A Study of the Motivation Behind Collaborative Knowledge Production and the Formation of Community in Web 2.0, using the Case Study of wikiHow.com

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Abstract

As our society merges with the digital, new issues of community, collaboration and knowledge production have risen to the forefront of the social sciences in a quest to explore what this means at both the macro and micro level. Collaborative knowledge production is the process of a large group of individuals joining forces to co-create tangible pieces of information. It only functions when a critical mass of individuals get together to co-create the resource. As these actions are unpaid, voluntary work, the challenge is to motivate individuals to donate their own resources (such as time and expertise) to the project.

This paper examines the motivations behind such actions, and whether or not a community is inevitably constructed by such actions, indeed whether or not community is even theoretically possible in the online sphere. wikiHow.com, a popular collaborative website, was used as an in-depth case-study in my research. I chose a qualitative approach, distributing both open and closed questionnaires to participants on the wikiHow website through both snowball and convenience sampling methods. The theoretical discussion and analysis draws upon work from Wellman, Putnam, Levy, Lessig, Benkler and Maslow, among others prominent in the field.

Participants revealed they were driven to contribute by numerous, interlinked motivations, linked primarily by the high level of importance they placed on social activities. This study provides novel evidence that wikiHow users are multifaceted entities, driven by a large range of factors with a strong emphasis on seeking out and participating in social interaction. This leads us to label wikiHow as a definitively modern community and allows us to conclude that community has not disappeared, rather it has evolved and adapted to include emergent digital possibilities.

Keywords: collaboration, community, knowledge production, motivation, web 2.0,
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 1. Introduction 5

1.1 Purpose and Aim 6

1.2 Significance to the field 7

1.3 The evolution of collaborative knowledge production and Web 2.0 8

1.4 Presentation of wikiHow as a case study 14

## 2. Theoretical Framework 16

2.1 Motivation 16

2.2 Community 26

## 3. Methodology 39

3.1 Conducting research online 39

3.1.1 Closed questionnaires: advantages and disadvantages 40

3.1.2 Open questionnaires: advantages and disadvantages 40

3.2 Description of method 41

3.2.1 Justification of choice 42

3.3 Ethical considerations 44

3.4 Self reflection 44

3.4.1 Limitations 45

## 4. Results and Discussion 46

4.1 Demographics 46

4.2 Discovering wikiHow 49

4.3 Frequency of activity 50

4.4 Motivation 52

4.5 Community 68

## 5. Conclusion 71

5.1 Future directions 73

## 6. Bibliography 74

## 7. Appendix 80
1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of my thesis is centred on the website ‘wikiHow.com’, a collaborative website or wiki acting as a digital how-to database whereby users collaborate on articles by contributing images, advice and expertise on a range of limitless topics. I intend to explore the sociality surrounding such hubs of activity, interested in what motivations ignite it, whether or not a community is formed through such collaborative action, and indeed theoretically, whether or not community is even possible on the web.

Our shift into the digital era has brought many challenges, many of which have impacted our everyday social and professional experiences. This has been accelerated even more so by the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, granting users more autonomy and agency over their online activities. Amidst piles of information, readers and creators can now engage one another, collectively debating, editing, producing and creating new knowledge. What is fascinating is how individuals have come together online to co-create a plethora of information, all for the common use and completely free of charge. These projects are bound together and sustained over time by large masses of geographically dispersed individuals, all seemingly highly driven to contribute.

When we think about labour we often think about motivation and payment as the same thing, leading us to re-evaluate what drives individuals in voluntary collaborative projects. Indeed, perhaps alternative motivations are more diverse or complex, and potentially even stronger than monetary incentives. It is often surmised that our society has become increasingly individualistic, isolated and selfish. Reputation is increasingly becoming the new social currency, with social media websites serving our desire to connect with others and demonstrate our strengths and positive attributes, and as such it may be a potential catalyst for the phenomenon that is voluntary collaborative knowledge production. Perhaps, on the other hand, such production is demonstrating that we are not merely a culture of ‘me’, but in fact a culture of ‘we’, driven by our desire to connect with and help others. Alternatively some of the factors that drive such voluntary producers may include the search for meaning, creation, challenge, identity, and pride.

Community is a convoluted concept, one that has been hotly debated for centuries by prominent theorists and social scientists. The challenge has been how to define it, whether it is conceived of as a group of individuals working together, a group of individuals sharing a
physical space, or simply a group that sustains its interaction for lengthy periods of time. What is different and interesting now is the way in which community is conceived in the digital era, when people are largely communicating in a fundamentally different way than ever before. Within this context of Web 2.0, sustained collaboration between dispersed individuals is a phenomenon that is highly intriguing for community studies. Here we explore what it means to be a community, and whether or not this is possible in the online sphere.

1.1 Purpose and aim

Primary research question:

- Why do individuals use their own resources to contribute to projects from which they might not gain? i.e. what motivates them - a desire for human connection based on similar interests, an altruistic goal of helping others, status and competition or perhaps a combination of all three?

Sub-research question:

- Does collaborative knowledge production on the Internet lead to the construction of a community?

The goal of the research is to understand the experience of users and isolate factors which contribute to their motivations in collaborating on such projects and whether or not this can be classed as a community.

My hypotheses are as follows:

- Users of wikiHow will be strongly and primarily motivated by the social aspect rather than altruism, status, or competition.

- Users will feel a strong sense of community on wikiHow

1.2 Significance to the field:
I believe this topic is academically relevant as wikis like wikiHow are in themselves social worlds, worthy of both in-depth investigation and analysis. My topic looks at current issues surrounding virtual communities and motivations behind mass collaboration. I foresee collaborative efforts and crowdsourcing becoming more and more integral in business strategy and indeed a plethora of projects from both the non-profit or private sectors. This will inevitably bring issues of copyright and the creative commons, and indeed relevancy and accuracy to the forefront of the debate. Most notably, we are living in a time where what we have come to expect of sociality is constantly evolving with the advent of new advances in technology. What we understand about community may be changing, and moving into unchartered territory. Community studies are notoriously convoluted, and particularly under researched in the digital sphere. I intend to apply my theoretical discussion on both motivation and community to the results of my study in order to analyse whether or not community life is truly present in such digital collaborative arenas, and if indeed it is the very glue that keeps participants coming back, holding the process together.

As I spend an increasingly large quantity of time on the Internet, I am interested in the dichotomy in the way that we conceptualize the production of information as a service that should be free and yet the notion that it is an industry that relies on the consumer to foot the bill. In this case of collaborative production the consumers are the producers, and vice versa, and so I ask myself what drives them to participate, if not for monetary reasons? Their growing significance is pushing out formal avenues of knowledge production and forcing industries to adapt.

I believe my master’s thesis has a broad relevance to society as it is essential to understand the motivations behind individuals who voluntarily contribute their resources as this could lead to not only a better understanding of ourselves but also to the formulation of strategies and the development of programmes that could contribute to the public good in new ways, i.e. involvement in the non-governmental sector. Voluntary collaborative models such wikis have a great impact on society, not just in the way that we connect personally but also in how we both value and share our resources.

1.3 The evolution of collaborative knowledge production and Web 2.0
If we consider what constitutes the most value in the world, it is clearly knowledge. It feeds all sections of society, and those who have it maintain competitive advantage across all sectors. Newell et al, 2009: 24) The capacity of humanity to generate new knowledge is the source of all innovation, production and development. Without it, nothing would evolve and we as a species would stagnate. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 153) Knowledge creation has always typically been a collective and collaborative process, rather than an individualistic one. In order to create new knowledge, it is logically important to draw on as many different bases of knowledge as possible so that we may consider what is missing, build on previous work and learn from comparing perspectives. Typically these bases of knowledge are dispersed among many different individuals from varying backgrounds, and so collaboration is an essential part of the knowledge creation process. (Newell et al, 2009: 79) Newell posits that social networks provide an essential context for the production and dissemination of knowledge. (Newell et al, 2009:79)

Lievrouw considers collaboration not to be a uniquely human trait, but certainly a defining feature of human behaviour and culture. Without collaboration, our society would be much more primitive, for it is in groups that we achieve the most powerful results. Almost every aspect of human activities can be considered collaborative to some extent. (Lievrouw, 2011:179) People have always banded together to achieve a desired purpose or outcome, and thus it is logical that this offline behaviour has transferred to the online realm, albeit with individuals devising tools and techniques to do so at a considerable distance from one another. (Lievrouw, 2011:180)

Peer production is the capacity to harness a large group of individuals with multiple and diverging motivations and structurally allowing them to make a concerted effort to reach a common goal. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:403) Peer production is understudied and difficult to predict in comparison to more traditional wealth maximization models of human motivation. This fascinating example allows us to delve much more deeply into the varied nature of human agency and action. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:403) Castells defines participants as a ‘new class of knowledge workers’, dispersed throughout the globe intent on sharing their ‘common code’ in a liberated informational environment that is devoid of gate-keeping or privatization. (Castells, 2001: 33)

The central characteristic that all commons knowledge projects share is their ‘Alexandrian’ ambitions. The term is derived from 300BC in Egypt when the Library of Alexandria was
established with the goal of collecting all the recorded knowledge of the ancient world up until that point. It was the first attempt at creating an encyclopaedia of sorts, categorizing and placing all available knowledge in one place. (Lievrouw, 2011) It is unsurprising that the Alexandrian goal has been revived in an online context, with such an accessible medium in which to publish text; entire libraries and collections have been made available via the Internet. (Borgman, 2007) The ethos and hypertextual structure of the Web encourages such projects, bringing the Alexandrian ideal into a modern context. This concept characterizes much of the digital library projects online, including that of wikiHow. The design of the web makes the process of locating and retrieving information remarkably easy, encouraging those who seek information to utilise it as a primary resource, which in Lievrouw’s view, undoubtedly narrows the breadth of knowledge that is available to them, as she considers the idea that all the world’s information will be posted online to be naïve. (Lievrouw, 2011:190) Indeed even the wealth of information that is posted online is largely ignored, with media chatter and the proliferation of hubs and nodes and algorithms obliterating much of what is uploaded. Though you may have a publishing platform at your fingertips, there is no guarantee anyone will read your information. This is a clear advantage of collaborative knowledge production sites like wikiHow, as they provide not merely a platform to publish their knowledge, but also an immediate audience due to the thousands that frequent the site and its high visibility in search engines such as Google.

The Alexandrian ideal has been heavily criticised in other areas, particularly in reference to the dominance of the English language over others in publishing, a feature that has only become exacerbated online, positioning it as the lingua franca of the digital realm. This has the unfortunate consequence of an ethnocentric disregard for a plethora of valuable knowledge that can only be truly expressed in their native tongues, thus making the Internet a narrower and less culturally rich environment. (Lievrouw, 2011:190) Tapscott and Williams take a much more positive view, and celebrate that we are living in a time when human knowledge is more broadly documented than ever before. They posit that the construction of digital libraries and the emergent collaborative models of investigation are only going to accelerate this process of discovery and enlightenment, with a new generation of Alexandrians leaving a legacy that will surely enrich the lives of future citizens. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 152)

Change has always been a feature of society, a difficult process of evolution from outdated structures to innovative forms driven by the growth of new knowledge. The dominant
medium through which society shared collective cultural experiences evolved considerably during the twentieth century from the page and stage to the screen, from the press and radio to the cinema, then television and most recently computer screens. Each medium did not maintain its dominance for long, thus it will be interesting to witness the trajectory of the Internet. (Hartley, 2012:117) Perhaps the most prominent medium through which knowledge has been collected and communicated through is of course, print. The Internet has built upon the technology of the printing press by allowing the public low-cost and ease of access to read information as well as the opportunity to publish their own. The people are at the heart of the Internet, playing a pivotal role in providing the services, forming the social networks, improving the products and creating the very content that makes up digital media. This is now a time of user productivity and entrepreneurship in the age of Web 2.0 (Hartley, 2012: 25)

Web 2.0 is a term that was coined in 2003 and brought into the mainstream by a media consultant named Tim O’Reilly. The idea of Web 2.0 is that there has been a particular intersection between software, hardware and sociality that has created a qualitatively different web from before. (O Reilly, 2005). This shift is characterised by a newfound ability to co-create, collaborate and openly participate in knowledge production, essentially opening up the closed nature of digital behaviour by introducing new practices such as blogging, tagging, building wikis and engaging in dialogue with dominant knowledge producers while producing their own knowledge simultaneously. (Lister, et al. 2009: 204) This literal spider-web of links between individuals makes up a fundamentally social switchboard of sorts, a stark contrast to the Web 1.0 where one could open and view information on the web, much like a newspaper, but one couldn’t interact with or alter it, let alone engage in dialogue with its authors or fellow consumers. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 37)

A further differentiator between Web 1.0 and 2.0 is that the generation and classification of knowledge is no longer controlled by higher powers and instead has become an activity that all can participate in. (Lister, et al. 2009:206) An important turning point was when the dot com bubble burst in 2001. O’Reilly noticed that the companies who survived the collapse all had certain traits in common. They harnessed the collective intelligence of their employees in tandem with promoting lateral communication between them and their customers, and notably between the customers themselves, making Web 2.0 into a world where the people decided what is important. (O’Reilly, 2012:32) O’Reilly believes that corporations must learn to harness the networked effect of user contributions in order to achieve market
domination in the Web 2.0 era. (O’Reilly, 2012:39) Indeed this virtual shift has had positive consequences for private interests due to the realisation that user behaviour on sites creates a valuable community in the form of market data that they can sell to advertisers in order to further boost profits. (Lister, et al. 2009:205)

This unprecedented shift from a hierarchical model of communication to one where meaningful relationships and interactive social networks dominate, has become a defining feature of the process. (Hartley, 2012:2) Here every desktop is a printing press, every person a producer of content, and thus we must radically reconsider ideas of copyright, information value, and expertise. This is a shift from passive consumers to active users, where they act rather than react by seeking enlightenment and entertainment and thus taking control of their own media experience. (Hartley, 2012:5) This calls into question the very idea of knowledge production, and forces us to re-examine knowledge production in the context of the online sphere. Hartley refers to this period as ‘the interactive era’, a time where the direction of causation has reversed, and culture is produced from the bottom up, with peer-to-peer production and user generated content a driving force in such cultural revolution. (Hartley, 2012:13) The Internet has outgrown its initial service as a library and evolved into a melting pot of expression, a cultural festival of sorts where anyone can contribute, create, comment and debate with one another. (Lievrouw, 2011:178)

Eric Raymond describes two models of knowledge production. The first is the bazaar model where a flurry of interaction maximizes opportunities for discovering new information and for identifying and correcting errors. The second is the cathedral model where a hierarchy of craftspeople come together to achieve a pre-defined output of information. Raymond contrasts the two by arguing that the collaborative bazaar model is far better suited to inspiring creativity, solving problems and completing large-scale complex projects. This approach defines the ethos of Web 2.0, open source software and commons knowledge production platforms like wikiHow. (Raymond, 1999; Lievrouw, 2011:180)

We must acknowledge that the creation of knowledge was previously a localized activity pursued either individually or within small circles of collaborators who generally knew one another. This was mainly due to the difficulty in co-ordinating interaction and discussion between geographically dispersed individuals with the existing communication tools. The Internet has fundamentally altered this entire structure, giving us unprecedented access and power to collaborate with loose networks of geographically dispersed individuals in order to
continuously produce and create tangible outputs, therefore opening up endless opportunities for people to collaborate together around the globe. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 10; De Alfaro, et al. 2011:81) The act of contributing to a digital commons requires little personal cost, which makes the experience very attractive. All one needs is a computer, a network connection, time, and a desire to collaborate. We are slowly being ushered towards a world where knowledge and thus power is more dispersed among the public than at any other moment in history. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 12)(Mandiberg, 2012:187)

