Institution: University of Westminster

Unit of Assessment: 36

Title of case study: Digital creativity and online platforms

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Our research on the ways in which digital platforms enable people to make and share creative material online, and thereby foster creativity in individuals and groups, has had a number of particular direct impacts on the media and cultural industries. At the LEGO Group, there have been several impacts, on policy, on training, and on product development. At BBC Children's, collaborative research about an online world for children led to changes in commissioning processes. At S4C, the work had an impact on digital media strategy, and led to a change in the company's statement of overall corporate aims and values.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The underpinning research here consists of work on Web 2.0 and digital platforms led by Professor David Gauntlett, since his appointment at the University in 2006.

The research is based in the Communications and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) and builds upon the Institute's long history of studying the impact of new communications technologies on society. From 2013 the work became part of CAMRI's new Centre for Social Media Research, collaborating with newly appointed researchers (Fuchs, Meikle, Trottier), and between centres.

The research concerns the value of digital platforms for fostering creativity – primarily as a positive social value, but secondarily also as valuable for businesses and organisations which seek to offer something of value to users. The essence of the underlying argument is captured in Gauntlett's book, *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (2011). This and the other references cited below marshal evidence that in order to be effective, such platforms should embrace all the kinds of participation that users wish to engage in; should enable identifiable, authored contributions which can be recognised and responded to by others; and should seek to foster supportive conversations, storytelling, and learning within communities of enthusiasts. The research highlights the importance of individuals being able to take small steps along a journey from consumer to creator; and draws parallels between today's digital creative activity and the principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement of the 19th century.

The underpinning research and activity includes a series of awards from UK Research Councils, which are listed in the following section. The recent AHRC-funded project *Community-powered transformations* (Ref: AH/J01303X/1) was a partnership with the UCL Centre for Digital Humanities, and non-academic partners included the British Library, Tate, and MuseumNext. This project contributed to the development of some of the ideas and findings drawn on here, for instance by building critical support for Gauntlett's 'eight principles' for creative online platforms (http://www.digitaltransformations.org.uk/building-platforms-for-creativity-eight-principles/).

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

PUBLICATIONS: The research has been disseminated, and come to the attention of companies, through a number of means including conference and event presentations, and online video. (Gauntlett's YouTube videos about this research have been viewed 150,000 times since 2008). Therefore – and because of the slow schedules of academic publication – some of the relevant publications have appeared after the time of initial impact. (Nevertheless, the impact flows from the prior research, because we have been involved with, and presented research to, organisations who have been able to benefit from research insights before the academic publications appear).

- Gauntlett, David (2011), *Making is Connecting: The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (Cambridge: Polity). Korean translation published by Samcheolli Publishing, Seoul (2011). Italian translation published by Marsilio, Rome (2013).

- Gauntlett, David (2011), *Media Studies 2.0, and Other Battles around the Future of Media Research* (Seattle: Kindle).

- Gauntlett, David (2013), 'Creativity and digital innovation', in Youngs, Gillian, ed., *Digital World: Connectivity, Creativity and Rights*, London: Routledge.

- Gauntlett, David (2013), 'Enabling and constraining creativity and collaboration: Some

reflections after Adventure Rock' (2013), in Thornham, Helen & Popple, Simon, eds, *Content Cultures: Transformations of User Generated Content*, London: I.B.Tauris.

- Gauntlett, David (2010), 'Creativity, Participation, and Connectedness: An interview with David Gauntlett', in Sonvilla-Weiss, Stefan, ed., *Mashup Cultures*, New York: Springer Wien.

- Gauntlett, David (2007), *Creative Explorations : New approaches to identities and audiences* (London: Routledge).

Items 1 and 3 are in REF2. All other items are in the public domain / available on request.

EVIDENCE OF QUALITY: All of the work has appeared in peer-reviewed academic publications.

Gauntlett's 2007 book *Creative Explorations* was entered into RAE 2008, in which 60 per cent of the work was rated four-star and a further 30 per cent was rated three-star. The book was shortlisted for the *Times Higher* Award, 'Young Academic Author of the Year', 2007.

A clear marker of research quality is our success rate for very competitive RCUK funding.

FUNDING: This work has won six successive awards from the UK Research Councils since 2007. Professor Gauntlett was Principal Investigator on each of these projects:

- *Community-powered transformations* (AHRC, £29,836, ref: AH/J01303X/1 with Kavada, Dwyer and Steemers as Co-Investigators), 2012.

- *Digital Engagements* (AHRC, £340,823, ref: AH/H038736/1), 2010–2014.

- *Young people's creative mediaworlds* (AHRC, £188,365, ref: AH/F009682/1), 2008–2010.

- *Building Collaboration and Engagement for Media Professionals and Academic Researchers*, (EPSRC/Digital Economy, £47,524, ref: EP/H032568/1, Goodwin as Co-Investigator), 2010.

- *Audience and producer engagement with immersive worlds* (AHRC/BBC, £74,243, AH/F006756/1 with Steemers and BBC colleagues as Co-Investigators), 2007–2008.

