The dynamics of mass interaction

The study mentioned in this paper focused on demographics of newsgroups, conversational strategies which asks questions such as “are conversations broadcasted throughout several newsgroups”, “what is the length of messages”, “do newsgroups have FAQs”, and “how often messages are posted,” and interactivity which asks questions such as “how deep is a specific thread” and “how often do posts attempting to initiate conversation succeed.” The authors also tested how common ground communication theory explains mass interaction. Common ground “refers to the fact that participants must establish a degree of mutual knowledge for their conversational contributions to be understood.”

In the paper it states that one can cross-post a message by entering the names of additional newsgroups in the newsgroups field while composing a message. Cross-posting is not considered a good practice, for the most part. If this is the case, I wonder why it would be so easy to cross post. It seems like the newsgroup interface would not make it so easy to cross-post to several newsgroups.

Some of the statistics provided were really interesting. One of them being that initiating messages account for more than 40% of messages. This shows that it is hard to start a conversation in Usenet, but once one starts it attracts a lot of contribution from other users.

In the introduction the authors mentioned an interesting finding, whish is that cross-posting and short messages promote interactivity. The authors mentioned that a possible explanation for this would be that people are less likely to read long messages. I would’ve liked to read more about the details of this finding from their research and maybe some statistical data to back up that argument.
Becoming Wikipedian: Transformation of Participation in a Collaborative Online Encyclopedia

In this paper the authors discuss people’s motivations behind editing articles on Wikipedia and the differences between novice users and more experienced users. After conduction a study on 9 participants, some of the motivations mentioned include the sense of community that Wikipedia produces, an expectation of reciprocity from the community in the future, a sense of efficacy, and a need to sustain one’s reputation. None of the participants mentioned depending on altruism. Some of the differences between novice users and experienced users is that to novice participants, Wikipedia is a collection of articles with random people editing them, while to experienced users it is a collection of people discussing, editing, and ensuring that good articles are available.

I liked that this article explained why people are motivated to contribute to Wikipedia. Some motivation factors are mentioned in the previous paragraph. Other motivation factors include having articles featured in the Wikipedia main page and also knowing that your article may be on someone’s “watch list.” If someone is editing an article they know that profanity will probably be caught since there is a big chance that someone is watching that article. This motivates people to post good articles or else posting profanity or “stupid” articles would just be a waster of their time.

The authors discussed Activity Theory and the activity triangle diagram relating the object, the subject, the community, division of labor, the tools and the rules. This was an interesting concept but the authors failed to relate the rest of the concepts in the paper to the triangle diagram. I think that the section on Activity Theory would’ve been more useful in the paper if the authors hadn’t just said that they used it to organize their data, but if they described more in depth how they used it and perhaps related other sections in the paper to the diagram.

Although the authors mentioned in the conclusion that only experienced users were interviewed and that a more complete study would involve interviewing users who made some edits but eventually left Wikipedia, and novice users, I would’ve liked to see a contrast of opinions among the different users in this paper. One experienced participant noted “We have a policy of don’t bite the newcomers and forgive and forget.” It would be interesting to see if a newcomer agrees with this policy and if they had ever felt as if he/she had “been bitten.” I think it would also be interesting to see what motivated users who made some edits on Wikipedia but eventually decided to leave the community.

I would’ve liked to know what professions the participants are in. The paper mentioned one of them being a computer engineer and another one being a professional writer. I would be interested in knowing if there is a particular trend in editors as far as backgrounds. Lastly, I would’ve liked to know how much time they spend, on average, on Wikipedia a day. As mentioned in the paper, one of the participants has over 300 articles on her watch list. I believe one of the concerns some people may have is how time consuming monitoring and editing articles can be.
Studying Cooperation and Conflict between Authors with history flow Visualizations

In this paper the authors describe history flow, a visualization tool they created in order to better visualize edits made on collaboration documents, such as Wikipedia. They also propose hypothesis on why collective authoring environments succeed. Some of these hypotheses include the fact that entries can contain information about recent news events and that inaccuracy doesn’t stay present for long, being fixed rapidly by the community.

I thought that the example of the history flow visualization mechanism with Mary, Andrew and Suzanne (Figure 2) was extremely helpful to understand how edits are visualized. I like that it’s a small enough example, making it clear how history flow works. Because this simpler example was used, more complex history flow visualizations such as the one for the Microsoft Wikipedia page (Figure 3), are easier to understand.

I also liked how the authors classified vandalism as having 5 different categories: mass deletion, offensive copy, phony copy, phony redirection, and idiosyncratic copy. This is an interesting approach on vandalism. The authors explained the different kinds of vandalism, but never stated statistics comparing each one. I think it would have been interesting to contrast history flow diagrams for the different types and perhaps compare how long it takes to correct each type of vandalism, which one is more common, etc.

On page 580, the authors talk about “watchers” on Wikipedia, but they never got into any detail about what exactly a “watcher” is. In the paper “Becoming Wikipedian: Transformation of Participation in a Collaborative Online Encyclopedia,” the authors talked about the Wikipedia “watch list” and how errors can be found that way. I think mentioning the “watchers” would have been clearer for readers if the authors had also mentioned the Wikipedia watch list.

I really liked how the authors used real examples for the history flow diagrams (Chocolate, Microsoft, abortion). It was interesting to see how edit wars are represented in the Chocolate diagram, how the entry for abortion had been completely deleted at one point, and all of the authors who have contributed to the Microsoft page.

I also liked how the authors talked about the differences between making an edit as a logged in user or as an anonymous user. I especially liked how you can tell what edits were made by anonymous users by looking at a history flow diagram. An interesting finding is that there is no clear connection between anonymity and vandalism. It seems as if users who wanted to vandalize pages would do it anonymously instead of registering a username and then having that act of vandalism linked to their username.