It is therefore unsurprising that commons peer production sites like wikiHow where the consumer is the producer, sharply question what the future holds for professional experts. (Hartley, 2012:91) Benkler considers these to be intrinsically related to the economic wealth of networks. These non-market forms of cultural production are all about sharing and connecting with others, which makes it much more appealing than the commercial model. (Benkler, 2006) Thus such open source projects could pose significant obstacles to the profit margins of established powers whose market lies in commodifying professional expertise. (Lievrouw, 2011:179)

Growing research on commons-based knowledge production suggests that in fact the quality of such projects are comparable to their traditional authoritative counterparts, for example Wikipedia and the Encyclopaedia Britannica. This may explain the growing trust and acceptance that such projects are generally reliable sources of information. (Lievrouw, 2011:179) Indeed it can be seen that traditional, authoritative forms of knowledge production are in fact increasingly overlapping with commons-based production methods as more and more agencies and corporations adopt such practices as part of their marketing or production strategies. (Borgman, 2007) Currently IBM boasts about using Linux in their systems and prominent publications such as the Economist have declared open source methods of research successful and widely applicable across numerous fields. (Vaidhyanathan, 2012:24) This tells us that commons knowledge is a demonstratable force, rival and compliment to traditional knowledge in the contemporary media landscape. (Lievrouw, 2011:185)

What Tapscott and Williams call wikinomics is based on four principles, those of openness, peering, sharing and acting globally. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 20) The term ‘wiki’ is the Hawaiian word for ‘quick’. Indeed as a problem-solving tool, it is an efficient process for achieving speedy solutions to difficult problems. ‘The three rules of open source - nobody own it, everybody uses it, and anybody can improve it.’ (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 86)
Wikis are essentially self-fulfilling entities that employ a cycle of co-creation. It is built on the premise that the more people collaborate, the more content will improve over time. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 71) Wikipedia’s founder Jimmy Wales has compared the commons production process to Darwin’s evolutionary model, whereby content is continuously improving with each edit and input from users. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 73) Von Hippel calls them ‘user-innovation communities’, engaging in what Benkler calls ‘commons based peer production’. (Von Hippel, 2005) (Benkler, 2006)

The knowledge produced through this model is completely transparent, with each article stating the dates, times and users that were contributed to the creative and editing process. What is interesting is that this commons product differs sharply from its authoritative counterparts in that instead of presenting knowledge as fact, wiki knowledge is seen as part of an ongoing conversation, an active search for the most accurate content. (Lister, et al. 2009:207) A single contribution or edit to a wiki article cannot exist outside of the collaborative context. (Hyde, 2012:54) Each change is documented and archived, noting important details such as the contributor’s username and time. They serve a purpose of clearly identifying stages of production, allowing users to revert back to previous drafts if certain contributions are deemed inaccurate. The goal of consistent editing is to further increase accuracy. (Hyde, 2012:55) Wikis often use ‘folksonomies’ to categorize and order their information. Folksonomies are essentially systems of classification where users tag or label information that will in turn point others to the resource. Lievrouw views this as fundamentally communicative, and a defining feature of Web 2.0. (Lievrouw, 2011:193)

Commons knowledge projects are characterized by their collaborative structure. The number of participants involved and the size of the resource produced are co-determining factors, as are their ability to produce comprehensive and quality content and their capacity to edit such content increases with the growth of new users to the site, thus increasing the diversity and reliability of the resource. (Lievrouw, 2011:210) It is clear that in such a model, some contributors are more intensely involved than others. A core of dedicated contributors take the lead in creating and refining the content while a mass of weaker contributors are involved in specialized areas. Lievrouw confirms that this example of highly skewed, ‘long tail’ distributions is relatively common across both online and offline forms of civic action. (Lievrouw, 2011:200) The fluidity and flexibility of peer production projects are their most prominent strength, allowing knowledge not to be deterministic in nature, but rather an
ongoing process of research, much more in line with scientific principles. (Lievrouw, 2011:212)

Pierre Levy argues that nobody knows everything, however everyone knows something for all knowledge must reside in humanity. The act of harnessing individual expertise towards shared goals is his idea of ‘collective intelligence’, an aggregation of individual puzzle pieces to form solutions. (Levy, 1997) He suggests that this pattern will transform industries, injecting new energy into rusty engines to increase productivity and progression. (Levy, 1997) Levy considers sites of collective intelligence to serve the important purpose of provoking critical thought and investigation into new information for the common good. (Levy, 1997)

Undeniably when humans collaborate, the results are far more impressive than if we remained individualistic and isolated beings. As the saying goes ‘United we stand, divided we fall, James Surowiecki uncovered just this in his 2004 book ‘The Wisdom of Crowds’. Surowiecki empirically examined crowd wisdom at work, where he found that ‘under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent, and are often smarter than the smartest people in them’. (Surowiecki, 2004) Thus Brabham surmises, this wisdom of crowds is found not from averaging intelligence but from aggregating it. (Brabham, 2008:79)

1.4 Presentation of wikiHow as a case study

wikiHow is a knowledge sharing community that uses the principles of a wiki to run its operation. It is a free multilingual how-to manual that is based on the ‘wiki’ concept. This means it is entirely composed of content that is written collaboratively by volunteers and is entirely open to be edited by anyone who wishes to alter its content. In 2005 wikiHow was born, aiming to provide the world’s largest and most comprehensive how-to-guide. To date its success has been monumental, and it is now easier than ever before to find free instructions or advice on the web. The site covers all manner of subjects from finance to fashion, and the topics are continuously built upon. The twist is that all of this information is supplied voluntarily by dedicated, knowledgeable individuals around the world, and is continuously updated and edited in real-time. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006:77)

The Internet has many uses, but crucially it is also an archive that stores everything that has ever been uploaded. In many ways it acts as a giant filing cabinet or encyclopaedia, a place to learn, discover and explore. Thus it follows that people will begin to contribute and learn
from the information that has been deposited. wikiHow is a manifestation of such a concept. It offers advice on the simplest of tasks to the most complex projects, and even ridiculous or spiritual pursuits. (Page, 2007:32) If you ever wondered how to french kiss, how to solve a rubik’s cube, or how to get rid of fruit flies, wikiHow is likely to be your first port of call. An immensely popular site, it currently shows no sign of becoming obsolete. Users with in-depth knowledge on specific topics, either from learned expertise or personal experience devote their time and effort to writing detailed articles that denote how to do all of the above and millions more. The site has an ambitious goal - “to build the world’s largest, most useful how-to manual.” According to the site, "Our mission is to provide free and useful instructions to help people solve the problems of everyday life." (Page, 2007:32)

wikiHow attracts millions of visitors each month, interested in the broad categories provided such as ‘Arts & Entertainment, Careers & Education, Cars & Other Vehicles, Communications, Computers & Electronics, Family Life, Finance & Business, Food & Entertaining, Health, Hobbies & Crafts, Holidays & Traditions, Home & Garden, Personal Care & Style, Pets, Philosophy & Religion, Relationships, Sports & Fitness, Teenagers, and Travel.’ The site currently boasts more than 150,000 articles, each following a simple and easy-to-read format. There is an introduction, a list of numbered steps to complete the task that are often accompanied by pictures, and a further list of tips, warnings, and links to related articles from both wikiHow and around the web. (Page, 2007:32)

Interestingly, wikiHow’s founder Jack Herrick originally started off by running eHow.com, a similar advice website that runs on a profit-model, taking its information from credentialized experts rather than the general public. Herrick quickly realized that eHow’s model of including only professional writers and editors would never produce the Alexandrian style how-to-manual that he had envisioned. Inspired by Wikipedia’s widespread success, Herrick sold eHow and launched wikiHow. (Page, 2007:32)

I was searching for a collaborative knowledge production site that was built upon the generosity of others rather than paid professionals. In a world where time has become an increasingly valuable and important commodity, I wondered what drove these people to continue donating their time to something that did not reward them either monetarily or professionally. I began to hypothesize that community played an integral role in such an attraction, with social life perhaps moving off the streets and online.
I chose wikiHow as I had seen from reviewing the literature that there was much to be found on Wikipedia, but as of yet nothing published on this site and the people behind it. I was also quite drawn to the much more personal aspect of the site, as its content fundamentally deals with giving instructions and advice to people rather than merely stating facts like that of Wikipedia. If we think about the complicated task of working on a project with multiple people, it involves the communication of meaning, heavy editing, some form of compromise. wikiHow simplifies this process by allowing individuals to contribute singularly in small sections, logging their specific changes for others involved to see, comment upon, and even edit further if they so wish. ‘Talk pages’ are spaces under a user’s profile where other users can address them personally to talk about an article or indeed something of a personal nature. Forums are also available for users to pose questions, problems and tips for all those involved in the project. These added features structurally facilitate social interaction, and so I wanted to explore the users perceptions of and motivations for using this site, in the interest of uncovering whether they stayed because they felt it was a strong and supportive community, to improve their skill-set, or simply a place to help others by pursuing their voluntary knowledge production activity.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Motivation in Collaborative Knowledge Production.

Pintrich and Schunk define motivation as ‘the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained’. (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996)

The core question we must answer is what motivates people to contribute their time and talents to collaborative knowledge production projects like wikiHow? Particularly as our focus is on voluntary participation that is not financially compensated, we must attempt to uncover other rational understandings of human motivation in such contexts.

In social dilemmas, if we all exhibited individually reasonable behaviour in which we only considered ourselves, this would lead to situations where everyone is worse off. (Kollock, 1998:183) Indeed as individuals it is much more advantageous for us to make use of a public resource without making any contribution, however if all parties involved acted on this conclusion, the public resource would not be provided and the entire group is worse off. (Kollock, 1998:184) A public good is a shared resource from which all may enjoy,
irrespective of whether they have helped to provide it or not. Public goods are nonrival, in that one person’s use of the good does not diminish it in any way. As a consequence, temptation exists to enjoy the resource without expending resources to contribute to its production or maintenance. This is termed ‘free-riding’, and while it is rational to do so, if all people did it public goods would simply not exist at all, and everyone is worse off. (Kollock, 1998:188) wikiHow is one such public good. How do we explain why some people are motivated to contribute the public good, while some are not? What are the driving forces behind such contribution?

Many institutions struggle with the task of motivating their workers. Some efforts to motivate workers to produce good work for the sake of the group have proved to be unsuccessful, much like the disintegration of Marxism in Soviet society. Others have succeeded, such as those employed in Japanese factories. Western capitalists claim that competition is more effective than collaboration in motivating work, however in the digital realm it appears that corporations who adopt collaborative structures, achieve the best quality results. (Sennett, 2008:52) As online collaboration become more and more widespread, questions arise as to the most efficient ways to organize and motivate sustained contribution. Budhathoki and Haythornthwaite hypothesize that participants are typically rewarded through social interaction with those they share common interests with, in turn forming communities comprised of people of similar interests and thus motivating continued participation. (Budhathoki and Haythornthwaite, 2012: 3) Peering activities are voluntary in that participants are not compensated monetarily and they make an independent choice to do so. However this does not mean that they do not benefit from their participation in other ways. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 67) Though at first glance it looks like a case of mass altruism amongst strangers, the reality is much more complex. (Benkler, 2012:20)

Individuals engaging with a common resource tend to behave in many different ways. Kollock classes them into four groups: co-operators, competitors, altruists or individualists. Co-operators behave so that they will maximize joint outcomes for all other parties involved, competitors maximize the difference between self and others, altruists maximize other’s outcomes without a regard for one’s own outcome and in contrast, individualists maximize their own outcome without any concern for the other’s outcome. Kollock classes most people as either co-operators, competitors or individualists, a sign that altruism is not as common as we might imagine. (Kollock, 1998:192)
Kollock surmises that significant research has shown that when individuals are communicating with one another, cooperation between such individuals increases significantly. (Kollock, 1998: 192) Group identity can also have a powerful effect, by increasing cooperation rates even in the absence of communication. Kollock suspects that this may be because a collective social identity increases the altruistic tendencies of the group members. It may also be a strategic move in that individuals expect future reciprocity among the other group members and thus encourages cooperation. (Kollock, 1998:194)

Perhaps it might be the case that people are more likely to co-operate if they feel their participation is genuinely having an impact on other people. Kollock found that cooperation rates significantly increased if participants could see the benefits others gained from their cooperation. (Kollock, 1998:195) Many researchers have found that a key reason for uncooperative behaviour is when the individual does not consider their actions to have any discernible effect on the situation. Thus it is rational to consider that if a project is structured in such a way that individuals feel they are ‘making a difference, or that their voice is being heard, then it follows that cooperation rates will be significantly increased. (Kollock, 1998:195)

The engine of peering is fuelled by various voluntary motivations that assign people to appropriate tasks. This is done by self-selection, where interestingly individuals who choose their own tasks are found to be more likely to choose ones for which they are uniquely qualified for. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 69) Tapscott and Williams surmise that self-selection in communities where frequent interaction takes place ensures that the best people are assigned to the correct tasks. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 69) Participation in peer production provides a measure of autonomy where individuals have the power to self-direct activity and set their own goals and principles. Benkler and Nissenbaum postulate that this may render such activity particularly attractive to those who cannot do so in the other aspects of their lives. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:405) In general the majority of our recreational choices (for example watching television) have a tendency to be passive and limiting experiences that do not give the individual the opportunity to have an input into the process. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:406) Commons-based production processes provide an interactivity and tangible sense of control that may explain its mass appeal to date.
Lessig distinguished between two different classes of potential motivations that may account for participation in a voluntary collaborative project. The first are ‘me-regarding’ motivations, where an individual participates due to the benefits it will bring him. The second are ‘thee-regarding’ motivations, where it follows that an individual will participate because it brings benefits to others involved. (Lessing, 2008:151) Clearly me and thee motivations are not dichotomous and are intertwined in a number of ways. One can even view some if not all ‘thee-regarding motivations’ as ‘me-regarding’ as they bring benefits to the individual who may enjoy the feeling of helping others or who may enjoy being seen or identifying as someone who helps others. (Lessing, 2008:151)

Lessig goes further and divides sharing economies based on this distinction. He describes ‘thin sharing economies’ as those where the primary motivations are me-regarding and in contrast, ‘thick sharing economies’ where the primary motivations are at least a mixture between me and thee motivations. In thin sharing economies, people make exchanges simply because it benefits them in some way. They do not mind if their actions also help someone else, but this is not an independent desire and their motivation is primarily centred on themselves. (Lessing, 2008:152) Distinctions between thin and thick sharing economies are important when considering the likelihood that a particular economy will survive over time. In fact thin sharing economies have more longevity than thick ones, as inspiring or sustaining thee motivations is more difficult, with me motivations coming much more easily to most individuals. (Lessing, 2008:154)

When compared to centralized and directed production, open source projects are much more inclusive and egalitarian. Rather than only recognizing project leaders or the company itself, the contributions of every participant are credited and recognized, generating a sense of pride amongst those who take part. This can have the effect of generating what are known as ‘reputation economies’ that provide powerful motivations for continued participation and a commitment to quality among those who collaborate. (Cliffolilli, 2003) Deuze concurs that people seem to be increasingly interested in voluntarily participating in media-production activities with the goal of achieving a ‘networked reputation’. (Deuze, 2007: 77) Hars and Ou state that the quest for peer recognition is derived from the need or desire for fame and high esteem, which can be associated with future returns for participants. (Hars and Ou, 2001:4)
Sennett postulates that the desire to do good work comes from a personal measure of success, where inadequate performance or failure to meet one’s potential wounds one’s pride and corrodes one’s sense of self. (Sennett, 2008:97) Bourdieu argues that individuals who are driven to pursue quality in their work can act as a tool to claim status or capital within the groups or organizations they reside in. They are then publicly distinguished as being hard working, aspirational and committed persons and thus superior to those who are not. (Bourdieu, 1986) It is often the case that open source participants receive immediate and constructive feedback regarding their contributions. This nearly always has a positive effect as it lets the contributor know that others care about their input and also that they are being evaluated on the basis of their content. Thus we can say that feedback is self-reinforcing by policing the author and simultaneously encouraging them to place further effort in improving the quality of their contributions. (Hars and Ou, 2001:4) This process allows individuals to produce something and be recognized for their contribution. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 146) It is easy to understand how individuals get thrills from innovating and creating something unique, showing it to others and receiving recognition. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 129)

Reputation systems are the online equivalent of a legal system in that they serve to regulate the actions of people in the digital sphere. (De Alfaro, et al. 2011:87) Reputation systems can be quite effective as wikiHow’s structure allows everyone to check the historical trajectory of each article’s editing process to see who did what in the past. Each member has a public ‘talk page’ where others can post, thus it is quite an open system where each member has the opportunity to develop trust and credibility over time.