- Second phase of above project (AHRC/BBC 'Knowledge Infusion Funding', £17,034), 2009.

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

IMPACT AT THE LEGO GROUP: The LEGO Group is one of the world's leading toy and digital media producers, specialising in construction products and digital services based around the LEGO System. In 2007, Gauntlett was approached by Cecilia Weckström, then Head of Consumer Insight & Experience Innovation within the LEGO Group (now Head of LEGO.com), to help restart the LEGO Learning Institute, a programme of collaboration with university academics. Thus began an ongoing programme of research, led by Gauntlett and Weckström, based around annual projects with externally-published reports (listed in section 5), written with colleagues at the Universities of Cambridge, Edinburgh, and MIT. In 2013 the LEGO Learning Institute became part of the LEGO Foundation, receiving considerable new investment. (See http://www.legofoundation.com/en-us/research-and-learning/academic-network/).

These projects, in particular the 2010, 2011 and 2012 reports, with Gauntlett as lead author, have involved discussion of digital platforms which would enable users to play, learn, and share material online. A key question for LEGO concerns how hands-on building with LEGO bricks can be combined with digital tools or games to enrich the experience in an intelligent way, which goes beyond merely replacing physical play with an on-screen simulation. The reports have discussed the ways in which creativity and learning can be fostered, and sought to identify the combinations of human relationships, and physical / technological tools, which can help to unlock the creative potential of children and adults.

In addition to building this knowledge within the company, there have been more immediate impacts. The work on systematic creativity made explicit the value of the interconnecting system which had always been implicit at the heart of the LEGO System, and so this understanding was included within a training pack given to all new employees at the LEGO Group headquarters in Denmark, communicated via a LEGO Serious Play building exercise devised by Gauntlett and Weckström. This pack has been used by every new LEGO employee in Denmark since 2009.

The study 'Systematic Creativity in the Digital Realm' argued that whilst LEGO already had digital applications which could turn on-screen designs into physical products, an innovative ambition would be to do it the other way around, so that LEGO bricks could act as an interface for digital devices – in other words, use LEGO bricks to make things happen on screen. This contributed to inspiration for the team who developed *LEGO Life of George*, a commercial product released in

2011 which brought together physical bricks and an iPhone/Android game in this way. The game sets tasks, which has to be physically built and then scanned back into the phone with its camera. The product was shortlisted for 'e-Connected Toy of the Year' in the Toy of the Year 2013 awards, the primary awards event for toys and games in the USA (http://www.toyawards.org). It has sold many thousands of copies (disaggregated sales figure not released, but the LEGO Group is the third largest toy manufacturer in the world in terms of sales, with 2012 profits being DKK 7,522 million (£848 million UK) before tax [source: LEGO Group Annual Report 2012]).

In 2010, Gauntlett also worked with LEGO Education to turn the consultancy process, LEGO Serious Play, into a set of principles and materials that could be offered free as an 'open source' package on the LEGO website. This work was done collaboratively between Gauntlett and Anna-Sophie Trolle Terkelsen, Concept Developer, LEGO Education, and led to the materials being made available for download from September 2010.

Corroboration: "Professor Gauntlett's research helped us to develop new ideas for connecting the digital and physical realms with LEGO tools. His work has been central to a number of LEGO reports exploring creativity, play and learning in the 21st century. This thinking feeds into strategy at the very top of our organization, and has made a difference at several levels."
– Cecilia Weckström, Head of LEGO.com, The LEGO Group, Denmark

IMPACT AT THE BBC: The AHRC & BBC Pilot Knowledge Exchange Programme project, mentioned above, meant that University of Westminster researchers could work alongside BBC producers and apply learnings from our existing academic research in the context of the BBC's development of a virtual world for children called *Adventure Rock*.

Amongst other findings, the researchers were able to identify eight orientations to *Adventure Rock* – simplified archetypes representing the different ways in which children engaged with this world – such as 'Self-stampers', who wanted to make their mark on the world through self-expression; 'Social climbers', who were interested in ranking, and wanted to be visibly doing better than other players; and 'Nurturers', who wanted to care for characters in the environment.

The impact was that these archetypes were enthusiastically taken up by executives in BBC Children's, 2008–10, who used them when discussing new ideas for digital games, platforms and other commissions. They would consider whether proposed new products would appeal to the different archetypes, and how the emphasis could be changed so that the different kinds of digital users could be appealed to equally.

"The research... identified a set of useful 'archetypes' of kinds of child player... The research gave us this valuable tool for thinking about potential projects [and] helped us to think more deeply about how and why we should implement interactive experiences for children, and we would welcome further opportunities for collaboration." – Rachel Bardill, formerly Interactive Executive, BBC Children's; now Executive Producer, CBeebies Interactive.

IMPACT AT S4C: S4C, the Welsh-language public service broadcaster based in Cardiff, functions as a publisher-broadcaster, commissioning TV programmes from small production companies across Wales. Its role in maintaining the Welsh language gives it a distinctive cultural mission.

