

Chapter 14

Cyber Behavior with Wikis

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ABSTRACT

This entry summarizes research about cyber behavior with wikis. Wikis are collaborative websites allowing the easy creation of interlinked webpages using text editors. The first wiki tool was created by Ward Cunningham, and the first online wiki-based encyclopedia, Wikipedia, appeared in 2001. Currently, three types of wikis exist: public, organizational, and private/educational wikis. This article identifies six areas of wiki research and its leading researchers. These areas are: (1) the wiki way (wikis as part of the suite of Web2.0 tools), and Wikipedia; (2) wiki growth and contributor roles; (3) what motivates people to contribute to wikis; (4) how the authenticity of wiki articles is ensured; (5) the use of wikis in education; and finally (6) how researchers consider the way wikis have impacted on various aspects of human life. The entry closes with suggestions about possible future research directions on online behavior with wikis.

INTRODUCTION

Wikis are collaborative websites and are part of a suite of web2.0 technologies which include blogs, social bookmarking and networking sites that facilitate information sharing or the creation of knowledge bases on a large scale. A wiki is a “website that allows the easy creation and editing of any number of interlinked web pages via a

web browser using a simplified markup language or a text editor” (Wikipedia 2010). This article synthesizes the existing research knowledge about cyber, or online, behavior with wikis and considers the ways in which people interact with, and contribute to, the different types of wikis. It examines what these contributors’ characteristics are, what motivates people to contribute, and in turn how interacting in and with wikis impacts on human life.

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Overview of Intellectual History and Current Knowledge Status

The first developer of the wiki tool ('wiki' meaning *fast* in Hawaiian), WikiWikiWeb, in 1995 was Ward Cunningham who created what we today know of as wikis: easily editable collaborative websites (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001). On such sites, users can perform a variety of functions including adding, linking, deleting or revising content such as text, multimedia or weblinks. This editing history is kept between the versions so that previous versions can be reinstated if needed, making it easier for people to collaborate on the same body of documents. As pages or articles are added to the wiki, its knowledge base grows.

The best known wiki is arguably Wikipedia (coined from the words 'wiki' and 'encyclopedia') created by Jimmy Wales. This wiki was introduced online in 2001 and is a publicly available, community-generated encyclopedia containing cross-linked articles. Wales, together with Larry Sanger, attempted an earlier online encyclopedia called Nupedia. Nupedia was based on a five-stage peer review process and articles were to be written by paid academics. However, this model for article creation turned out to be very slow and Wales realized that the encyclopedia would not grow with such a rate of production. He then removed the barrier of the peer review process and replaced it with that of instant publication, in which edits on articles could still be done after their creation and Wikipedia was born. The explosion in the number of articles was instant and Wikipedia has been growing ever since. To date, Wikipedia has some 3.5 million English-language articles, 439 million edits and 78 million visitors, 1770 administrators and is available in some 270 languages (Wikipedia 2011a).

Since the proliferation of different wiki software tools, their use has become widespread. Three kinds of wikis can now be distinguished: public, professional/organizational and educational/private wikis.

- **Public wikis** are those which can be publicly read or edited by anyone (such as Wikipedia, Knol, Citizendium).
- **Professional or intra- and inter-organizational wikis** are knowledge bases contributed to by its members which can be viewed by the public (e.g. medical or health wikis such as Ganfyd or just by its members (e.g. company wikis such as for IBM, or governmental wikis, such as Intellipedia for the US Intelligence Community).
- **Educational and private wikis** are restricted to a smaller group of people, and can be typically used by educational institutions to promote collaborative learning between groups of students, or can be private wikis created for social uses between family and friends.

Given that wikis are only ten years old, research related to cyber behavior with wikis is still very current. The main authors who have studied Web 2.0 or 'the wiki way' include Cunningham and the late Leuf (2001); Tapscott and Williams (2007) from University of Toronto; Weinberger (2007) from the Harvard Law School; and Reagle (2010)-whose work focuses entirely on Wikipedia – from Harvard University. Lih, who is currently a visiting professor the University of Southern California and himself a Wikipedia editor, has written extensively about Wikipedia and its history (2009). Other academic researchers have focused on more specific areas related to wiki behavior, such as Arazy et al. (2010) from the University of Alberta who have examined contributor types and the roles people play in wiki development. Similarly, Yates from the University of Maryland, Wagner from the University of Hong Kong and Majchrzak from the University of Southern California (2010) studied the type of contributions people make in wikis. Cress and Kimmerle (2008) from the University of Tuebingen have also been interested in contributor roles in relation to a user's motivation to contribute to a wiki. Motivation is

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