The many-to-many character of the Internet means that when someone is helped it can be seen by all others, and thus increases their status within the group. This can have the desired effects of achieving recognition and heightening the probability that they will receive help from other community members. (Ester and Vinken, 2003:671) Kollock identifies the expectation of reciprocity as a potentially intrinsic motivation to participate, particularly in cases where individuals do not know one another. Kollock argues that the online informational support given to unknown participants alter the dynamics of social action whereby each response becomes a public good while simultaneously increasing the contributor’s status within the group. He believes the primary motivations for participating include anticipated reciprocity and a sense of pride that comes from being able to help. (Kollock, 1999)
Lessig hits the nail on the head with his description that sharing economies are fundamentally devices for building connections between people and how the relationships that are established are the ‘glue of the community’ (Lessing, 2008:148)

Maslow considers the nature of human beings to constantly and intrinsically desire something, rarely reaching a state of complete satisfaction, to be a major feature of human psychology. A conveyer belt of desire and satisfaction, one is replaced by another, over and over again throughout their whole lives. (Maslow, 1954:7) Thus motivation is a key process in fulfilling desire and achieving satisfaction.

Maslow’s theory of motivation involves a hierarchical structure of basic human needs. The idea is that once one need is satisfied it becomes unimportant to the individual who is then motivated to achieve the next need. (Maslow, 1954:17) There are five stages in the pyramid, beginning with physical needs, followed by safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and finally the self-actualization need. If both the physical and safety needs are satisfied, then the individual desires belongingness and love, requiring the acts of giving and receiving affection. If these are unsatisfied, the individual will desire and strive intensively to build relationships with people in general, or find a place in a group. (Maslow, 1954:20)
Maslow considers the large increase in groups and communities to be directly motivated by an unsatisfied need for intimacy, contact and belongingness. He reasons that this may be due to feelings of isolation and loneliness that afflict those affected by the shift in traditional forms of community to more modern, dispersed social activities. (Maslow, 1954:20)

Maslow theorizes that all individuals have esteem needs, a desire for a high evaluation of their persona, for self-respect and the respect of others. These may then be split into two groups, the first a need for personal achievement, competence and independence and the second a need for recognition and appreciation from others in order to build status and reputation. (Maslow, 1954:21) As these needs are satisfied, it leads an individual’s development of personal pride, a sense of worth and capability. On the other hand, if these are denied, people feel weak and useless, without direction or purpose. (Maslow, 1954:21) In the final stage, despite all prior needs being satisfied, an individual may become restless unless he or she feels they are vocationally fitted to their correct purpose, staying true to their own nature so to speak. This is the need for self-actualization. It is a desire to become or do everything one is capable of becoming or doing, a goal of fulfilling one’s potential. The form this takes varies greatly from individual to individual. (Maslow, 1954:22)
Maslow acknowledges that what are considered to be certain needs may vary from person to person. Acquiring knowledge can be seen to be a tool for achieving safety needs, or also an expression of the self-actualization needs. (Maslow, 1954:28) The lines between work and play are blurred, and as such selfish hedonism cannot be completely opposed to altruism when altruism is selfishly pleasurable. (Maslow, 1954:162)

Peer production provides a gateway for new forms of creative expression. It allows individuals to contribute their thoughts, opinions, beliefs, knowledge and know-how to form part of a meaningful and tangible product. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:406) Creative expression appears to be part of human wholeness and integration and core to self-acceptance. (Maslow, 1954:162)

The motivational drive to participate tends to be personal, with an attachment to social well-being but also strongly to the group and its members. (Budhathoki and Haythornthwaite, 2012: 8) The notion of trust can be crucial to attracting or depleting levels of participation. Some research has revealed there is a positive correlation between a general trustful disposition and participation (Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010), while distrust in the group had a negative correlation with members eventually withdrawing from the group. (Norris, 2000) Therefore we can deduce that the social interactions people have within the group, play a definitive role in participation.

Collaborative knowledge producers may also be motivated by the opportunity to increase and improve their existing skill set, viewing their participation as a form of training, an investment from which they will yield future returns. Economists call this investment ‘human capital’, which may eventually lead to future career opportunities. (Hars and Ou, 2001: 3) Consistently participating in collaborative projects can therefore also be an efficient advertising channel to publicize one’s own skill-set and capabilities. (Hars and Ou, 2001: 4) Lessig concedes that a significant portion of contributors are motivated to contribute for intellectual stimulation or with the aim of improving their skill set. (Lessing , 2008:173)

Sennett considers there to be two fundamental motivations to work hard and well in modern society. The first is the moral responsibility to the community and the second is the role of competition, stimulating the desire to do good work with the promise of individual rewards. (Sennett, 2008:28) It is often the case that those who participate in collaborative work believe their work is different or exemplary. More definitively, they believe they are part of a
collective project that drives the focus of their work. The final product that includes their participation is viewed as much more valuable than the material they found when they arrived. (Lessing, 2008:196) It is clear that alongside amateurs, wikis also attract a range of subject matter experts who are passionate about their topics and wish to share them with the world. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006:72)

Simply ‘feeling good’ can be a clear incentive to participate, as the greater the personal returns from cooperation as measured against lower returns from deciding not to participate, the greater the level of co-operation. (Kollock, 1998:195) Lessig posits that a large part of the motivation for participation in sharing economies comes from people engaging in activity they actively enjoy. Wikis have invited the world to participate and discovered that there are enough volunteers interested in enough topics to make it function smoothly. (Lessing, 2008:173) Why do people participate in sharing projects rather than say watching television? Lessig believes it is simply because they like to, making it a purely self-indulgent me-regarding motivation. (Lessing, 2008:175) ‘These are happy places. People are there because they want to be’. (Lessing, 2008:176) Tapscott and Williams also assert that some users may be motivated by the fun and social elements of the activity. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006:72)

Deci distinguishes between two different types of motivations. The first are internal or intrinsic motivations and the second, external rewards. Intrinsic motivations involve feelings of self-worth and competence while external rewards entail recognition and reward. (Deci, 1975) Deci considers some activities to come natural to some people, and as such can be classed as an intrinsic motivation, accounting for the vigour with which some people pursue their hobbies. (Deci, 1975)

Intrinsic motivations are seen as composed of the most effort in comparison to external, more self-serving interests, and thus have a higher rate of success. It is therefore expected in a wiki environment that participants with intrinsic motivations will spend more time and expend more resources on the project at hand. (Hars and Ou, 2001: 3) Another intrinsic motivation is altruism, the act of placing another persons welfare above your own. It can be seen as the inversion of selfishness, providing something for others at a cost to oneself. (Hars and Ou, 2001: 3)
A further intrinsic motivation, community identification, can be seen as affiliated with altruism. It aligns with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, specifically looking at the need for belonging and love. Individuals may grow to identify themselves as part of the group and thus alter their goals to fit in with those of the community. They may eventually reach a point where they are willing to help others in the group over themselves. (Hars and Ou, 2001: 3) These individuals tend to view themselves as charitable and altruistic, donating their time and expending their efforts to participate in commons-based peer production that otherwise could be realized in more selfish pursuits. Benkler and Nissenbaum believe such peering activity is an intrinsic exercise of kindness, benevolence and generosity. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:407) Benkler and Nissenbaum acknowledge the possibility that the persistent practice of voluntarily expending one’s time and effort to produce a valuable product while receiving no compensation may be explained as self-satisfying behaviour that is rewarded through a reputation system. They believe, however, that a much more realistic and direct explanation for most participants may simply be the pleasure and satisfaction gained from helping others through kindness and generosity. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:408) This type of work requires traits such as patience, fairness, dedication and civic-mindedness. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:408) Generosity of spirit is perhaps a core feature of humanity, indeed Tapscott and Williams state that ‘The culture of generosity is the very backbone of the web.’ (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 206)

Benkler criticizes the assumption that all human motivations can be reduced to a basic categorization of positive and negative goals—things people want, and things people want to avoid, where money, a universal medium of exchange, when inserted into any interaction, makes this interaction more desirable to individually rational people. Benkler believes this is too simplistic, and cannot be a universal description of human motivation, for we live in diverse social frames where monetary means of exchange have both the capacity to add or detract motivation to participate. (Benkler, 2006:92) Lessig affirms this in the context of peer production by stating that while there are multiple methods of exchange present in such sharing economies, money is not appropriate here. (Lessing, 2008:118) There is not one but a variety of reasons why people might participate in the peering process, ranging from feeling a sense of purpose, to enjoying the mere act of creation or thriving in an environment of shared companionship and social networking. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:403) Benkler makes a salient point by insisting that individuals are not monolithic agents with one
goal or one motivation in mind. Indeed in reality they are likely to possess a composite of motivations. (Benkler, 2006:98)

Tapscott and Williams suggest that people participate in peer production systems for a wide range of motivations. Firstly those who are expending their resources in order to actively engage in the project clearly love it and feel passionate about creating something new or improving what is already in existence. It is important to note that the motivations are much more convoluted and complex than merely fun and altruism. Participation in such activities rewards users with experience, improved skills, new social connections, exposure to potential opportunities and all the while build status that could later translate into monetary value. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006:70)

As Lin puts it, “there are two ultimate or primitive rewards for human beings in a social structure: economic standing and social standing.” (Lin, 2002) It is clear that some individuals are more driven by monetary incentives while others are more focused on attaining a higher social standing and esteem or a general sense of well-being. Benkler considers that the for-profit and non-profit systems will automatically attract people with different tastes. (Benkler, 2006:98) Thus we can infer that those who choose to participate in voluntary commons projects like wikiHow may be more socially rather than fiscally driven.

Wikis are often characterized by a duality of sorts, diverged into two sets of contributions and contributors that are needed to maintain the production process. The first is the critical mass of contributions needed to fill the data set with information, and so logically crowds of independent and ‘light’ contributors are needed to provide this. The second type are the ‘heavy’, repetitive contributions from engaged members who thrive on recognition and reward systems for sustained contribution over time. Wikis also have a dual organizational structure that mirrors the forms of contributions above. There is an easy and small-scale (and thus low cost) structure of inputting information and an interaction structure involving ‘talk pages’ and forums where users can debate and discuss topics, recognize one another and provide social support beyond the informational task at hand. This implies that there may be varying motivations between those who contribute as part of the crowd versus part of the community, and as such different reward systems may hold for each form. Budhathoki and Haythornthwaite propose that rather than contrasting the two as polar opposites, they should be considered as part of a spectrum of organized collective action online. (Budhathoki and Haythornthwaite, 2012: 3)
At the crowdsourced end of the spectrum, it is assumed that the participants have minimal interaction with one another and as such, it is required that an authority presides over the process, moderating and organizing all activity. Therefore it is fair to assume that despite the relationships that develop among users, the basic elements required for crowdsourced participation do not necessarily include interaction among users. (Budhathoki and Haythornthwaite, 2012:4) However its long-term success may be due to the core ‘heavy’ group that glue the critical mass together, and so then user interaction forms a critical part of the knowledge production process.

Tapscott and Williams consider peering to function best when three fundamental conditions are present. Firstly the end product of participation is either information or culture, which allows the cost of participation to remain low. Secondly, tasks must be divided into manageable pieces so that users are able to contribute independently of others and allows them to view their overall investment of resources as lower in comparison to the benefits they yield. Thirdly and finally the costs of integrating the mass of contributions into a finished product must be low, in order to encourage further participation. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006:70) The challenge for peer production systems is to find a way to sustain user motivation and coordinate collective action over lengthy periods of time. Surprisingly such self-organized production appears to sustain itself. Peer production is still a novelty, a newfound freedom of knowledge production that users are enjoying while experiencing a rich interaction between diverse and geographically dispersed groups of people. Overall, peer production works because it can. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006:71)

2.3 Community

Nisbet considers community to be one of the ‘most fundamental and far-reaching concepts of sociology’. (Nisbet, 1966:47) As fundamental as it may be, sociologists remain divided on its composition and meaning. (Jankowski, 2006:59) The term ‘community’ has now come to be synonymous with the formation of any ‘group’ of individuals. Bruckman states that casually describing any collection of people as a community is seriously misguided. (Bruckman, 2006: 617) Indeed the concept is complex and convoluted, and theoretically debated at length. At the core of sociological discussions on community are Tonnies conceptualizations of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Gemeinschaft can be literally
translated as ‘community’, referring to social relationships that are defined by intimacy and endurance. Its core regards it as culturally homogenous with traditions handed down from generation to generation. (Tonnies, 1957) This is contrasted with Gesellschaft, which is the concept of ‘society’ or ‘association’ and discusses impersonal and contractual social relationships on a large scale. (Tonnies, 1957) Bruckman offers a balanced perspective by stating that there are many possible ways of understanding the concept of community, none of which are mutually exclusive or verifiably correct. She believes that a number of frameworks can be chosen from to delineate varying aspects of such a complex phenomenon. (Bruckman, 2006: 619)

This discussion of community’s true definition and meaning become even more labyrinthine when related to technology. Sociologists have been discussing the effects of technology on community for centuries, most notably since the Industrial revolution. Technological change inevitably brings anxiety over the decline of traditional solidarity, such as that feared by Durkheim (1893), and a fear that such innovation would lead to independence and individualism and thus only superficial relationships. (Simmel, 1922)

For many observers, the advent of the Internet was characterized by a dichotomous, utopian versus dystopian discourse. Some pundits viewed it as a technological answer to the world’s problems, creating incredible and exciting new forms of community and serving as a modern and positive force for society. (Wellman, 2004:26) Others felt it was the demise of identity and the community as a whole, destroying what they viewed as authentic human contact between individuals. These critics feared the effects of long term alienation resulting from individuals interacting more with screens rather than the physical versions of one another. (Wellman, 2004:26)

Out of all the predictions that were made about new media perhaps the most interesting and plausible idea has been the potential of regenerating and expanding community through mediated communication. This notion arose with the rise of radio in the 1920’s, with television’s popularity in the 1950’s, with community forms of both in the 1970’s and now has exploded with the recent emergence of Internet technology and the possibility for ‘virtual communities’ to emerge through the medium. (Jankowski, 2006:55)

So we ask, is it possible to find community on the Internet? Can meaningful relationships truly be formed between people who never physically see, touch, smell, or hear one another and can such relationships be truly intimate and supportive? Healy argued that
communication should not be mistaken for community, and posits that this is only achievable in an offline setting. (Healy, 1997:63) Online groups have also been labelled morally defunct and too homogenous, in tandem with the available option to opt out at any moment. (Healy, 1997:63) Some pundits have expressed concerns that people will lose touch with 'real life' by spending more time communicating by digital or virtual means rather than face-to-face. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:2)

Stoll asserts that relationships formed online do not possess the intimacy needed to be strong ties. He considers intimacy to be an illusion in the online sphere, created superficially without any true emotional investment or compassion. (Stoll, 1995) Some academics such as Weinreich staunchly agree that community can only exist when face-to-face interaction is possible. (Weinreich, 1997)