As a consequence of interest in his publication *Making is Connecting*, Gauntlett was invited to have a sequence of meetings and interactions with S4C's New Media Forum, a committee which had been charged with developing S4C's digital future. Meeting the Forum and the acting Chief Executive at S4C, Gauntlett made proposals about the role that everyday people in Wales could play in building the range and diversity of Welsh-language media. He argued that S4C's corporate aims were too narrow and outdated, being based only on the transmission and reception of television programmes, and proposed instead a three-part list of aims for S4C:

▪ To educate, inform, and entertain the Welsh people, in both established and innovative ways;
▪ To cultivate the creative capacity of Welsh-language producers and makers of all ages and abilities;
▪ To celebrate the culture, traditions and imagination of Wales.

This text was adopted and proposed in the strategy report produced by the New Media Forum over the summer, 2011, and delivered to S4C's governing Authority and Management Team on 20 September 2011. The report incorporated Gauntlett's further suggestions building on this theme: that the company should do much more to support non-professional Welsh-language media

content wherever it was to be in found – primarily, video and audio made by enthusiasts and shared on online platforms – so that the Welsh language could be supported by communities of people making and sharing their own media. The report was published in November 2011.

In October 2012, S4C published a new statement of corporate aims and values, which was directly influenced by Gauntlett's research and the subsequent dialogue. The new publication stated that the organisation's role was to 'nurture and celebrate creativity in the Welsh language' – mirroring the specific vision and language proposed by Gauntlett (and in sharp contrast to the previous aims, which only concerned making a certain number of Welsh-language broadcasts).

Extract from letter of corroboration: "I wish to acknowledge the vital contribution that was made to the work of the New Media Forum by Prof. Gauntlett. The work of the New Media Forum was one aspect a process of renewal that has been taking place inside S4C over the past three years, and I am personally very grateful to Prof. Gauntlett for his extremely valuable contribution to this process" – Dyfrig Jones, Chair, S4C New Media Forum (2010-11).

<u>CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING:</u> Gauntlett's talks about his book *Making is Connecting* around the UK in 2011 were attended by over 700 people, mostly non-academics. He also discussed the book on BBC Radio 4's *Thinking Allowed*. The book was featured in the high-street magazines *Marie Claire*, *Making*, and *Psychologies*. Gauntlett's videos on YouTube about research on digital transformations, produced since 2008, have been viewed over 150,000 times.

He has been a keynote speaker at industry and public events, such as *Innovation in Mind* (Lund, Sweden, 2012) and the World Maker Faire, New York (2013) as well as the headline speaker at the first European Maker Faire in Rome (2013). The 2013 Italian translation of *Making is Connecting* attracted coverage in Italian magazines and newspapers, with the research said by commentators to speak to the craft traditions of Italy, and offer a solution to economic problems.

Gauntlett's work on creative methods (2007, 2008) has been used to facilitate public engagement events. Examples include the Lego Landscape of Ideas at Reboot Britain, 2009, where 700 participants from business, government, and the third sector, were invited to build metaphors of their vision of a better society; and at the World Learning Environments Conference, 2009, where 300 delegates built models representing the spirit of an ideal learning environment.

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

<u>LEGO IMPACT</u>: REPORTS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN:

Letter of corroboration from Director of Research, LEGO Foundation, available on request.

All reports listed below are available at: http://www.legofoundation.com/en-us/research-and-learning/foundation-research/

Ackermann, E.; Gauntlett, D., & Weckstrom, C. (2009), *Defining Systematic Creativity*, Billund: LEGO Learning Institute.

Ackermann, E.; Gauntlett, D.; Wolbers, T., & Weckstrom, C. (2010), *Defining Systematic Creativity in the Digital Realm*, Billund: LEGO Learning Institute.

Gauntlett, D.; Ackermann, E.; Whitebread, D.; Wolbers, T., & Weckstrom, C. (2011), *The Future of Play: Defining the role and value of play in the 21st century*, Billund: LEGO Learning Institute.

Gauntlett, D.; Ackermann, E.; Whitebread, D.; Wolbers, T.; Thomsen, B.S., & Weckstrom, C. (2012), *The Future of Learning*, Billund: LEGO Learning Institute.

Gauntlett, D. & Thomsen, B.S. (2013), *Cultures of Creativity*, Billund: The LEGO Foundation.

<u>BBC IMPACT</u>: REPORTS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN:

Letter of corroboration from Executive Producer, CBeebies – available on request.

Jackson, L.; Gauntlett, D., & Steemers, J. (2008a), Virtual Worlds: An overview, and study of BBC Children's Adventure Rock, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/knowledgeexchange/westminstertwo.pdf

Jackson, L.; Gauntlett, D., & Steemers, J. (2008b), Children in Virtual Worlds: Adventure Rock users and producers study, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/knowledgeexchange/westminsterone.pdf

<u>S4C IMPACT</u>: REPORTS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN:

Letter of corroboration from Chair, S4C New Media Forum – available on request.

S4C New Media Forum (2011), *Embracing the Future: S4C Post 2011. Report of the New Media Forum, September 2011*, available at http://www.s4c.co.uk/newmedia/e_index.shtml