identified a problem and subsequently secured funding to undertake iterative research that enabled and shaped the design and delivery of a hugely successful new product: Student Pulse. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kodime Ltd. (the project's software developer), confirmed that: *'The work of the researchers at the University of Salford was [...] fundamental in obtaining the initial funding that allowed the app to be developed, and then subsequently, providing invaluable audience and user focused research that **shaped the design and content** of the Student Pulse app'* [5.1].

For many organisations, this is their **main (if not sole) mechanism for engaging with student and younger audiences**. A Marketing Assistant at the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra highlights: *'Student Pulse is [...] the only discount scheme we have for young people'* [5.2], and many of the participating orchestras did not have student or young person discounts or engagement strategies prior to joining Student Pulse. The Communications Director at Britten Sinfonia likewise confirms that *'it [Student Pulse] gives us a mobile presence that we previously lacked, as before this we had no mobile presence in London'* [5.3].

4.2. Direct increase in student audience numbers

Prior to the launch of Student Pulse, the LSO had a mobile text message system that students signed up to in order to purchase discounted tickets. In the 6 months prior to the launch of Student Pulse this system had 175 registered users and sold 67% of the discounted tickets on offer [3.1]. By August 2012 Student Pulse had 265 registered users and had sold 82% (318) of the available tickets, rising to nearly 2,000 sales by 2013 [3.1].

However, most impact can be seen after this period. The Communications Director at Britten Sinfonia states: *'It is only [...] after the first couple of years of using it, from about 2014 onwards, that we start to see the real value and impact of Student Pulse for the orchestras and venues involved'* [5.3].

Between August 2018 and August 2019 Student Pulse had **approximately 2,500 active users**, had registered **over 1,900 app downloads** and **sold approximately 11,400 tickets**, providing access to **more than 200 concerts** [5.4]. Student Pulse registration data in 2019 further indicates that **over a third of users (34.92%) were new audience members** who had previously not attended a classical music concert [5.4].

In late 2019 Student Pulse was being used by **nine orchestras and venues**, including the country's, and some of the world's, leading classical music providers, such as the LSO, the South Bank Centre and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, as their main (and in many cases only) means of student ticketing and engagement [5.1], directly contributing to the **vitality and sustainability of an important cultural form**. As the Marketing Manager at the South Bank Centre asserts: *'From the orchestras [sic] and venue's perspective Student Pulse is completely invaluable, as it is an easy way to reach a really big audience'* [5.5].

4.3. Improvement in the economic prosperity of orchestras and venues

The work of the research team directly contributed to the economic prosperity of an important and world-class cultural form. Both our initial research and our follow-up interviews in 2019 indicate that Student Pulse has significantly increased student ticket sales, **creating new revenue for the orchestras and venues**. Kodime's CEO verifies that the app *'has been hugely successful in increasing student ticket sales for the respective orchestras'*, with a total of **12,500 ticket sales** between August 2017 and August 2018 via the app [5.1].

This is corroborated by the orchestras who are using the app. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra confirmed that *'the main benefit of Student Pulse has been for us financial [...] For example, in 2018 we sold a total 1,625 tickets through Student Pulse, generating nearly £14,000 in ticket sales, and constituting up to nearly twenty percent of ticket sales for some concerts'* [5.2]. A Marketing Assistant at the Philharmonia Orchestra similarly attests that *'our ticket sales through Student Pulse are very good, year-on-year, with total ticket sales of 2,866 tickets and £22,958 in the 2018/19 season, which constitutes just under six per cent of tickets sold that year'* [5.6].

4.4. Engagement of a younger and more ethnically diverse audience

The main aim of the research was to address the declining and narrow demographic of UK classical music audiences, by developing and employing a new and innovative platform to reach a younger and more diverse student population. Existing research indicates that mobile apps can prove a useful mechanism for attracting and retaining new audiences, as brand engagement is 'pulled' by the customer, rather than 'pushed' onto them [3.2]. The Senior Marketing Manager at the LSO highlighted the **importance of using this app to engage with a new audience**: *'The student audience is important for the continued vitality and sustainability of classical music orchestras in London and beyond, as the student population constitutes a vital contributor to the next generation of the classical music audience'* [5.7].