Another argument is the question whether it is suitable to discuss community in the context of the Internet when the technology to access it is still limited to a privileged few. Though access is steadily increasing, the digital divide is still a considerable barrier to inclusion, as are issues of media literacy. Wood and Smith believe true community cannot be attained as long as this inequality persists. (Wood and Smith, 2001:121)

Putnam is perhaps the most prominent of the sceptics. Though he has not written explicitly on the effect of the Internet, Putnam considers civic decline to be directly linked to a ‘retreat into the domestic sphere’ which has been encouraged by the widespread adoption of technology, isolating individuals from their local communities. (Putnam, 2000:15) Putnam yearns for 1960’s America where local community groups were burgeoning and had record levels of rising membership annually. (Putnam, 2000:16) When contrasted with several surveys undertaken in 1999, two thirds of Americans believed that American civic life had weakened over time and that society was now more geared towards nurturing the individual rather than the community. (Putnam, 2000:16) The way we receive our news and entertainment has become increasingly tailored to the individual, divorcing our need to coordinate our taste and timing with others in order to consume knowledge and cultural products. In the early 1900’s music was collectively listened to at pre-arranged times, now the experience is individualized and incredibly flexible. (Putnam, 2000: 217)

Putnam laments the privacy of electronic technology and its ability for individuals to independently consume it in the privacy of their own homes. He recalls entertainment that used to be part of the public setting, viewing leisure as having transitioned from public to
private through the advent of technology. (Putnam, 2000: 217) As the poet T.S Elliot said ‘It is a medium of entertainment which permits millions of people to listen to the same joke at the same time, and yet remain lonesome.’ (Putnam, 2000: 226) As such, it has been claimed that moral principles, deep solidarity and civic engagement are no longer present, and are phenomenon from the glorified pre-war generation. (Ester and Vinken, 2003: 674)

Sherry Turkle, a prominent critic of virtual communities, agrees that sitting alone in a room or connected to a mobile device is not the same as investing in what she calls ‘real relationships’. (Turkle, 2011) Benkler suggests that perhaps this is due to the manner in which one can simply sign off at any time. (Benkler, 2006:360) A further critique focuses on the thinness of online interaction, and the sheer amount of time spent in front of a screen as opposed to in the locality. (Benkler, 2006:361)

There are two main responses to such concerns. The first specifies that in order for these concerns to be valid, Internet communication must supplant other human interaction. Unless computer-mediated communication actually replaces other forms of human contact, there is no valid basis to consider that using the Internet will diminish existing strong ties. The second response challenges the idea that an individual is a fixed entity with static needs, suggesting that it is human nature to change over time and we are seeing a shift from local thick and stable relationships to chosen networks of individuals. Castells refers to this as the ‘networked society’, in tune with Wellman’s ‘networked individualism’. It is not that people cease to need human contact or connection, but that such forms of connection have changed over time. As Benkler asserts, fears over the loss of community can be described more as nostalgia than a diagnosis of social malaise. (Benkler, 2006:362)

One of the most recurrent arguments in social capital studies is that community has steadily declined from the pre-war American’s and the post war generation. Putnam glorifies the pre-war generation who were much more active in engaging with their local communities. (Putnam, 2000: 251) Ester and Vinken acknowledge that there is a darker side to this generation which is hardly ever explored in the literature. They had strong polar views on what was right and wrong concerning ideologies and lifestyles, they were authoritarian and patriarchal in their attitudes to both work and family life and they held rigid stereotypes with regard to who would be tolerated in a group. (Ester and Vinken, 2003:665) The authors posit that with each new era comes a new definition of what it means to be involved in a
community. If we stubbornly insist on measuring community with outdated parameters, then we run the risk of seriously misunderstanding our own society. (Ester and Vinken, 2003:666)

The claim that community life and civil society has profoundly diminished due to younger, Western generations lack of interest in such activities is a serious failure to recognize that social practices evolve over time. (Ester and Vinken, 2003: 674) Ester and Vinken posit that what Putnam has failed to acknowledge is that each generation crafts its own style of socialization. While playing cards and going bowling in the physical community was once popular, there has now been a shift into more digital forms of civic engagement in contemporary society. (Ester and Vinken, 2003:667) A decline in traditional practices is not equal to a decline in civic engagement. Indeed the very practice of going online may be the modern form of engaging in civic, community activity. Ester and Vinken view the Internet as the ultimate tool for younger generations to develop and increase their social capital, form their identities and contribute to communities and the common good. (Ester and Vinken, 2003:675)

Ester and Vinken argue that community life is still here, it has simply moved indoors. (Ester and Vinken, 2003:671) The Internet has become an inherently attractive place to interact as it is what has been described as a ‘meta-medium’, one where individuals can immerse themselves in a multisensory experience. These are framed by a culture that imposes no restrictions on expression and is neither ruled nor regulated by a single power. Furthermore this is a system where fluid social interaction and the creation of new social roles and identities is the norm. (Ester and Vinken, 2003: 673) Virtual identity can only exist through interaction with others on the medium. We now see this idea of a permanently in progress personal identity, ripe with freedom of expression and social fluidity. (Ester and Vinken, 2003:670)

Since Putnam’s notion that television played a pivotal role in the decline of civic participation in the United States, a spate of research has been conducted into the effects of various media-use. Pessimists relied primarily on the time displacement hypothesis, claiming that more time spent engaging with media meant less time spent socializing with the exception of newspaper reading, which was seen as having a positive correlation with civic participation. (Newton, 1999) However, along with the recent developments in media and communication research and the advent of widespread Internet-use, sociologists have reached a more balanced consensus that media use directly linked to information acquisition
and social networking are in fact positively correlated to civic participation, whereas media use solely linked to entertainment are negatively correlated. Thus it is not media use itself that affect civic engagement, but the manner in which people use the media. (Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001)

Several studies, including that of Kavanaugh, et al’s 2005 research, have found that in fact virtual communication has increased both the quantity and quality of interaction between local community members. (Kavanaugh, et al., 2005; Wellman et al., 2001). This suggests that Internet use can actually strengthen our existing ties while simultaneously creating new ones that may spill into the offline realm. When we speak of the strength of ties we are referring to the frequency of communication between individuals. (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela, 2010:402) Furthermore, the Internet has also been found to facilitate non-geographically bound networks such as virtual communities that are centred around shared interests, common discussion and debate. (Bennett, 2008; Smith, Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2009).

We are now starting to see the emergence of loose and yet still meaningful relationships between people. It appears that despite concerns, computer mediated communication has had the effect of thickening existing ties, while facilitating the opportunity to connect socially with a wider social network. (Benkler, 2006:357) There is undeniably declining public space in society where it is desirable and acceptable to congregate and thus there is a desire to find a new space, free from constraints. Furthermore people hunger for connections that span borders and immediate locations. As Rheingold states in The Virtual Community,

“My direct observations of online behaviour around the world over the past ten years have led me to conclude that whenever computer mediated communication technology becomes available to people anywhere, they inevitably build virtual communities with it, just as microorganisms inevitably create colonies. I suspect that one of the explanations for this phenomenon is the hunger for community that grows in the breasts of people around the world as more and more informal public spaces disappear from our real lives. I also suspect that these new media attract colonies of enthusiasts because CMC enables people to do things with each other in new ways, and to do altogether new kinds of things— just as telegraphs, telephones, and televisions did.” (Rheingold, 1993)
There is an enticement to the idea that human connection can be built halfway across the globe with a stranger in a matter of seconds. The new medium enhanced what was previously possible in a quick and convenient way. (Benkler, 2006:359) Castells is a strong proponent of the networked individual, supporting the increasing autonomy and interaction that has arisen from the proliferation of the Internet. In the digital sphere, individuals connect with others directly either synchronously or asynchronously, combining the option to spread information one to one, one to many, or many to many. (Castells, 1996: 357) The Internet provides an opportunity for individuals to create and construct, to appear or disappear, and to transcend space, time, social roles and physicality. It has the capacity to generate and maintain communities larger than possible without it, bringing together a diverse web of connections and topics in a flurry of interaction. (Ester and Vinken, 2003:671)

Tonnies definitions of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft are interesting when applied to the Internet, as some online communities may be classed as culturally homogenous and some may be more impersonal in nature. Indeed participation in online peer production projects can be places of infrequent visits or sites of social vitality and range from anonymous contributions all the way to a persistent presence and identity of individuals who exchange personal details with one another. (Budhathoki and Haythornthwaite, 2012:2) So, how do we class peer production? Is it merely a place to accomplish a task or is it fundamentally social in its design?

Peer production is a practice that depends on a collection of decentralized individuals who, rather than being hierarchically assigned, self-select themselves to produce a common resource. (Benkler, 2006:62) Such production is a highly co-operative and collaborative practice that involves individuals willing to pool resources such as time, expertise and wisdom to create new knowledge and cultural goods. (Benkler, 2006:81) It is this combination of a desire to create something and a yearning to share experiences and communicate with others on topics that we believe others want to discuss, that positively distinguishes this model from the commercial, hierarchical model of knowledge production. By cutting out the middle man, users have a direct line to one another, effectively starting a giant conversation. (Benkler, 2006:55) The increasing ubiquitous nature of computer-mediated communication has brought about a dramatic rise in the scale and efficacy of commons knowledge production projects. As the digital divide narrows, as computers become cheaper, network connections become faster and media literacy increases we are
seeing a much broader scope and larger scale of complex tasks created by nonprofessional groups. (Benkler, 2006: 68) Benkler postulates that the act of producing information, knowledge and culture through social, collaborative structures has created a more critical, engaged and autonomous global community. (Benkler, 2006:92) Clearly it involves communication, and social interaction in order to produce a tangible output but it remains to be seen whether this is enough to tie people together in a mutually supportive and rich community.

Thus this paper has a dual focus on the motivations behind peer production, and whether or not sociality is a primary goal or a by-product that sustains the process. Orgad posits that we are now living in an ‘age of empathy’ where people use digital technology to giving time and knowledge in order to help people. When people turn to the Internet for help, they are usually seeking information. They begin by typing key words or phrases related to their problem into a search engine. (Orgad, 2004:149) It is clear that the majority of the information that is found in self-help areas of the web is based on the personal experience of individuals. (Orgad, 2004:150) Thompson believes this is because we tend to compare the experiences and events of our own life trajectories in relation to those of others that we encounter in our everyday lives. (Thompson, 1995:223) The web provides a platform for individuals to interactively share their experiences and maintain reciprocal relationships characterized by support and good will. It is a site where valuable processes of self-discovery and social development can take place. (Slevin, 2000:180) Indeed it has been indicated that patterns of online usage show that interpersonal interaction was more valuable to users than the act of information seeking or production. (King and Moreggi, 1998) It acts as a discursive place that is instantly accessible, sending a clear message to participants that they are not alone. (Orgad, 2004:154)

Individuals join online groups for an abundance of reasons. Some researchers have discovered that some individuals use the Internet as a method of overcoming social anxiety when forming interpersonal networks. (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). For these individuals, computer-mediated communication allows them to obtain support that they otherwise might not receive offline. (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela, 2010:403)

In our modern world, work has infiltrated more and more of our social lives. Life in itself has come to mean work. Deuze calls it a ‘workstyle’, a blend between work and lifestyle where
life means always being at work. (Deuze, 2007:1) Technology has slowly crept into social settings, making smart phones, tablets and other gadgets as ubiquitous as humans. This is an indicator of social change that has dramatically altered the way we connect and share with others (Deuze, 2007:12) Increasingly, the way we develop our social skills and get to know other people is happening in a mediated environment. (Deuze, 2007:34) Deuze views this new way of using media as a profound statement about the contemporary nature of humanity, vastly interconnected and networked and yet socially isolated and fragmented simultaneously. (Deuze, 2007:35) We are seeing the rise of ‘networked individualism’, a new form of social cohesion where we are networking as individuals rather than as groups and in the process reaching out to a broader group of individuals, expanding our social networks in breadth rather than depth. This hypersociality is more fragmented and ‘loose’, on–demand and has been powerfully advanced by digital media, most notably the rise of the Internet. (Rainie and Wellman, 2012) People have found new ways to connect, collaborate, create and participate that has transcended previous traditional boundaries of communities and kinship groups.

Rosen states that individuals online have exhibited behaviour that shows that they tend form communities around their favourite spaces. (Rosen, 2012:15) Thus it follows that if users are enjoying the acts of participation and are having fun in this space, they are in the process of actively building a community around it. Jenkins makes a salient point, remarking that as participation in peer production is a voluntary act, people do not remain in them if they do not meet their emotional or intellectual needs. (Jenkins, 2006:57) Enjoyment must therefore be a key to participation.

We are inherently social beings, and arguably those who use the Internet naturally seek not only information, but also companionship and a sense of belonging. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:6) Online interaction can be incredibly beneficial to those who wish to explore their thoughts and feelings without being personally judged or defamed. It can be a safe space. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:6) This being said, the ‘quality’ of support an online community can offer has been heavily criticised, looking at the simulated emotions such as emoticons, cyber hugs, cyber smiles, cyber kisses etc. The absence of touch or a direct sense of physicality is troubling to some. (Baym, 2006: 40) Baym balances this with the fact that groups tend to form their own ‘inner discourse’ where members are privy to specific vocabulary, inside jokes, and routines, offering a sense of belonging and identity that many individuals may find appealing. (Baym, 2006:46)
Certainly, online groups have become synonymous with the term ‘community’, implying that any gathering of individuals involved in a discussion composes a community. This is simply not the case, as mirroring offline social gatherings, online groups vary greatly, and are not immediately communities by default of association. (Baym, 2006:45) Rafaeli and Sudweeks argue that the level of interactivity within a group can be an important indicator of community, and a powerful motivator for wanting to become consistently involved in an online group. (Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1997) Jones puts forward four characteristics he feels are representative of virtual communities. According to Jones, virtual communities are distinguished from simple online gatherings when they involve a minimum level of interaction between individuals, a variety of communicators across the group, a shared public space and a minimum level of sustained membership. (Jones, 1997) Interestingly, these characteristics could easily be conditions for offline (and thus geographically bound) communities as well. What is left ambiguous is the definition of time needed to sustain membership and what constitutes a minimum level of interaction or how many individuals need to be interacting in any one group.

