Whittaker et al. ask how common ground is established when there is such a large number of users on a newsgroup. Do they expect that there are only a few people in the whole world that are interested in the certain topic? If a person joins this newsgroup, there must be some common ground to begin with. I think I am just confused at what Whittaker et al. is trying to get at. The authors claim that posting redundant messages might be irrelevant to the group’s interests. If long histories of the newsgroups are not kept, how is a user supposed to know something was already discussed? What if there are other new users with the same question?

The authors explain that they did not include the alt category for the study because of their tone and because of their different approval and creation process. I thought the point of this paper was to get an idea of Usenet as a whole, not to pick and choose. In the beginning of this paper, that is why the authors did feel that similar papers that only studied a single newsgroup was substantial enough. Now however, the authors are saying that it is ok to exclude newsgroups. The authors also excluded humanities, and news newsgroups.

I am somewhat surprised that the percentage of posts from repeat posters is so low. I expected there to be fewer singleton posters. If the newsgroup is about computers or something, I understand that there may be a large number of singleton posters. The person comes in, asks their question, and once they get their answer, they do not come back. However, under the category talk or recreation, I wonder why there would be so many singleton posters. What would be the point of only posting once to a newsgroup like that? The paper does not offer much of an explanation for these questions.

One interesting statistic would have been to see how many times the FAQs were viewed. Whittaker et al. found that 54% of newsgroups in their sample had FAQs. I wonder, of those FAQs, were any of them actually read? If they were read, did the readers find them to be clear? That is, in one of last week’s readings, Managing the Virtual Commons: Cooperation and Conflict in Computer Communities, Kollock and Smith found that many FAQs do not answer certain questions or are ambiguous with their answers. I wonder if Whittaker et al. found any responses to FAQs? What was the thread depth here?

Another interesting statistic that Whittaker et al point out is that 40% of messages posted to a newsgroup are trying to start a conversation. This says can mean one of two things. One, it can mean that whatever it was that the person posted was uninteresting to the group and unworthy of a response. Or it can mean that the people subscribed to the newsgroup simply are not responding, whether it is out of laziness or some other characteristic. If that is the case, why are these people on this newsgroup? The purpose of the newsgroup is to discuss, if one does not want to discuss the topic, then do not subscribe to the newsgroup. In fairness to the people on the newsgroups, Whittaker et al. does state that if a conversation does start up, it receives many responses. That seems to indicate all the other posts that do not receive responses are simply interesting and not worthy of a response.

I found it very interesting that cross-posting actually increased interactivity. When I think of cross-posting, I can understand a topic being valid in a couple groups, but the authors stated that cross-posting affected over 200 different newsgroups. I find it very interesting that one topic can span to so many others. The authors say that posters go “beyond a particular newsgroup to carry out their conversation”. It is interesting that posters need to go beyond their newsgroup. It just goes to show that it is hard to label something and not have it be anything else.
First and foremost, I had no idea that Wikipedia was made in 2001 and that the first wiki was established in 1995. I wonder how much of the Wiki interface has changed since then. It seems that Wikipedia has looked more or less the same since 2003 when I started to read its articles. I was also surprised by the fact that Wikipedia articles are “stylistically indistinguishable” from articles found in a more traditional source. I never really thought about that aspect, but as I was reading this paper I found myself going to Wikipedia and wanting to see these things for myself.

This paper brought up characteristics of Wikipedia that I had never even thought about. For example, Bryant et al. spoke of rigor (the total number of edits made to an article). This quality is used as criteria when evaluating an article on Wikipedia.

Bryant et al. then go into a detailed explanation of what legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) is. They make it sound like this is a phenomenon that only may happen in a few certain places. Then they describe how it can happen in numerous areas. I was very surprised that they chose to explain LPP this way. While I thought they had a good example, I almost feel that they were restricting themselves because they chose such an obscure example. There are very few tailors in the world (compared to other professions); they could have used a more general example because I know that LPP was used when I was doing my internships. I was given smaller tasks in the beginning and gradually into my second internship I was doing the same activities that a full-time employee would be doing. This happened because I learned more about the company, more about my job, more about how things worked in general.

