The dynamics of mass interaction

The article basically explores the nature of the interactions on Usenet. Usenet is the world’s largest conversational application that has over 3 million users with over 17,000 newsgroups. The paper basically highlights three main areas, demographics, conversation strategies, and interactivity. Demographics basically includes size, familiarity and moderation. Conversation strategies basically include FAQ production, message length and cross-posting. And, interactivity includes the extent of conversational threading. The authors then focus on the “common ground” model to discuss how these highlighted areas interact with one another – demographics with conversation strategies, demographics with interactivity and conversation strategies with interactivity. This is the idea each newsgroup is in theory suppose to focus on a single topic therefore it derives a sort of common ground between members who respond to that topic. Overall, the authors discovered that the common ground model provides a decent relationship between demographics and conversational strategy. However, it is much weaker on predicting interactivity. Furthermore, the article indicates that shorter messages promote interactivity. Therefore, a notion of conversational overload is addressed whereby participations actually filter out large number of messages to search of relevant information. Consequently, long messages are regularly ignored. The authors also indicate that cross-posting benefits interaction – members who post regularly helps increase the amount of members who read the forums.

I find it very interesting that the model, in this sense, needs to take into account familiarity and diversity. I found very interesting that common ground is usually thought to be a positive in that it promotes agreement and mutual understanding. However, the article mentioned that the conversations can become stale because of the over familiarity of topics and people.

I always thought that more diversity of people and ideas in a group the better the conversation/discussion would be since more points of view will be represented. I was quite shocked to discover that the authors of this article indicate that a “diverse
population may stimulate interaction but their widely disparate perspectives may mean that no conversational progress can be made.

**Becoming Wikipedian: Transformation of Participation in a Collaborative Online Encyclopedia**

The article basically summarizes and comments on the idea Wikipedia – an open-content encyclopedia built from the collective will of individuals around the globe. The more shocking part, is that anybody, even an anonymous person in sitting with the world’s oldest computer in at the foothills of Mount Everest can update, delete, edit this highly regarded information resource. The article suggests that Wikipedia has become such a highly respected information resource because the information has been edited over and over again by a variety of people. This constant updating may have caused the online encyclopedia to be well-written and more or less factually accurate.

The article states that the rigor and diversity of Wikipedia improves when an article is published in popular media. This makes sense since the more public media attention Wikipedia the higher the credibility of the site improves. The authors mention that many measures have been taken to ensure quantitative metrics that can measure the site growth and complexity. These measures also include two distinct characteristics called rigor (the total number of edits) and diversity (the number of individual editors).

There is also a process called “history flow” that was developed to identify and examine existing trends in wikis.

I really enjoyed the Lave and Wengar’s example of tailors learning their trade, and slowly working their way up to work on children’s clothing and undergarments, while practicing sewing and then being experience enough to cut the cloth. I was impressed at how well this relates to someone starting out by changing a grammar error on Wikipedia. After that they decide to link one page to another through a common word. Then, they move on too correcting a fact about their hometown. Further, the insert a whole new sentence into an article. Finally, they gain the expertise to create a whole new article.
Studying Cooperation and Conflict between Authors with *history flow* Visualizations

This paper basically investigates the dynamics of Wikipedia, an online collaborative encyclopedia. Through the paper, the authors introduce an exploratory data analysis tool such as history flow visualization, that effectively reveals patterns in the wiki and may lead to other collaborative solutions.

I found it very interesting to learn about the five common types of vandalism that occur in Wikipedia – Mass deletion, Offensive copy, Phony copy, Phony redirection and Idiosyncratic copy. I edited Wikipedia myself this past month. I wanted to promote my family restaurant located in Guangzhou. I edited the page for Guangzhou. The page was supposed to maintain an unbiased view of Guangzhou, and merely help those new to Guangzhou become familiar with the major tourist attractions, popular shopping areas and various hospital, school, police station locations. I inserted a new section into this article called “Restaurants”. Under this section, I wrote a few sentences about restaurants in general in Guangzhou. I then listed our family restaurant. Within five minutes, my post was flagged for being an advertisement. Further, within 10 minutes it was gone. I was surprised at the speed, and efficiency with which the system works. Later, I entered the restaurant again on wikitravel, a Wikipedia travel project. The posting remains there today. From these two instances, I feel I began to understand the way Wikipedia works. When a user feels like some information may be a commercial message, they can flag it, and then another user has to confirm the flag request. There seem be a very large group of loyal Wikipedians who constantly browse the hundreds of thousands of Wiki pages searching for factual errors or faults, and correcting or updating pages within seconds of a change. History flow is a great tool that allows us to visualize how this serious of editing and creating occurs.