Several pundits have expressed concern that integration into virtual communities will displace real-life interaction entirely. Wellman and Gulia state such fears are misguided as community is not an all or nothing construct, where time spent online does not subtract from time offline, and indeed offline ties can be strengthened in a virtual medium. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:10) Too many accounts view the Internet as an isolated social world, completely disconnected from offline interaction and everyday living in ‘the real world’. (Wellman, 1999) We must move beyond the dichotomous view of online and offline, and merge the two worlds into one. The Internet has not separated people away from their close friends and neighbours, but simply allowing individuals to personalize their own communities, transforming them from groups into complex social networks. (Wellman, 2004:27) An individual’s social network and community ties exist in both and overlap considerably, with the Internet just being one of many methods of sustaining relationships. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999: 11) The temporal and spatial freedom that the net provides may even serve to facilitate more in-person meetings between people who otherwise would have forgotten about one another. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:17)

Just as relationships that begin in person can be sustained online, those that begin online can be reinforced offline. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:11) It is clear that developing relationships online takes longer than offline as communication can be asynchronous and frequently
interrupted. Thus far, research does indicate that over time, online interactions can be just as intimate and sociable as those offline. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:9) Wellman and Gulia posit that the Internet encourages the expansion of community and furthermore that useful information may be spread faster and wider through the widened accessible networks of acquaintances and friends. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:16) This may be attributed to the absence of social and physical cues online, making it difficult to determine whether another user possesses attractive or desirable social and physical markers. Thus this gives users more control over their presentation of self, allowing relationships to develop based on shared interest rather than be blocked by disparities in social status or physical attractiveness. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:26)

Despite multiple theories to the contrary, Baym concludes that people do form personal relationships through computer-mediated communication, and quite successful ones at that. (Baym, 2006:43) Walther and Burgoon posit that over time, computer-mediated communication shows the same levels of socio-emotional expression and intimacy as that of face-to-face communication. (Walther and Burgoon, 1992) In her research of online groups, Baym consistently found that they are often strongly supportive of one another. She also posits that they are often composed of social hierarchies, consistent with the offline social environment. (Baym, 2006:46)

The world is not a global village, but as Marshall McLuhan said, ‘one’s village could span the globe’. (McLuhan, 2001) Indeed our personal social networks now have the opportunity to spiral out in all directions. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:2) Research shows that aside from relatives and small clusters of close friends, the majority of connections in an individual’s social network do not really know one another. This further bolsters the point that people tend to cultivate different groups of specialized ties in order to obtain a broad range of resources. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:5) This also mirrors Mark Granovetter’s notion of the ‘strength of weak ties’, the argument that in fact it is our weak community ties that integrate diverse social systems by linking heterogeneous groups of individuals. (Granovetter, 1973)

There is considerable evidence holding the prevalence of reciprocal support on the Internet, even amongst weak ties. It may be that providing support can be a way of expressing one’s identity, a method of increasing self-esteem, building respect or status. It is often easier to provide social support when the group is large, thus sustaining a large community due to each act being seen by the entire group and thus raising rapport. Users then know that they
may not receive direct reciprocal support from the one they helped, but from another member of the group. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:8) Putnam describes such generalized reciprocity as the lubrication of social life, often generated when individuals frequently interact with one another. (Putnam, 1999)

The invention and popularisation of additional means of transport in the 20th century marked a pivotal moment in community studies, and sparked a debate between sociologists pondering whether communities are necessarily tied to locality. (Bruckman, 2006: 617) There are some pundits who insist that community consists of persons socially interacting within a geographic space and sharing common ties. Indeed, studies on community have neglected looking at the existence of supportive ties and instead often fixated on examining local ties in neighbourhoods and other areas of common geographical proximity. (Wellman, 1999) Wellman believes we should question this association between locality and social connection, and separate the two concepts. Is proximity a maker of community? The problem with proximity is that you are expected to share the same ideas, opinions and beliefs which is not always the case. Opportunities for mobility and spatially dispersed activities allow interaction to occur between like-minded individuals. Such activities are often so dispersed and private that it is rare to see observable interaction in public neighbourhoods. This does not mean community has withered away, but rather that it as reconfigured into a form that is not locally based. (Wellman, 1999) Indeed, increased research has shown that although communities have changed in format and structure in response to new opportunities and societal forces, they have not disappeared. (Wellman, 1999) What is particularly interesting about virtual communities is that they do not have an actual physical space to inhabit, so in many ways they are invisible community.

Wellman believes the ‘social network approach’ would be more appropriate to measure social ties. The social network approach allows us to consider other forms of community that might be more spatially dispersed and even virtually based. (Wellman, 1999) It looks at an individual’s social network, examining multiple indicators for example, its density, size, diversity and how tightly it is bounded, etc. (Wellman, 1999) The social network approach broadens boundaries, allowing social relationships that transcend localities to be considered valid forms of human connection. These relationships tend to spread out in the shape of a spiders web, fitting with the structure and nature of the Internet itself. Global is the new local when it comes to much of our new social interaction.
Wellman has observed that in lieu of operating in local neighbourhood spaces, contemporary community activities have their central position in private homes where individuals interact in person, or by using a communication medium such as a telephone or computer. He does concede that the easy accessibility of local ties suggests that in some instances, local ties are strong. (Wellman, 1999) The modern community has evolved to become somewhat tailor-made to the individual’s taste. It would appear that now communities contain high proportions of people who actively enjoy one another’s company and lower proportions of those individuals are forced to interact with due to geographical proximity. These acts of selectivity have changed the composition of communities, turning them into more homogenous networks of individuals who share similar tastes, interests and opinions. Wellman and Guilia suggest that the proliferation of computer-mediated communication is set to accelerate this trend. (Wellman, 1999)

Our assumption of community as a shared space is simply a misguided image of how individuals communicate. We must understand that it is the act of connection, not physical presence that is important. The act of communicating is very important, as without this relationships cannot be established. (Benkler, 2006: 369) These connections can be made in new ways in the digital sphere, bringing us exciting new opportunities for broadening and diversifying our network. (Benkler, 2006:376) For the first time in history, people can connect with others instantly regardless of location. Wellman and Guilia remark that computer mediated communication has the potential to expand the reach of social networks, shrinking time and space by directly connecting larger groups of people over longer distances in a manageable and low-cost process. It is therefore unsurprising that this has facilitated the density of ties to increase. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:2) As it is human nature to enjoy connecting with others, a community may naturally develop even around the most impersonal crowdsourced activity. (Budhathoki and Haythornthwaite, 2012:4) Peer production provides a new avenue of human connection, bringing together people who might otherwise never connect in a shared pursuit. Jenkins theorizes that it is unquestionable that the emergent knowledge culture has played a part in diminishing older forms of community, however new forms are springing up, defined through voluntary conscious decisions. These communities are held together through the shared creation and exchange of knowledge. (Jenkins, 2006:27) Such individuals may or may not be ‘bowling alone’ offline, but they are definitely playing together online. (Benkler, 2006:375)
While neither utopian nor dystopian views were completely correct, the dystopian prediction was particularly inaccurate for, while the Internet’s effects on social relations are complex, they are still unclear. Recent empirical findings lean towards a more positive view, positing that relationships between friends and family have thickened in quality, particularly those who were for various reasons unreachable prior to the advent of the Internet. (Benkler, 2006:356) While this debate continues, it is obvious that the phenomenon is so recent that we can only speculate upon its effects. This is due to the fact that empirical research is underdeveloped and patchy at best, as digital media studies is still quite a recent strata of academic interest. Ester and Vinken take this into account, stating that despite such ambiguity, the Internet’s potential to enhance civic engagement in society is more likely to increase rather than decrease. This is largely because the medium is so rich in its power to connect others through information, making it a veritable alternative to classic forms of community interaction. (Ester and Vinken, 2003:667)

3. METHODOLOGY:

3.1 Conducting Research Online

Conducting research online can be both a challenging and rewarding experience. The advent of the Internet has allowed for research to be conducted amongst geographically dispersed individuals who share common interests or engage in similar practices, either online or offline. Undoubtedly this form of non-face-to-face questioning acquires a greater potential reach, and is perhaps the most convenient and cost-effective technique for researching groups that are large or geographically dispersed. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 68)

A further advantage to online questioning is that it allows individuals to participate from their chosen private location at the time of their choice. This makes it much more appealing and more practical to those who lead a busy and hectic lifestyle. Deacon et al. suggest that his form of covert questioning prompt individuals to be more forthcoming in their answers due to the anonymous nature of the medium, allowing socially sensitive information to surface when it otherwise wouldn’t. Thus we can speculate that the lack of personal involvement in online questioning uninhibits respondents. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 72) Gunter compliments this finding by discovering that that structured online questionnaires generally tended to yield richer and more comprehensive responses to open-ended questions than their
offline counterparts. They speculate this may be due to their ability to take the time to review, edit and articulate their answers. (Gunter, 2002: 235)

A final point is that online research dramatically eases the difficulty in collecting and coding data, eliminating the need for computer software. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 69) However it is important to note that just as with offline research, it is not without limitation. Online research suffers from the presence of anonymity and thus potential misrepresentation. There can also be issues of abandonment when using online surveys where the respondent leaves the survey half completed. This may be due to the fact that the survey requires one to sit down and complete it in one sitting, which can be inconvenient or tiresome. (Deacon, et al. 2007:69)

3.1.1 Closed Questionnaires
Closed-format questioning has several advantages. It does not distinguish between respondents who are less articulate, and they are quicker to answer, which means that people are less likely to abandon the task. Furthermore closed format questioning can enhance understanding of what is being asked by providing acceptable types of answers, making the process less intrusive to respondents. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 80)

Closed-format questioning also has the disadvantages of allowing misinterpretation to go unnoticed, to allow respondents to answer despite not having an opinion or specific knowledge pertaining to the topic at hand and to force participants to make a choice that they otherwise may not have chosen. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 80) This is amplified if the categories are too simplistic, as respondents may be annoyed that they cannot adequately express their viewpoint. (Deacon, et al. 2007:72)

3.1.2 Open Questionnaires
Open-response formats have the advantage of allowing respondents to articulate themselves on their own terms, sans restrictive frameworks. This can provide richer, and more illuminating feedback as unanticipated findings can be uncovered. (Deacon, et al. 2007:83)

Open-response questions have some disadvantages, most notably that they place the greatest demand on respondents who have to carefully think about how to articulate their viewpoint.
There is also the danger that the interpretation of such responses by the researcher may be inaccurate and inconsistent. (Deacon, et al. 2007:83) Furthermore irrelevance and the potential for respondents to be confused or intimidated by questions are elements to consider. (Deacon, et al. 2007:83)

3.2 Description of method

I began by carefully designing my questionnaires on the website ‘surveymonkey.com’. This process involved selecting the most relevant questions to my specific research questions, a task made more difficult by the ten-question limit on each survey.

For selecting a sample for the open questionnaire from the wikiHow.com population, I began on the site’s homepage where there is a monitor that shows users interacting with the site in real time. I immediately noticed that a user (JuneDays) had recently edited an article and so I clicked onto her profile. I deduced she was an active user and seemed to be a very social, judging from the regular interactions that were occurring on her ‘Talk’ page. I posted a personal request informing her of my study and its intentions and asked her to fill in the questionnaire, to which she responded kindly and referred me to other users, asking me to quote her name so that they would not dismiss my request as spam. This snowball sampling was very effective, leading to a largely positive response. Each user that I messaged appeared to be enthusiastic about the research and eager to help in any way possible, which was a pleasant surprise and only added to my hypothesis that wikiHow is a fundamentally social system. Thirty responses were yielded in total, giving me a large pool of rich data to work through. This initial data for the open questionnaire was collected for the duration of one week between the 30th of April and the 6th of May 2013.

When the data had been sufficiently collected, I began the analytical process. I transcribed the open questionnaire results into a document, separated by both question and user and coding any similar phrases or meanings across questions. Based on the dominant themes that arose, I then created the multiple-choice questions for the closed-format questionnaire.

The closed questionnaire was designed to be short and easy to complete, so that I may collect a larger sample than in the open questionnaire. In this questionnaire, there is no way of knowing personal, demographic information about the respondents, as I chose to purely focus on information solely related to their participation in wikiHow. I decided the best
approach would be to post the link to my survey in the forums section of the website in order to collect a convenience sample. I posted it in two separate discussion threads, one authored by myself entitled ‘Wikihowians, I want your data!’ and in another official thread entitled ‘Introduce yourself’. This also yielded a largely positive response, although not as many as I had hoped for. I initially planned to have at least one hundred closed-format respondents, but instead collected forty-two in total. On closer inspection, the data had become saturated at this point, and so I was not disappointed.

I then proceeded to code the results from the closed-questionnaire, cross-referencing it with the results of the open questionnaire. In order to draw conclusions I converted the proportions of those who expressed the same opinion into percentage values. The various themes were separated and organized by question, and appropriately linked to the theoretical discussion in chapter 2. This secondary stage of data collection took place for the duration of one week from the 9th – 15th of May 2013.

### 3.2.1 Justification of choice

Given the practical time and cost restraints on the study I was unable to incorporate other methods of such as a larger, more quantitatively representative approach and the inclusion of discourse analysis. I made an informed decision to look purely at the personal viewpoint of the participants of wikiHow, as I felt this would be a core method of strongly illuminating their motivation to participate and with that, their personal perception of the site as a community or not. Discourse analysis would certainly have complimented this approach, as would other more quantitative, statistical analysis, however given the constraints on the study, it was simply not possible.

Rather than striving to be statistically representative, my research took on what is called an ‘extensive perspective’, which produces results that from small samples that can be generalized more widely and viewed as illustrative of wider social and cultural processes. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 45)

Given the breadth of wikiHow, language exclusion was a practical choice. I selected the English version of the site as this is the area with the most traffic, and due to practical constraints pertaining to the research. To have combed through and sampled other lingual versions would have required a working knowledge of such languages, or a research assistant
who did. wikiHow is continuously using its workforce to slowly build up its multilingual sections, however English is still the dominant language on the site, and indeed on the Internet as a whole, and thus I felt it would still attract an international population.

I chose snowball sampling for practical reasons, as this would allow the project to grow in momentum, opening up social networks and those willing to participate in my research. This was particularly useful given the limited time frame. Snowball sampling is often widely used when researching informal social groups, where the social knowledge of others can be key to the success of the project. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 55) This method proved to be useful in contacting users for my open questionnaire, as there is a distrust of those who send ‘spam’ messages on the site, and my initial contact permitted me to refer to her username when contacting her suggested list of users so that others would view my research as legitimate, and thus be more likely to take part.

Convenience sampling differs in that the selection process is less directed and is more a product of chance. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 56) This method was used when sampling for my closed questionnaire. I posted an introductory letter and link to my survey in the open forum section of the website, in two separate threads, one of which is permanently placed at the top of the site, and thus widely read by wikiHow participants. This allowed me to obtain a wider range of users though the process was longer, presumably as it took time to gain participants trust and enthusiasm for the project without being directed from an inside source.

When designing the questionnaires, I made a concerted effort to begin with questions that were general, unthreatening and straightforward to answer. Deacon et al. advise that this reassures participants that the questionnaire is manageable and allows them to relax, moving onto more detailed or complex questions later when the participants are more focused and more likely to answer in detail. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 78) Following Deacon’s instructions, I made sure that the wordings of questions were clear and straightforward so that there was no ambiguity about what I meant to ask. (Deacon, et al. 2007:79)

Deacon et al. point out that when appropriate it is important to provide a ‘don’t know’ option. This is important because despite the potential disappointment of losing responses, it is preferable to forcing respondents to guess or contrive their opinion. Furthermore it is also important to occasionally provide an ‘other’ option, which gives respondents the chance to write down alternative responses that you may have omitted. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 81) I made sure all questions, bar demographic ones, were adjustable to suit responses I may not
have anticipated, and provide a chance for those who were unsure to legitimately express that.

I stopped gathering information once I felt the research reached its saturation point. This is where the data stopped revealing new points and starts to repeat itself. According to Deacon, this point can occur quite early on in the research, even after just a few interviews or questionnaires. (Deacon, et al. 2007:45)

In my analysis, I used a mixture of motivational theory and community studies from both the current decade and those from an earlier time, in order to compare and contrast the attitudes, thereby leading to a rich theoretical discussion.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Sveningson Elm regards Privacy as a concept that protects an person’s integrity and rights of self-determination and asserts that informed consent is a basic requirement of research whereby all participants should be aware and approve the research that is being conducted. This is a core component in most international research ethical guidelines where participants must be able to decide whether or not, for how long, and under what conditions they would like to participate. (Sveningson Elm, 2009: 70) Deacon emphasizes this point, stating that all questioning in research is dependent upon attaining consent from all parties involved. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 69)

Getting people involved depends on building rapport and convincing them of the value of the research project. In this sense self-completed surveys are at a disadvantage as there is limited personal contact that serves to persuade users to participate. For this reason self-completion questionnaire surveys tend to attract lower response rates than interviews conducted in person. (Deacon, et al. 2007: 70)

Following Sveningson Elm’s and Deacon et al.’s guidelines, I made sure to precede my questioning by writing a brief and courteous introduction, explaining it’s purpose and emphasizing that participation was voluntary and anonymous. This appeared to reassure members of the target population, yielding a predominately positive and trusting response from those who were contacted.