When the authors went into describing the experiences of the participants, I found it very interesting how good all the participants’ experiences were. All of the users stated that they were able to make small initial changes to articles they had a lot of knowledge about. Not one of them stated that their edit was changed back. This makes me wonder if the Wikipedia “elite” did not exist as solidly as they do now. Even when describing times when the users had edit wars or conflicting views with others on Wikipedia, the participants talked about it with a generally good-natured tone. However, from all of our Usenet readings, we know that not everyone on the internet is so good-natured. With all of this said, I think the participants in this study were holding things back. I think that there were stories that the participants are not talking about or the authors of the paper are holding back.

One thing that I found interesting was that I have the same exact feeling that one of the participants did. Participant 6 mentioned that they were nervous about making large edits in the beginning, even if they saw that the article was wrong. That has happened to me before as well, I have seen that there was an incorrect notion in an article and was too scared to change it.

This article has inspired me. I wanted to see all of these characteristics for myself. I wanted to see if I could successfully make a small change to an article and have it not be changed back to its original state. I have just made a change to the article on “Customs and etiquette of Japan”. I am curious to see if the change persists (as described by the participants in the Bryant et al. paper). If the change does persist, I wonder if the number of edits I make will gradually increase, and if so I wonder if it will become closer to an obsession. It certainly seems like editing Wikipedia articles is an obsession for many of the participants in this paper.
Paper: Studying Cooperation and Conflict between Authors with history flow Visualizations
Author: Fernanda B. Viegas, Martin Wattenberg, and Kushal Dave

I found this paper really interesting. Even more so than the last paper. One interesting point that it brought up was that since Wikipedia has so many readers, it may actually have articles worth reading. With all of these issues about stability and vandalism, one wonders how anyone can truly trust this source, but people do everyday. Thousands of people read Wikipedia articles and use the information gathered from that source as fact.

Another interesting point that the paper brings up is that because the articles are so easily editable, articles often reflect what is happening in the world today, more so than text books or printed encyclopedia might. Think of all the new science text books that elementary schools need to buy now that Pluto is no longer considered a planet. I remember in middle school that my history book still talked about George Bush Senior was president at the time, even though I was in middle school during the last couple years of the Clinton presidency. As I checked Wikipedia today, Pluto is defined as not being a planet and the Barack Obama is defined as the 44th president of the United States. This is not even a week after the inauguration. The page does not state that he will be the 44th president, it states that he is.

One issue that I have with the visualization is that it doesn’t show persistence of information correctly. In the example used in Figure 2b and 2c, after the second edit, the text written by “Mary” disappears, and the added text by “Suzanne” starts to move. It is as if the data drifts away over time. However, according to the explanation of the visualization it was “Andrew” that deleted the text by “Mary”, but since it disappears from view immediately the edit by “Suzanne”, it seems as though “Suzanne” was the one that deleted it. I feel that the black line should somehow be extended to where “Andrew” makes the edit, so it shows that the text was there until “Andrew” came around.

One other aspect that I wish the authors would have included was some idea on how accurate their system was. That is, Viegas et al. did speak of how there were many problems in how changes were logged by Wikipedia. One issue that was mentioned was that an added comma was logged as a changed sentence. I would have liked to see some statistics on how often a situation like this occurred.

In the table where Viegas et al. describe the mean and median time for changing revisions, I found the median time to make sense (a little crazy on how fast things were sometimes, though). Overall, I understand that mass deletions and obscenities want to be cleaned out as fast as possible or two to three minutes makes sense. However, the high mean time seems to signify that there are a few mass deletions or obscenities can go unnoticed for weeks or even months before being changed back. These weeks or months are required to balance out the all the quick reaction time that leads to such a low median time. It would have been interesting if the authors included some examples of these articles, the ones that took a long time to fix.

There were a couple more interesting notes that this paper brought up. First, it noted that 31% of contributors in May of 2003 were anonymous. I was under the impression that anonymous edits were not trusted and therefore changed, but if a third of the edits were from this population, then is it really that bad? Also, I also found it interesting that the initial text of an article tends to be the text that remains the most persistent throughout the life of an article. I wonder, after a certain number of changes, one would think that the original text may not be as significant, depending on what has changed over time in the article.