The dynamics of mass interaction

The conclusions drawn in the paper seem to agree with what I’ve experienced in the few newsgroups I’ve participated in (all of which are in the university’s computer science department), particularly the finding that a small number of posters accounts for a large majority of all messages within the newsgroup.

Another area in which I’ve had some firsthand experience in is conversational inertia. On both web-based message boards and Usenet newsgroups there are plenty of threads that die very quickly or never even receive one reply. For some posts it’s easy to see why no responses are present; the thread may have been locked/closed or ended by moderators, or it might’ve been irrelevant to the topic under which it was posted. Others were either unable or unwilling to respond. For others types of threads, it’s almost sad to see someone asking a legitimate question or bring up an issue only to be ignored. One possible explanation is that even if it isn’t against the group’s rules to post a simple “I don’t know”, participants may feel embarrassed to post such messages.

The paper states that Netiquette guidelines and common ground make identical predictions about interactivity with the exception of succinctness, but why? Even in verbal conversation I wouldn’t enjoy speaking to someone who gave speeches every time it was his “turn” to talk.

I’m glad the article brought up the potential problems with using thread depth to determine the levels of interaction between users across multiple newsgroups. I understand that using this metric would’ve been easier to automate and much less costly to implement, but it fails to capture other data such as decreased overall interactivity due to duplicate topics of threads (which would likely receive rebuke in replies only one level deep and be closed shortly afterwards in a moderated community).

Some other issues such as private responses and lurking are also mentioned, and specialized studies would cover these areas, but I don’t think another “global scale” study should be attempted. While the data gathered from studies like this are certainly interesting, I believe each type of community will undoubtedly provide different results, and the aggregate or average outcomes would not serve any significant analytical purpose.
**Becoming Wikipedian: Transformation of Participation in a Collaborative Online Encyclopedia**

Reading this article felt markedly similar to reading the paper on cooperation, probably because Wikipedia is such a massive project that relies on the cooperation of its huge user base. The main difference to me between this paper and the previously-critiqued one is that this takes a proven, successful system and analyzes the steps of “initiation” and full membership rather than a recipe for possible success. There are some extra technical details in here just as the other article did, but they both seem to detail much of the same areas.

I like the separation within the topics between novices and expert “Wikipedians”. Providing these different and sometimes opposing points of view (especially the quotations) allowed me to see things from both sides and think about how the transformation would’ve gone.

It seems that the time it takes to become a full-fledged Wikipedian is relatively short. Again, the speed of this process can most likely be attributed to the atmosphere which a cooperative community such as Wikipedia’s provides. The environment is conducive to attracting as well as retaining members, and once the snowball/train effect is in motion, it’s hard to stop it (not necessarily a bad thing, as in this case).

One thing I would have like to see more in-depth discussion about is anonymity. A participant in the study said he was urged to create an account after a few months, but what about others who never do? Were all of the subjects in the study registered members, and do most if not all longtime users eventually create a username?

I enjoyed reading this article because it specified a structured breakdown of the analysis using activity theory but also more generally described the transformation of the participants in the study. In this way there were some hard facts to present but some aspects which cannot be covered in that manner were also considered.
Studying Cooperation and Conflict between Authors with *history flow* Visualizations

The introduction to Wikipedia in this paper also reminded me of a previous paper on the cooperation and potential subsequent success of a community. It was also similar to the immediately previous reading.

I don’t know whether the revision tools available now on Wikipedia are greatly improved over their previous versions, but it sounds and looks like *history flow* was vastly superior to any text- and simple forms-based solution for the web. Perhaps *history flow* turned out to be more useful as a tool to observe a community’s interactions rather than a practical view while editing an article. Unfortunately, I have nearly no experience in editing wikis and therefore no conclusions of my own based on personal knowledge. According to the reading, however, any viewing mode of *history flow* appears to be more intuitive and usable (and aesthetically pleasing) than Wikipedia’s original interface.

Something that surprised me was the classification of common types of vandalism. I was not expecting that many, but since the community repairs the damage so quickly, as evidenced by the sample screenshots, I guess I could never notice all of the (often humorous) damage. There are some instances where an article is flagged for low quality or inappropriate tone, but editors seemingly never get around to editing the page. These are probably examples of where the Wikipedia community makes compromises or cannot reach agreement on what to do about some issue. On one side are people who think that the page should be changed, but don’t know what changes to make. On the other are people who either refuse to change it or are indifferent to the page’s content. Such pages can be left in this undecided state for long periods of time. Maybe future versions of *history flow* can take flags and proposals/notifications into account.

Overall, it is nice to see that in a successful system such as Wikipedia, cooperation triumphs over temporary outages and misinformation caused by malicious users. While it’s true that Wikipedia provides facilities which aid in policing and behind-the-scenes discussion, the decision to keep articles as professional as possible, unbiased, and educational is ultimately up to the users. A community of uncooperative users could choose to ignore actions like mass deletion and the gaps in *history flow* visualizations would’ve marked the end of a revision history instead of a temporary setback.