3.4 Self reflection:
It is true that true objectivity in research is an illusion, as the mindset of the researcher and any questions posed will inevitably introduce some degree of bias, influencing the data collected and the conclusions reached. (Deacon, et al. 2007:138) An important stage in minimizing such bias is question design. Depending on how a question is phrased, it can lead the respondents down the path to results the researcher is hoping to achieve. In order to mitigate such a stance, I made a conscious effort to pose as neutral questions as possible, including an ‘other’ option in the closed questionnaire to avoid narrowing the scope of the response.

There is always a risk that the sample will have constant errors, which means that the sample is biased and thus distorted representatively. Constant errors have been shown to occur in patterns that either under or over represents the population at hand. Detecting such errors can be difficult, requiring careful scrutiny of the sampling procedure for skews. (Deacon, et al. 2007:45)

Sample error is another point to consider, which occurs when the values from a sample are different from the true or real values of the population studied. In most studies it is accepted that some degree of sample error is inevitable and it is assumed that they are random errors which occur due to the random variation present in a small sample from a large population. (Deacon, et al. 2007:44)

In order to minimize the presence of both sample and constant errors, I made sure to cast a wide net during my sampling procedure, and carefully examine the results for obvious skews. As I had two separate samples, and upon cross checking both sets of data and finding similar outputs, I deduce that there are no obvious skews in the sampled populations. However, as my study does not claim to be representative, I expect some degree of sample and constant error to be inevitable.

3.4.1 Limitations

There are clear limitations to my study.

In the absence of an interviewer it can be difficult to ascertain whether or not the respondents understand the questions, to motivate them and to confirm that they are who they claim to be. (Poynter, R. 2010: 392) Due to the medium through which I carry out my research, I cannot be sure if those who answered my survey did so multiple times under different guises or
deliberately misrepresented themselves in the data. Furthermore, the presence of non-response can undermine the representation of a sample. Non-response occurs usually due to the refusal of respondents to participate in research because of aversion, suspicion, indifference or sheer confusion. This lack of cooperation is usually overt in that individuals deliberately do not participate or covert by selecting a ‘don’t know’ option. (Deacon, et al. 2007:46) Indeed, some respondents may have misunderstood my questions, found them confusing or too intrusive, given the varying non-response rates for certain questions.

There is also the further problem of self-selected respondents, which in turn creates bias in the sample. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006) These individuals may feel particularly involved with the site and therefore community, thus putting themselves forward for the survey in contrast to more docile users who may not be feel as connected to the community and thus does not wish to take part in the survey or any other social task on the site. People also may strive to portray themselves as more altruistic than they are in reality, as they may not feel comfortable confessing to be more self-centred. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006)

As aforementioned, it is clear that there is an unavoidable loss in the quantity and richness of data yielded from online questionnaires, as people tend to speak more freely and go further in depth than when they write, and furthermore online surveys afford respondents the opportunity to review and edit their answers. (Deacon, et al. 2007:72) This is a clear limitation of my approach however given the nature of the medium and the anonymity of participants, it would have been largely impractical to collect data in a spoken form.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter I choose to combine both the results and analysis sections in an effort to clearly show the immediate translation of the data to the theory in a seamless fashion. I wanted to interpret each result one by one, drawing comparisons between different sections, conveying a flow of transparency and understanding to the reader.

4.1 Demographics

The demography of participants is relevant as while their parents are accustomed to passive media use, today’s youth are raised to actively interact with media content. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 47) Demographic factors have often been shown to be strongly associated
with levels of participation. The four most relevant indicators are education, income level, gender and personality.

In OQ1 we asked an initial demographic question, ‘Are you male or female?’ Demographically, it was interesting to discover that my sample was predominately female, with respondents answering 27% male and 70% female. We also had a non-response rate of 3%. This may be due to a possible limitation in not providing a third option of ‘intersex’ or ‘prefer not to say’.

*Figure 4.1 A categorical measurement of user gender*

Evidently we can draw a possible conclusion that more women than men dedicate their time to wikiHow. Consistent research regarding gender’s role in civic action has shown that men tend to be more engaged in political affairs while women are equally or more active in community driven activities. (Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 2001) The reasons for this are not clear, however it has been proposed that this might be the case due to differences in socialization and specialization within education and the labour market. (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela, 2010:400)
In OQ2 we asked respondents to state their age and country of origin. We combined the question as the survey platform had a ten-question limit. This may have caused confusion and contributed to the non-response rates, which stand at 17% for age and 10% for location. As I was focusing on the English version of the website, I expected respondents to predominately come from native speaking countries. The data confirmed this, with 84% coming from native speaking countries, with a heavy focus on the U.S.A. All those surveyed over age 36 were from a native speaking country, whereas out of all under 20, 30% were from a non-native speaking country. Perhaps this is due to educational improvements and an increased global emphasis on learning English in recent decades. Interestingly, 16% of respondents were aged 13 and from the U.S.A.

The data reports that 55% of all respondents were aged between 10 and 18 and 23% were aged between 40 and 60. Just 5% were aged between 20 and 36. This shows a cleavage in the data, perhaps indicating that those between 10 and 18 and between 40 and 60 may have had more interest in collaborative activities. This may be due to differences in lifestyle and career stages, when people have the most time to give.

Generally speaking, those who are highly educated and wealthy are more driven to participate in civic activities than those who are lower educated and less wealthy. (Verba et al., 1995; Zukin et al., 2006). There are numerous reasons to expect such a pattern, for example people need resources such as time, money and media literacy in order to participate in civic activities, and such resources are more readily accessible with a higher income and education level. (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela, 2010:399)

Choosing to exclude income level on the basis that it was less relevant to knowledge-production than educational level, OQ3 asked ‘What is the highest level of education you have completed/are currently enrolled in?’ Here we have a non-response rate of 10%, perhaps due to the sensitive nature of the question for some respondents. The data indicates that 40% of respondents have completed or are currently enrolled in Undergraduate level. Highschool is placed second in educational attainment at 30% and Elementary school represented 10% while Postgraduate represented just 10% of respondents. This is roughly in line with what you would expect of the demographics, although some younger respondents i.e respondent #9 and #13 may have misrepresented themselves as undergraduates simply judging by the fact that they are aged fourteen and thirteen respectively.
All respondents over 18 (28% of those surveyed) are currently enrolled in or have completed some level of tertiary education, either undergraduate or postgraduate which tells us that wikiHow participants are largely well educated. This falls in line with Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela’s theory that education may also serve as a mechanism of social sorting, whereby higher educational attainment translates into a higher social status. Due to a correlation between higher status and civic participation, education is thus seen as a strong indicator of participation. (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela, 2010:399) Educational attainment is also seen as playing an important role by teaching social norms and aspects of civic engagement, particularly when group work is featured. Therefore it is expected that those who have higher levels of education perform well in groups and then are more likely to be civically engaged. (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela, 2010:399)

4.2 Discovering wikiHow

In OQ4 we asked respondents ‘How did you get introduced to/first hear about wikiHow?’ The data indicated that an overwhelming 93% found the site by either ‘surfing the net’, ‘searching how to do something’ or ‘searching for instructions online’ of which the majority did not specify. Some individuals were quite specific and could recall the initial search that brought them to the website.
User #15 ‘I searched ‘how to flirt’ on Google and wikihow was the first result’.

User #19 ‘I was looking for how to take care of pets’.

37% of those specifically mentioned that they used Google to find the site, a testament to how visible wikiHow is on the search engine, and thus a reflection of its immense popularity on the net. The remaining 7% found wikiHow by being referred to it from friends and family.

4.3 Frequency of activity

In OQ5 we looked at the frequency of activity of the respondents by posing the question ‘How many articles have you contributed to?’ in order to gage the level of interaction with the site. Interestingly the respondents had written a larger number of articles than originally anticipated. In my closed survey my categories had ranged between 1-20, 20-40, 40-60, 80-60 and 100+. The overwhelming majority of respondents, 82% rested in the final category, with the majority reporting over 1000 contributions. In the open survey many users were vague in their answer, with many stating they had lost count, stating ‘idk’ or ‘I’m sorry I lost count a long time ago’. A large proportion rounded off their answer with a rough estimate ‘probably thousands’ ‘somewhere around 1000’ ‘Lets just say a LOT’, giving us a non-response rate of 10% It is therefore fair to assume that overall the respondents who took part in this survey were quite active contributors on wikiHow. Just 12% of respondents reported to have contributed to less than 100 contributions.

In CQ1 when we asked ‘How many articles have you been/are you involved in?’ we immediately saw a cleavage in the data set, with the categories 1 – 20 and 100+ much more popular than the categories in between. This becomes more obvious when crosschecking with the open questionnaire, as the mean number of contributions is disproportionately over 100. This leads us to consider that perhaps the most active users and also the newest perhaps most enthusiastic users were motivated to take part in the survey.
Jones puts forward four characteristics he feels are representative of virtual communities. According to Jones, virtual communities are distinguished from simple online gatherings when they involve a minimum level of interaction between individuals. (Jones, 1997) What is left ambiguous is the definition of time needed to sustain membership and what constitutes a minimum level of interaction or how many individuals need to be interacting in any one group.

In order to grasp just how often social communication takes place, In OQ9 participants were asked how frequently they would typically communicate with other users, giving them the option to choose from either ‘daily’, ‘weekly’, ‘yearly’ or ‘never’ categories. Here we obtained a non-response rate of 3%.

Figure 4.3 A continuous quantitative measurement of user article contributions.
Figur[209x483]e 4.4 A temporal measurement of user interaction

Some respondents selected multiple choices, skewing the data set slightly. In order to gain an accurate representation of the results, those who selected multiple options were placed in the category of the most frequent interaction period. Unchanged were the majority of respondents (60%) who reported to interact with other users daily. Weekly interaction was the next most frequent period of interaction, with 28% of respondents. Monthly and Yearly and Never all contained 3% of respondents. Thus it is fair to deduct that a sizable proportion of respondents interact with other wikiHow users on a highly regular and frequent basis. This spanned all age, gender, location and educational attainment categories. Though we do not know just how much social interaction is required to form a community, Jenkins makes the salient point that, because participation in communal activities is a voluntary act, people do not remain in them if they do not meet their emotional or intellectual needs. (Jenkins, 2006:57)

4.4 Motivation

In OQ6 it was asked ‘Why do you give your resources to wikiHow? Can you describe exactly why this is rewarding for you?’ When analysing the data for this question, some immediate trends were visible. 30% of respondents used the words ‘reward’ or ‘rewarding’
in their answer, perhaps indicative that the choice of wording in the question can have a direct bearing on the answers given.

Typically, each respondent answered with at least two or three different motivations, a sign that it is in fact a combination of factors that drive users to participate.

The most predominant motivations were noted as follows. Participants cited being part of ‘a world wide project’ or ‘a giant puzzle game’ as legitimate reasons to give their resources to the site. This tells us that wikiHow is viewed as part of a movement, with expressions like ‘I believe in it’ and ‘I think it is important to help others/the world, and I don’t have the resources available to donate considerable amounts of time/money, so wikiHow is something I can work on whenever I have a spare moment.’ This indicates that wikiHow plays a broader role to participants than merely a method of passing the time. Indeed, Lessig states that in peer production participants definitively feel they are part of a collective project that in turn drives the focus of their work. The final product that includes their participation is viewed as much more valuable than the material they found when they arrived. (Lessig, 2008:196) Thus it can be seen as a platform for helping others on a global scale. Indeed helping others was the most commonly cited motivation, with 50% of respondents including it in their answer. According to Deci’s model, a primary intrinsic motivation is altruism, the act of placing another person’s welfare above your own. (Deci, 1975) This can be seen as the inversion of selfishness, where one provides something for others at a cost to oneself. (Hars and Ou, 2001: 3) In this case, what is being provided is free information, with the personal costs of time and expertise.

As anticipated, altruistic goals were not the sole motivation with many stating improving skills among their reasons for participating.

User #17 ‘This is rewarding because I can use my language, formatting, grammar and editing skills.’

User #14 ‘It helps me to improve my skills. Whether it be socializing, english, creativity and knowledge and many more things and I am even learning different programming here.’

This is important as it shows that the users are aware they are gaining something in return for helping others. Hars and Ou concur that collaborators are often motivated by the opportunity to increase and improve their existing skill set, viewing their participation as a form of training, an investment of human capital from which they will yield future returns, which
may include future career opportunities. (Hars and Ou, 2001: 3) Consistently participating in collaborative projects can therefore also be an efficient advertising channel to publicize one’s own skill-set and capabilities. (Hars and Ou, 2001: 4) Lessig concedes that a significant proportion of contributors are motivated to contribute for intellectual stimulation or with the aim of improving their skill set. (Lessig, 2008:173) User #14 and #17 make it clear that this is a training process, allowing them to hone their individual skill-sets for future use. This is a clear ‘me’ motivational driver, focused only on the personal returns.

There are other ways to gain from participation, most arguably in the form of rich relationships built on the site. 13% of respondents mentioned ‘friendships’ or ‘community’ as a key reason for continuing to participate. Lessig argues that sharing economies fundamentally act as devices for building connections between people and these relationships become the ‘glue of the community’ (Lessig, 2008:148)

User #5 ‘I like knowing that even though the world is full of evil, there’s always the wikihow community that are willing to help others. It gives me happiness and friendly people to look forward to every day.’

User #13 ‘It is so rewarding to see the growth of wikiHow and the growth of it's people. I remember back in February when we were getting hyped up about our 150,000th article. Some of those little exciting milestones make wikiHow worth sticking around for.’

User #25 ‘The community. I count many wiki editors among my close friends, even though I have yet to meet some of them in person. I have met in person with folks from all over: Chile, Bolivia, Sweden, Iceland’

According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs model, if both the physical and safety needs of an individual are satisfied, then they inevitably desire belongingness and love, requiring the acts of giving and receiving affection. If these are unsatisfied, the individual will strive intensively to build relationships with people in general, or find a place in a group. (Maslow, 1954:20) Maslow considers the large increase in groups and communities to be directly motivated by an unsatisfied need for intimacy, contact and belongingness. He reasons that this may be due to feelings of isolation and loneliness that afflict those affected by the shift in traditional forms of community to more modern, dispersed social activities. (Maslow, 1954:20) User #5’s response is particularly poignant, indicating that he/she relies on
wikiHow to provide him/her with ‘friendly people to look forward to every day’. User #25 considers her friendships on wikiHow to be close, indicating that he/she actively sought to build relationships on the site.

Simply the enjoyment of the activity serves as motivation in itself, with common phrases such as ‘It feels great’, ‘I enjoy’, ‘I get satisfaction’, ‘I love it’ or ‘It’s fun’ dominating the responses. This might seem obvious, as voluntary participation is unlikely to be sustained if the participants find it an unpleasant experience, however certain motivations such as improving skill-sets might take precedence over the enjoyment of the activity. It appears the data yielded shows that this is certainly not the case. Lessig posits that a large part of the motivation for participation in sharing economies comes from people engaging in activity they actively enjoy. Wikis have invited the world to participate and discovered that there are enough volunteers interested in enough topics to make it function smoothly. (Lessig, 2008: 173) Why do people participate in sharing projects rather than say watching television? Lessig believes it is simply because they like to, making it a purely self-indulgent me-regarding motivation. (Lessig, 2008:175) ‘These are happy places. People are there because they want to be’. (Lessig, 2008:176) Tapscott and Williams also assert that many users may be motivated purely by the fun and social element of the activity. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006:72) Users simultaneously voiced how they appreciated how wikiHow gave them an opportunity to express themselves and to feel useful.

User #30 ‘I really enjoy feeling useful in the sense that when I express my expertise many people come back and give feedback that my articles have helped them in some way. That is the best reward.’

User #27 ‘I think it's fun and can help you show others what you have to say.’

