The Dynamics of Mass Interaction
Steve Whittaker, Loren Terveen, Will Hill, Lynn Cherny

This paper investigates mass interaction in Usenet groups. By conducting a comprehensive quantitative research and statistical regression analysis, this paper seeks to find causal relationships between demographics, conversation strategies and interactions in Usenet groups. What was interesting was the comparison of real life common ground interaction to virtual ones over Usenet groups. I thought that the methodology used to conduct this research was detailed and well thought out. The findings thereof were interesting as I have observed many of them to actually happen in Usenet groups, such as the size of a group effects the length of messages and cross-posting, familiar contributors posting longer messages and moderation that leads to lesser cross posting and longer messages. What was new to me was the concept of FAQ production as a behavior to gauge the extent of activity in a Usenet group. What was also noteworthy in this paper was the application of a communication theory of the common ground, more noted as a theory governing face-to-face communication; to computer mediated communication. As similarities may be drawn in theory, it may not be practically applicable. Simply because, the concept of the common ground in online platforms are elementally different from common-grounds in face-to-face interactions. While research papers such as this find innovative ways to understand the dynamics of mass interaction through number of people in a group, the frequency and length of messages posted, it fails to find the purpose and motivations behind group behavior in Usenet interactions. The conclusions and future research ideas presented in this paper are thought-provoking. The authors conclude by saying there is much room for research on interactivity and I agree with
this too. Finally on a different thought, it would be interesting to see if communication theories governing Usenet behavior would apply to actual face-to-face interactions. I think this is a well researched paper and the authors provide room for further research. Coming from a communication background, it would be interesting to see new communication theories emerge in the computer-mediated world.

Becoming Wikipedian: Transformation of Participation in a Collaborative Online Encyclopedia
Susan L. Bryant, Andrea Forte, Amy Bruckman

This article is a well-documented qualitative case study on the process of becoming a Wikipedian. From my previous knowledge Wikipedia is the first and the biggest online encyclopedia to have gained instant success, spread like a global wildfire when it started. This study delves into the model that Wikipedia was founded on – that of a “computer supported cooperative work” and social activity theories such as Legitimate Peripheral Participation and Activity Theory. The authors in this paper rightly credit the founders of Wikipedia on their forethought of having a publicly editable webspace to achieve “fast productive online collaboration.” What also makes Wikipedia an interesting case-study of a collaboration masterpiece is that it was started as a basic novel idea and it outgrew and outdid the expectations of its creators. Apart from that, while Wikipedia grew rapidly the founders foresaw where it was headed and took the right measures to provide for its growth.

This paper mainly discussed the nature and transformation of writers from being novices to Wikipedians. It highlighted the membership process being wholly participatory, which I found educating as I always wondered where Wikipedia found its writers and not merely editors who
could edit existing articles and expand stubs. The concept of self-identification was also interesting where an individual starts by being a novice and over a period of peripheral participation comes to be a skilled and valued member by contributing towards a purpose of the “greater good”. This brought to light the users motivations and role perceptions as they become more and more engaged in the community. This method of moving from a periphery towards the core community reminds me of a classic organizational hierarchy where employees start by working at the lowermost level and work their way upwards to the board of directors. What strikes as different, however, is that in a real-world organization this takes a really long time unlike in the case of an online collaborative work-place. Also, employees in an organization are paid salaries and their motivations come from perks, promotions and incentives. It would be interesting to know if these apply in the online work-space too. However it is unclear, in this paper, if the core Wikipedians are given some incentive or some form of compensation for their work. Even though the profit model for Wikipedia is not in the scope of this paper, it would be helpful to know. Although novices and Wikipedians were interviewed for this article, I am interested in knowing if they were selected from different parts of the world or from the same geographic location and hence how selection of writers from geographically and culturally different locations would affect the study, if at all. On a different note, the success of Wikipedia has also led to some controversies in publishing and valid academic citing. It is a Janus-faced situation where multiple editions can result in neutrality, objectivity and quality of writing but on the other hand since it is by nature online and “publicly editable”, it raises questions on the validity and resource credibility as it is not peer-reviewed by academicians and the background and status of the contributors is unknown.
Some of the take-away points from this paper are the online group behavior where the contributors are driven and motivated by a “higher purpose” of making information freely known to the rest of the world and the implications and opportunities that can stem from the “consumer-to-creator” ideology.

**Studying Cooperation and Conflict between Authors with history flow Visualizations**  
Fernanda B. Viegas, Martin Wattenberg, Kushal Dev

This was the most interesting paper of the three assigned readings as it talks about practical application to real data. *Studying Cooperation* talks about how *History Flow* can be used as an effective data analysis tool in revealing patterns and trends. The authors applied this tool to studying patters that evolved in Wiki edits. As this tool uses a sheer volume of numbers and translates that to striking visualizations was indeed laudable. Although the paper talks about patterns in cooperation and conflict applicable to the Wikipedia data, the application of *History Flow* opens up many areas for online consumer research methodologies. By tracking and using information that is available and ethically usable, companies can benefit in reaching and serving their consumers better. By relating it to my field, Advertising, I can say that one of the biggest challenges facing the industry is of gauging advertising effectiveness and measuring word-of-mouth advertising. By collaborating such tools as *history flow* to online social-spaces where people spend time, what they talk about, what governs purchase decisions in a constantly changing and online world today etc. opens up new areas for research and brings to the table traditional research methods that are in need of review, modification and upgradation.