London Higher (2017) suggests that there are approximately 372,000 HE students in London; 29% of these are 'international', 47% are BAME students, and just under half of all HE students nationally are under the age of 21 (HESA, 2018). Student Pulse data reveals that **68.59% of registered users in 2019 were under the age of 25** [5.4] and in our original research 78% of Student Pulse users identified with an ethnic category other than 'White British' [3.1]. The South Bank Centre confirms: *'Student Pulse has increased our audience diversity, particularly in terms of bringing in younger concertgoers'* [5.5]. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra further argues that *'Student Pulse [...] helps bring in an audience that has noticeably different*

demographics to our traditional older, white, middle class audience. Certainly, those coming via Student Pulse are **more diverse in terms of their age and ethnicity** [5.2].

4.5. Change to business practices with lasting benefits on cost, efficiency and culture

Of the orchestra and venue representatives interviewed in 2019 several attested to how working in partnership with other organisations through Student Pulse had brought significant cost and efficiency savings by being able to **share advertising, pool resources and extend their audience reach**. The Senior Marketing Manager at the LSO confirmed that working together proved a more cost- and time-effective way of targeting a larger student population than each organisation would have been able to reach alone [5.7]. This has led to a **greater and closer working relationship between orchestras** and this was particularly emphasised by the Director of Marketing and Digital at the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra who stated that *'[a] real and lasting impact [...] has been a closer working relationship with the other organisations in Birmingham. As a result of this, we are still working closely together [...] to engage more students and young people'* [5.8].

Further confirmation is provided by the Communications Director at Britten Sinfonia, who acknowledges that *'a real value of Student Pulse for the organisations involved [...] is that the student offer is funnelled into this one product'* [5.3]. Recognising that competition between organisations was *'counterproductive and confusing for the end user'* [5.3], organisations are now able to offer customers **good value tickets for world class events, at a range of orchestras, all in one place** [5.3]. Similarly, the Marketing Manager at the South Bank Centre agrees that *'Student Pulse also allows us and the other orchestras and venues involved to share the workload of targeting and attracting new student audience members, and hence [...] this significantly reduces costs associated with this'* [5.5]. Sharing costs and workload in attending freshers' fairs and advertising has been vital for smaller lone venues, such as the South Bank Centre, that would *'simply not have the time and resources to reach the size and number of individuals we can collectively through Student Pulse'* [5.5].

An additional advantage to the organisations involved is that Student Pulse **removes venue and box office booking fees** for students and **reduces administrative costs**. As one research participant stated, *'one of the biggest things is that you don't [normally] get this quality at this kind of tickets price'* [3.1]. The Senior Marketing Manager at the LSO attests to the benefits of the app for all parties: *'At some of the orchestras and venues, such as at the Southbank Centre, the Student Pulse app has also allowed paperless ticketing [...] this has again saved time and money at all stages of the process for the promoter and the students'* [5.7].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1. Testimonial: Kodime Ltd. (September 2019), on the delivery of an innovative product (4.1), increase in student numbers (4.2) and increase in ticket sales (4.3)
- 5.2. Testimonial: Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (November 2019), on the unique discount scheme (4.1), improved ticket sales (4.3) and greater audience diversity (4.4)
- 5.3. Testimonial: Britten Sinfonia (December 2019), on new mobile presence (4.1), increased value for orchestras (4.2) and efficiencies generated for the organisations (4.5)
- 5.4. Student Pulse User Data: Kodime Ltd (August 2018 - August 2019), on number of users, downloads, tickets sold, new audience members (4.2) and age of users (4.4)
- 5.5. Testimonial: South Bank Centre (November 2019), on reaching a large audience (4.2), improving audience diversity (4.4) and pooling resources effectively (4.5)
- 5.6. Testimonial: Philharmonia Orchestra (November 2019), on increased ticket sales (4.3)
- 5.7. Testimonial: London Symphony Orchestra (October 2019), on engaging with new audiences (4.4), pooling resources effectively and benefits of paperless ticketing (4.5)
- 5.8. Testimonial: City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (October 2019), on forging closer working relationships (4.5)