Though the Internet by nature is a one to many medium, giving individual’s constant ability to self-publish and provide them with a voice, it is worth noting Jodi Dean’s observation that mass communication in the digital age has become nothing more than media chatter, with smaller messages simply taking up space and not being heard. (Dean, 2006) wikiHow acts as a verifiable hub, giving the opportunity for users to reach an active audience that can easily access their content. Thus by knowing that their contribution matters, this can serve as a veritable motivation.
Reputation and recognition seemed to be clear motivations for a number of respondents, who considered the feedback integral to their participation.

User #26 'When i get encouragement, whether it be a thumbs up, a message or even my articles being read 100 times, it really gives me a sense of pride and is a motive to contribute further.'

User #25 ‘I get to show off’

User #4 ‘It rewards me, you know recognition that someone will appreciate it.’

As Cliffolilli asserts, open source projects such as wikiHow are inclusive and egalitarian by nature. This allows recognition of work to be attributed to each user, generated a sense of pride among all those who contribute. He believes this generates ‘reputation economies’, a powerful motivation to contribute quality material to the group in the hopes that this will elevate status. (Cliffolilli, 2003) Deuze concurs that people seem to be increasingly driven to participate in voluntary media-production activities with the goal of achieving a ‘networked reputation’. (Deuze, 2007: 77) This can be linked to feeling useful, as it is the feedback others give that elevate a user’s sense of pride and worth, and thus motivate them to contribute further. Furthermore, Hars and Ou believe that participants may believe that being held in high esteem in the group could reward them in the future, spurring them to participate (Hars and Ou, 2001:4)

According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, all individuals have esteem needs, which involve a desire for a high evaluation of their persona, for self-respect and the respect of others. These may then be split into two groups, the first a need for personal achievement, competence and independence and the second a need for recognition and appreciation from others in order to build status and reputation. (Maslow, 1954:21) As these needs are satisfied, it leads an individual’s development of personal pride, a sense of worth and capability. On the other hand, if these are denied, people feel weak and useless, without direction or purpose. (Maslow, 1954:21) We can see this clearly in user #26’s response, detailing just how much positive personal evaluations matter to his/her motivation to contribute further.

Bourdieu believes that individuals who are driven to produce good work thrive on the feedback given and use it as a tool to claim status or capital within the group. (Bourdieu, 1986) The feedback that is given lets contributors know that others care about their input and that they are being evaluated on the basis of their content. Thus it is self-reinforcing by
policing the author’s work and simultaneously encouraging them to contribute again, with improved quality. (Hars and Ou, 2001:4) Reputation systems can be quite effective as wikiHow’s structure allows everyone to check the historical trajectory of each article’s editing process to see who did what in the past. Each member has a public ‘talk page’ where others can post, thus it is quite an open system where each member has the opportunity to develop trust and credibility over time. In today’s digital media landscape, where we are all walking advertisements of our own capabilities, it is easy to comprehend why reputation serves as a strong motivational factor.

One respondent stated it was an addiction, an insight into how perhaps wikihow can become compulsive and time-consuming, perhaps to the detriment of other activities.

User #4 ‘It has become my addiction’

Both users #21 and #22 gave answers that refused to answer the question asked.

User #21 ‘You writing a book? Leave that chapter out!’

User #22 ‘No’.

User #21’s hostile response leads me to consider the possibility that the question may have been offensive or uninteresting to the respondent. User #22 simply answered ‘no’ and may have misunderstood the question asked.

In OQ7 participants were asked ‘How did you choose each particular article? What factors influenced this decision?’ This question targeted the flesh of wikiHow, the material that forms the entire structure of the site. By asking users about why they chose to contribute to specific articles, we may find out more about what drives them to participate. Indeed the responses were quite interesting. While many considered their article choice to be random, 70% of respondents had an interest in the topic, either from personal experience, a favourite hobby, or expertise that was either accredited or self-taught.

User #28 ‘My love of pokemon is a large factor’

User #24 ‘I have chosen to work on spherical helices, neutral operations, Euclidean proofs, geometrical equalities and a bit on slideshows, all of which I have been studying for over 20 years now on my own time per my own library collection.’
Some users were motivated by noticing a gap where something they were interested in did not currently exist, or by discovering inaccuracies or incomprehension in existing articles.

User #16 ‘I was interested in those topics and usually I don’t find any one with whom I can share all those feelings so I write articles like "how to draw a teenage girl".

User #25 ‘My most popular article, How to Fix a Running Toilet, I wrote because a friend mentioned he had recently moved into a new apartment with a less-than-responsive maintenance staff. The article that existed was terrible, incomplete, and incomprehensible’.

User #16’s point was particularly interesting, uncovering the fact that in his/her personal life they have not found anyone to share similar interests with, and so wikiHow provides them with a platform to connect to like-minded individuals. This is in tune with Ester and Vinken’s point that the Internet provides modern-day leisure opportunities for those willing to connect with others. (Ester and Vinken, 2007) Furthermore, it is clear that this person is searching for ties beyond their immediate physical locality, supporting Wellman’s claim that community cannot be limited to such rigid boundaries. (Wellman, 1999)

One respondent mentioned choosing to contribute to an article so that they may develop their knowledge in that field. This is related to both enjoying the activity and building one’s skill-set and is classified as a ‘me’ focused motivation.

User #25 ‘I wanted to learn more about the topic or collect and organize my thoughts about it.’

In OQ10, participants were asked ‘Why is wikiHow important to you? Do you think wikiHow is important to society and if so, why?’ Asking users how they felt about wikiHow’s importance to both themselves and society was quite revealing. The dominant response was that respondents felt wikiHow was important to them as it gives them a voice and an opportunity to express themselves creatively.

User #16 ‘I don’t think there is any one having time to listen to my ideas or see my creativity. So wiki-how is acting as a medium for me to communicate and share my views to this world’

User #30 ‘It's important to express myself and to feel like I am making a relevant and useful contribution’
User #13 ‘I love being able to channel my inner creative and social side and put it toward something useful to society’

User #25 ‘It’s important to me because it gives me a voice and a community, and an opportunity to be part of the larger world.’

As wikiHow is fuelled by voluntary contributions, logically participants self-select which tasks they are interested in and willing to work on, ensuring that the best people are assigned to the correct tasks. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 69) This gives participants a large degree of autonomy, where they have the power to self-direct and creatively express themselves at their own pace. This may render such activity particularly attractive to those who do not have an opportunity to do so in other aspects of their lives. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:405)

Indeed, it is clear that the majority of recreational activities, for example watching television, are passive and limiting experiences that do not allow input. wikiHow is one of many commons-based production processes that provide a creative outlet and sense of control, potentially explaining its mass appeal to date.

Interestingly there also seemed to be a common understanding that wikiHow allowed users to read about and discuss issues that they might not feel comfortable doing in an offline or overt setting. This intimacy is perhaps why the respondents feel so close to their fellow users.

User#27 ‘I adore wikiHow because nobody judges you on there, and you get to speak in your own words. There are no limits when it comes to bringing out your personality in an appropriate way’

User #29 ‘It’s important to me because I learn a lot, especially about subjects I can’t talk about with my friends offline’

User #20 ‘Reading instructions online is a lot less risky or embarrassing than asking another person offline’

As Slevin postulates, the web provides platforms like wikiHow so that individuals can share their personal experiences and obtain a wide range of support from like-minded individuals. This can lead to processes of self-discovery and social development, fulfilling Maslow’s belongingness and love needs, and self-actualization needs. (Slevin, 2000:180) (Maslow, 1987) As Thompson notes, individuals actively search for and participate in personal
discussions because we possess an innate need to compare our own life experiences to those around us. (Thompson, 1995:223) This activity becomes more covert when dealing with sensitive information, and so is transferred to the online sphere. The type of support that is found, clearly strengthens relationships, as we hear from user #27’s response. The lack of physical cues allows users to seek information without judgement, and in the process develop strong ties. Indeed, as King and Moreggi have found, it has been indicated that patterns of online usage show that interpersonal interaction was more valuable to users than the act of information seeking or production. (King and Moreggi, 1998) It acts as a discursive place that is instantly accessible, sending a clear message to participants that they are not alone. (Orgad, 2004:154)

Furthermore the majority of respondents felt that wikiHow was fundamentally important to society because it helped people.

User #1 ‘And yes, I do. I think people value our advice (a person delivered a baby using one of our articles!) and use it to their best interest.’

User #5 ‘Wikihow is very important to me because I can help people from all over the world. It’s helpful to society because people have instant access on free knowledge and they can learn to do literally anything’

User #8 ‘It's not always factual, but each article we have is written with the aim of helping another person.’

User #10 ‘Everyone is an expert in something, & is able to help someone out there in the world. That is why WikiHow.com is very important to international society.’

This overwhelmingly positive response was uplifting, displaying that users genuinely cared about the possibility that their information could enrich the lives of others. This commitment to freedom of information is an indication of how much the Internet has changed our lives on a global scale. wikiHow is just one manifestation of how communication can facilitate education, development and growth all around the world. In the case of User #1, a baby was delivered amateurly by those who urgently needed clear and reliable information. His/Her sense of pride in wikiHow’s credibility tells us that he/she believes the work is effectively serving those who need it. Users #10 and #5 both mention the word ‘free’, indicating that they believe that wikiHow as a resource, helps those who cannot afford to pay for
credentialized information. Despite scepticism over altruistic motivational drivers, Tapscott and Williams consider that there are indeed many who truly view themselves as charitable and altruistic, and genuinely wish to build an informational resource that will be available to everybody, free of charge. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006:72) Benkler and Nissenbaum strongly consider those who participate in commons-based peer production to be characterised by kindness, benevolence and generosity, deduced from the fact that they could be spending their time on much more selfish pursuits. They believe that rather than reputation systems, a much more direct explanation for participation may be from the pleasure and satisfaction gained from helping others. (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006:408) Indeed Tapscott and Williams consider the web to be constructed by an intrinsic culture of generosity. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 206)

Generally respondents felt that wikiHow was important to society because it was a free source of information that could be accessed easily across all sections of society.

   User #30 ‘I think wikiHow is important to society in that its philosophy is all about the democratic sharing of ideas and concepts, helping people empower themselves through information.’

   User #17 ‘Wikihow is important to society as it provides information which people may be searching for. It is informative and spreads ideas and methods’

   User #3 ‘Having a FREE way of finding how to do things without having to sign up or buy something, I think, is fantastic and should be something that is copied by everyone.’

This aspect of wikiHow continues to surface as a key point in the discussion. The fact that it is a free resource appears to fulfil the utopian desire of users to liberate information and democratically make it available to the masses. Despite the continued existence of a digital divide, respondents clearly feel that their work on wikiHow has an impact, giving the gift of free knowledge to those who need it the most. User #3 describes it quite eloquently when he/she speaks about how fantastic it is to learn how to do things ‘without having to sign up or buy something’. This tells us how ubiquitous commodified information has become, and perhaps how wikiHow is part of a counterculture against such practices.

The existence of a community was also a factor in defining wikiHow’s personal importance.
User #27 ‘When you join the website and look back on your life before wikiHow, it’s like one big blurr. You can’t remember it, or imaging what your life would be like without the website. It's insane. I love it. <3’

User #2 ‘I think its important to society because it brings people together in a productive and fun way’

User #1 ‘Because it’s the place I’ve spent the last 2 years at and *enjoyed* myself. It’s a great community; there’s so much to do. There are so many new things to learn and have fun with. It’s fun to watch wikiHow grow, and grow with it’

User #29 ‘anyone can join so its like a really big club.’

This strongly shows that respondents feel there is a real and tangible community centred around wikiHow, a community that they can’t imagine living without. These responses are interesting, and in particular User #29’s response that it ‘is like a really big club’ and ‘anyone can join’. The fact that there are no social, monetary or physical boundaries to entering into such a club can generate mass appeal. The fact that user #1 enjoys watching the wikiHow grow and professes having spent the last two years participating, tells us that wikiHow can act as an important and constant presence in a person’s everyday life. This is testament to Wellman’s argument that community is alive and well in digital contexts,

Addiction surfaced again as a possible reason for participation. wikiHow appears to provide gratification in a number of ways which may result in compulsive behaviour from users.

User #14 ‘It is indeed really important to me. It has become my addiction now’

This mirrors some remarks such as User #27’s ‘ I can’t remember or imagine what my life would be like without the website’. These remarks display a clear dependence on the site for various needs, such as those outlined in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs model. (Maslow, 1954) What each person needs varies greatly, but if they continue to return to a collaborative knowledge production site such as wikiHow, it is likely the needs are those in the upper spectrum of the table.

Improving skill-sets was also cited as a reason of wikiHow’s importance.

User #24 ‘as I hopefully improve my writing skills, It's the active editing here that makes all the difference I feel.’
User #23 ‘I know that I and thousands of other people rely on this website, and many more even use it as a author-in-training sort of thing.’

As aforementioned, this ‘me’ focused motivation drives individuals to participate based on the promise that they may hone their various skill-sets.

One respondent strongly expressed a sense of identity with wikiHow, an indication of the strength of its appeal to some users.

User #3 ‘wikiHow has become a part of who I am. I have made friends of some of the editors and I do believe that it is important to society.’

As Budhathoki and Haythornwaite posit, often the motivational drive to participate tends to be personal, with an attachment to social well being but also strongly to the group and its members. (Budhathoki and Haythornthwaite, 2012: 8) This tells us that there is a tendency for users to identify strongly with the needs of the group and therefore strive for it’s continued well-being.

From the opposite end of the spectrum, there were some who were more negative about wikiHow’s importance, by stating that it was not a large part of their lives nor did they believe it made a significant contribution to society.

User #23 ‘It is not a big impact on my life’

User #2 ‘It's not a huge part of my life’

User #22 simply stated ‘don’t know’.

Here, we clearly have more distanced participants, unphased by wikiHow’s presence in their lives and in society. They are by far the most interesting group, as they continue to participate despite professing a clear lack of dependence on the site for their needs. Perhaps in this case, contributing to wikiHow is a hobby, a fun and enjoyable way to pass the time, but not a significant or valuable part of their lives.

Interestingly one respondent changed his response upon reflection directly due to this questionnaire. This leads me to consider the impact this research may have had upon the perceptions of the respondents.
User #7: ‘I think that since the internet exists, people are going to use it, and if it didn’t exist, wikiHow would not be sorely missed, but since it does exist, people in countries like America have become spoiled with ease of access to information, and I can help put accurate information out there. And that was what I believed until I had to think about it for this response. Now I believe that wikiHow really isn’t that important’

It is again obvious here, that the motivational drive to participate was based on the premise that contributing to wikiHow helped others by putting ‘accurate information out there’. Now that this motivation has been reconsidered, it is unclear whether or not he/she will desist to participate. If so, it can be surmised that believing in the fundamental importance of a project is vital to contributing one’s resources such as expertise and time. Beenan et al. assert that users in collective projects generally tend to decrease or desist to participate if they no longer believe their contribution is important, overriding any existing altruistic elements that may be important to them. They put forward three conditions that they believe will minimize such stagnation. These are: (1) believing their contribution is important, (2) considering their contribution to be identifiable, and (3) liking the other members of the group. (Beenan et al., 2004) As part of wikiHow’s core structure, each contribution is logged by username and thus clearly identifiable, allowing feedback and personal recognition. Thus we can summarize according to Beenan et al, participants will desist contributing to wikiHow if they do not consider their contribution to be important or if they do not enjoy the social communication between other users on the site. Therefore Beenan considers online collaborative spaces to be fundamentally social and in turn, directly affecting the motivation to participate.

In CQ2 when we asked ‘What motivates you to give your resources – your expertise, your time – to contributing?’, the respondents had nine factors, each of which had to be rated either ‘not important’, ‘quite important’ or ‘very important’. These nine factors were ‘contributing to a field’, ‘helping others’, ‘friendly competition’, ‘social aspect’, ‘being part of something bigger than oneself’, ‘gaining skills’, ‘challenging your brain’, ‘creative outlet’ and ‘other’. These were chosen based on the broad spectrum of answers given in the open questionnaire, in an effort to test these on our second sample. We made sure to include an ‘other’ option in case we omitted an important factor that might be true for the second sample.
In our data set, ‘friendly competition’ was deemed ‘not important’ by 55% of respondents, which was an interesting result as I had anticipated competition to be a major driving force in the motivation for participating. Sennett considers the presence of competition to be a fundamental motivation to work hard and well in modern society, stimulating the desire to do good work with the promise of individual rewards. (Sennett, 2008:28) Holohan and Garge also posit that Internet-based communities facilitate competition through cooperation. (Holohan and Garge, 2005) This result may indicate that competition is not an essential component of the voluntary collaborative process.

‘Helping others’ was universally popular with 0% stating that it was not important. This is therefore a strong motivational drive to participate. ‘Gaining skills’ was also a popular motivation, with 67% of respondents deeming it as ‘very important’. This confirms the hypothesis that users participate in wikiHow for more than simply altruistic motivations. The ‘social aspect’ was skewed towards the positive end of the spectrum, with the majority of respondents selecting ‘quite important’ or ‘very important’. This tells us that
The same results were reported for ‘feeling part of something bigger than oneself’, ‘challenging your brain’ and ‘creative outlet’, which all surfaced as positive motivations. In the final stage of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs model, despite all prior needs being satisfied, an individual may become restless unless he or she feels they are vocationally fitted to their correct purpose, staying true to their own nature so to speak. This is the need for self-actualization. It is a desire to become or do everything one is capable of becoming or doing, a goal of fulfilling one’s potential. The form this takes varies greatly from individual to individual, and creative expression is just one form of human self-acceptance. (Maslow, 1954: 22) It is clear that these are strong motivational drivers, leading us to consider that the act of contributing creatively to a project provides a deep sense of satisfaction to all those involved.

‘Contributing to a field’ was more evenly spread, with 28% describing it as not important. Thus it can be said that there are many users who enjoy participating but do not believe their contributions make a significant impact in their respective fields. In such cases other motivations take precedence. However in many cases, as Lessig notes, those who participate in collaborative work often believe their work is different or exemplary, and thus consider contributing to a field a primary goal in a bid to further their Alexandrian ambitions. (Lessig, 2008:196)

In the ‘other’ category, four users added ‘feeling useful’, ‘teaching others’ ‘fun way to pass the time’ and ‘having fun’. Indeed, as aforementioned, having fun is a valid motivation for participation and was deemed ‘very important’ by the users who submitted it. Feeling useful could potentially be classed under creative outlet or helping others as it is an opportunity to express oneself in a creative manner and to help others. ‘Teaching others’ could also come under the heading of ‘helping others’ but also lies in a less altruistic zone, where the act is to impart your knowledge unto others rather than simply ‘help’ them.

In CQ4 we asked ‘How important are the following goals to you?’, listing six possible goals and requiring the respondents to rate them as either ‘not important’, ‘quite important’ or ‘very important’. These six goals were ‘your reputation on wikiHow’, ‘the successful completion of an article’, ‘helping others’, ‘interacting with fellow users’, ‘contributing new knowledge to the chosen field’ and ‘other’.
The data indicated that the respondents ‘reputation on wikiHow’ was quite skewed to the positive end of the scale with 22% claiming it was of no importance, 41% stating it was quite important and 37% confessing it was very important. This places the earlier discussion on reputation into context, clearly showing it’s wider importance as a motivational driver. As Ester and Vinken posit, the many-to-many character of the Internet means that when someone is helped it can be seen by all others, and thus increasing their status within the group. This can have the desired effects of achieving recognition and heightening the probability that they will receive help or positive feedback from other members. (Ester and Vinken, 2003:671) Kollock also identifies the expectation of elevated status as a potentially intrinsic motivation to participate, particularly in cases where individuals do not know one another. (Kollock, 1999)
The remaining variables reflect a similar trend, with helping others once again at the extreme end of the spectrum, 0% stating it was ‘not important’. Kollock considers the possibility that people may co-operate if they feel their participation is genuinely having an impact on other people. He found that cooperation rates significantly increased if participants could see the benefits others gained from their cooperation. (Kollock, 1998:195) Many researchers have found a key reason for uncooperative behaviour is that the individual does not consider their actions to have any discernible effect on the situation. Thus it is rational to consider that if a project is structured in such a way that individuals feel they are ‘making a difference, or that their voice is being heard, then it follows that cooperation rates will be significantly increased. (Kollock, 1998:195) Once again we can conclude that helping others serves as the strongest motivational driver.

In the ‘other’ box, five respondents put forward additional motivations such as ‘feeling useful’, ‘making friends’, ‘teaching others’ ‘enjoying myself’ and ‘having fun’. Making friends can clearly be classed in the social aspect category, while enjoying myself and having fun is a legitimate category of its own. Kollock argues that simply enjoying oneself can be a clear incentive to participate, as the personal rewards from cooperation as measured against lower returns from deciding not to participate, are greater and thus lead to increased cooperation. (Kollock, 1998:195) Feeling useful and teaching others, as discussed above bear similarities to ‘contributing new knowledge to the field’ or ‘helping others’. Overall it can be seen that the respondents considered an array of motivations, and usually classed multiple choices positively as either quite important or very important in their continued participation on wikiHow.

4.5 Community

Participants were asked in OQ8. ‘Do you enjoy interacting with other users? If yes, why? How would you describe your relationship with the other users?’ Here we had quite a low non-response rate of 3%, with the majority of respondents providing detailed and forthcoming remarks on the subject. The overall data yielded from this question was quite rich. It gave a real insight into how users perceive one another, an essential component of determining whether or not wikiHow can be seen as a community. Indeed many of the users voluntarily use the word ‘community’ to describe the site, indicative of the quality of relationships they perceive around them.
The majority of respondents (68%) professed that they enjoyed interacting with other users, while 16% did not and 13% expressed that they sometimes did. This leads us to believe that the site is quite a social place, one where users gain considerable satisfaction from interacting with other participants. Some even strongly articulated the strength of their ties with other users, providing details such as:

User #25 'I'm planning to marry one of them later this year. :-) For the most part, it's a very close community. We certainly have newcomers, and for the most part, we try to welcome the earnest ones.'

User #6 'Yes, I love to interact and communicate with people. And I do build strong relationships with many wikiHowians. They are like my 2nd family and I love and care about all of them.'

User #27 'Yes. I contribute quite a bit, but if the users weren't nice, I might not even like wikiHow nearly as much as I do. You can't describe how awesome they are in words until you experience interacting with them. They make you smile, and laugh 'til you cry. They're not a community, they're a family and they're the best people in the world.'

These statements make a strong case for the idea that ‘WikiHowians’ have been able to cultivate strong ties on the site, and construct a solid community despite claims by Stoll and Weinreich who believed such intimacy was not possible in the online realm. (Stoll, 1997; Weinreich, 1997) User #27 and #6 go far enough to say that their bond is closer than a community, it’s a family. This supports Brunsting and Postmes claim that there is a link between strong social bonds in groups when its members remain isolated and anonymous from one another. (Brunsting and Postmes, 2002) The data compliments Wellman and Guilia’s findings that indicate how online interactions develop over time to become just as intimate and sociable as those found offline. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:9) This may be attributed to the absence of social and physical cues online, making it difficult to determine whether another user possesses attractive or desirable social and physical markers. Thus this gives users more control over their presentation of self, allowing relationships to develop based on shared interests rather than be blocked by disparities in social status or physical attractiveness. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:26) It is clear that individuals join online groups and communities for an abundance of reasons. In this case, there appears to be a strong claim that the peering group in wikiHow are emotionally attached, relying on computer mediated
communication to obtain the social support and belonging they might not receive offline. (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela, 2010:403)

In OQ3 we asked ‘Would you participate in wikiHow if there was no possibility to interact with other participants?’ While 26% said they would continue to participate and 24% remain undecided, it is clear that the majority of respondents would not participate in wikiHow if there was no possibility to interact with other users. This leads us to a reasonable conclusion that the interaction on the site is a key motivation for participation. Holohan and Garge postulate that interaction is often necessary to maintain collaborative projects, leading us to consider that it is in fact the social aspect itself that primarily motivates participation. (Holohan and Garge, 2005)

![Figure 4.7 A closed-format measurement of perceived participation in wikiHow if social interaction was ruled out.](image)

Of those who answered ‘Yes’, the majority also stated that in CQ4 the social aspect was ‘not important’. Paradoxically a large proportion of those who said yes had previously stated in CQ2 that interacting with users was either ‘quite important’ or ‘very important.’ Leading us to consider that they enjoy interacting currently but are driven by more than simply social interaction to participate in wikiHow. This is clear when we see that all the respondents who said yes also expressed that helping others was either ‘quite important’ or ‘very important’.
This being said, it is evident that the degree to which there are social connections underlying the collaboration process is a key factor in retaining its participants, as evidenced by my survey results. A sense of community is therefore a critical component of attracting and retaining participants in the wiki production process. Budathoki and Haythornthwaite stipulate that although participation in crowdsourced projects like wikiHow doesn’t necessarily require social interaction with other users, it appears that it is a core element of the site, one that many users, and in my case the majority of respondents keep coming back for. (Budathoki and Haythornthwaite, 2012) Indeed, the secret to its long-term success may be due to the core ‘heavy’ group that glue the critical mass together, and so then user interaction forms a critical part of the knowledge production process.

5. Conclusion
Social scientists have known for a lengthy period that technology does not determine the fate of society. Individuals adopt the technology and use it or discard it in order to achieve certain tasks. Contrary to McLuhan’s assertion, the medium is not the message, rather it is a tool that affords new opportunities for all aspects of society. The Internet opened up new possibilities for fast and cheap communication but did not force people to engage in it. (Wellman, 2004:27) People engage with it because it is convenient, fast, interesting and different. There is an intrinsic novelty attached to the process, added to the fact that we can discover new meaning and even connect with people from distant lands and cultures. As Deuze notes, we have adapted our lifestyles to incorporate media use in many different aspects of the human experience, using it as a largely social and participatory process of creating meaning and forming relationships. (Deuze, 2007:49)

The act of voluntary peer production is still a novelty, a newfound freedom of knowledge production that users are enjoying while experiencing a rich interaction between diverse and geographically dispersed groups of people. Overall, it is clear that peer production works because it can. (Tapscott and Williams, 2006:71) It is not just novelty that sustains the process however, with users found to be motivated by a wide range of factors, not all as altruistic as it might first appear. The data indicated that in addition to altruistic goals such as helping others, users also cared deeply about their reputation, self-expression, enjoying themselves and building knowledge and skills.
What was even more exciting to discover is how the social aspect was a core reason in why users participated in wikiHow, and featured strongly in how they conceived its importance to both themselves and to society. This leads me to conclude that wikiHow is an example of a definitive community, one that is distinctly modern and indicative of rich social experiences. It is clear that the ties that bind us are fundamentally social, and thus sociality is an intrinsic part of an efficient working environment, crowdsourced or otherwise. We have deduced that personal involvement and a sense of belonging is crucial for engagement and investment in personal resources. The glue that holds collective knowledge production together is not intelligence or knowledge itself, but rather the dynamic social process of acquiring and building knowledge. (Jenkins, 2006: 54) People’s acts of freely sharing and co-creating information online, provides new hope for increased social cohesion and connection in society. (Deuze, 2007:78)

Putnam and Turkle, Stoll and Weinreich among others failed to recognize that community expression is continuously shifting into new forms. Indeed, in some respects we have retreated to a domestic sphere, but new media has allowed us to interact and co-create with others in ways that make us feel included and involved. The global becomes local at the lick of the button in the age of Web 2.0. Now we can all listen to a joke at the same time, and actively respond to it, engage in dialogue and connect with others in a giant conversation either synchronously or asynchronously. I agree with Ester and Vinken’s response, indicating that going online is simply a new modern practice, a feature of contemporary civic engagement that binds people together.

wikiHow is an example of both Geimenschaft and Gellenschaft, it is intimate and it is impersonal and contractual, its participants lined up in a spectrum of sorts. It is then fair to assume that despite the relationships that develop among users, the basic elements required for crowdsourced participation do not necessarily include interaction among users. (Budhathoki and Haythornthwaite, 2012:4) However its long-term success may be due to the core ‘heavy’ group that glue the critical mass together, and so then user interaction forms a critical part of the knowledge production process. Such individuals may or may not be ‘bowling alone’ offline, but they are definitely playing together online. (Benkler, 2006:375) This is testament to how the desire to connect to other human beings is a fundamental human trait, it knows no boundaries, physical, virtual or otherwise. It is no surprise that wikiHow has achieved popularity and notoriety on the web, it has harnessed what most successful
businesses on the Internet share: social connectivity, and bringing people together for the common purpose of sharing information. (Deuze, 2007:35)

I concur with Ester and Vinken’s stance that despite the continued ambiguity surrounding community studies, the Internet’s potential to enhance civic engagement in society is far more likely to increase rather than decrease. This is largely because the medium is so rich in its power to connect others through information, making it a veritable alternative to classic forms of community interaction. (Ester and Vinken, 2003:667)

5.2 Future directions
Given the recent adoption of computer-mediated communication, Wellman and Gulia assert that there are currently no statistics covering the longevity of Internet-based relationships, and indeed very few detailed studies on virtual communities on the whole. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999:9) Ester and Vinken concur that virtual communities suffer from a serious lack of academic research in the social sciences, and call for increased ethnographies and surveys into the phenomenon. Baym also propose that further research is needed to explore the experiences of computer-mediated experience at an individual level as most research conducted on CMC has been conducted at a group level. (Baym, 2006:50)

I too call for further research into the area in both the realm of digital media studies and the social sciences, as this insight into sociality as a driving force for peer production is vital to harnessing this potential resource for the common good.
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY


7. APPENDIX

A. Open Questionnaire (OQ)

OQ1. Are you Male or Female?

Male
Female

OQ2. Please state your age and country of origin.

__________________________________________________________________________________

OQ3. What is the highest level of education you have completed/are currently enrolled in?

Elementary School
High School
Undergraduate
Postgraduate (Masters or PhD)

OQ4. How did you get introduced to/first hear about wikiHow?

__________________________________________________________________________________

OQ5. How many articles have you contributed to?

__________________________________________________________________________________

OQ6. Why do you give your resources (e.g. your expertise, your time, etc.) to wikiHow? Can you describe exactly why this is rewarding for you?

__________________________________________________________________________________

OQ7. How did you choose each particular article? What factors influenced this decision?
OQ8. Do you enjoy interacting with other users? Why? How would you describe your relationship with the other users?

OQ9. How frequently do you typically communicate with other users?
   Daily
   Weekly
   Monthly
   Yearly
   Never

OQ10. Why is wikiHow important to you? Do you think wikiHow is important to society and why/why not?
**B. Closed Questionnaire (CQ)**

**CQ1.** How many articles have you been/are you involved in?

1 – 20
20 – 40
40 – 60
60 – 80
80 – 100
100+

**CQ2.** What motivates you to give resources – your expertise, your time - to contributing? (Choosing one of not important/quite important/very important)

- Contributing to a field
- Helping others
- Friendly competition
- Social aspect
- Being part of something
- Gaining skills
- Challenging your brain
- Creative Outlet
- Other (please specify)

**CQ3.** Would you participate in wikiHow if there was no possibility to interact with other participants? (no forums, talk pages etc.)

- Yes
- No
- Don’t Know
CQ4. How important are the following goals to you? Please choose one of very important/quite important/not important.

- Your reputation on wikiHow /not important/ quite important/very important/
- The successful completion /not important/ quite important/very important/
  of an article
- Helping others /not important/ quite important/very important/
- Interacting with fellow users /not important/ quite important/very important/
- Contributing knowledge /not important/ quite important/very important/
  to the field
- Other (Please specify) /not important/ quite important/very important/

__________________________________________________________________________________