

Normative self-regulation in the emergence of global network institutions: The Case of Wikipedia.

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Overview

- Emergence in the Loop
- Norms
- Wikipedia
- The case research
- Findings for mechanisms of normative self-regulation



Emergence in the Loop (EMIL)

- Three-year EC funded project (Sixth Framework Programme -Information Society and Technologies- Citizens and Governance in the Knowledge Based Society)
- Partners
 - **Institute of Cognitive Science and Technology**, National Research Council CNR-ISTC Italy
 - **University of Bayreuth**, Dept. of Philosophy UBT Germany
 - **University of Surrey**, Centre for Research on Social Simulation UNIS United Kingdom
 - **Universität Koblenz-Landau** KL Germany (
 - **Manchester Metropolitan University**, Centre for Policy Modelling MMU United Kingdom
 - **AITIA International Informatics** Inc. AITIA Hungary



Project aim

- understand and develop (simulation) design strategies to cope with the complex two-way dynamics of sociality, i.e. emergent and immergent processes
 - understand and manage complexity in social systems with autonomous agents;
 - understand how new conventions and norms emerge and spread in these systems;
 - study of norm innovation by means of agent-based simulation.



Work Program

- Frame Ontology of norm emergence (ISTC)
- Collect Empirical data from relevant cases (Surrey)
- Build simulator capable of replicating case scenarios (Koblenz and AITIA)
- Run Simulations (Bayreuth)
- Reconcile empirical and simulator data (Manchester)



What is a norm?

- Implicit
 - Not consciously recognised
 - E.g. Don't sit in the front row of a lecture hall
- Explicit
 - Known, but not formalised
 - E.g. Don't shout
 - Known and formalised
 - E.g. Don't smoke
 - Known, formalised and with formal sanctions
 - E.g. Don't be violent



What is a norm?

- Research questions
 - How do norms arise?
 - How do they work?
- Research difficulties

Norms are observable only *ex post facto*

Norms often operate in rather open, difficult to control social environments



Why Wikipedia?

- Everything (i.e. records of all user communication) is online
- It is possible to 'go back in time' using History pages
- Wikipedia is very orderly, but the contributors are unorganised
- There are few formal roles and few sanctions
- So it seems that norms must be being used to enforce the order



The case study

- Discussion pages
 - All Wikipedia articles have a linked Discussion page
 - The discussion for controversial articles could get ‘heated’
 - We can see if and how the Discussion pages are ordered using norms



What is a norm?

- A source of constraint (regulative norms)
 - Generated by social institutions
 - Obeyed by following the norm
 - E.g. drive on the right!

And/or

- An emergent regularity (constitutive norms)
 - Generated as a by-product of social interaction
 - Treated as the ‘normal’ way of doing things
 - E.g. don’t fart!



Discussion pages

- Wikipedia pages are written and edited by ‘anyone’
- Associated with every Wikipedia page is a Discussion page



- The Discussion page is for exchanges *about* the main page
 - For example, debates about whether text on the main page is properly referenced, and is ‘neutral’
- The Discussion pages of controversial pages seemed likely to be the sites of conflict and therefore exhibit the effects of norms
 - Controversial pages are those that receive more than a threshold rate of edits
 - E.g. abortion, Christina Aguilera, Conservatism, Human Rights, Cuba



The rules

- The Wikipedia community has developed increasingly detailed rules about how articles should be phrased
- 2001
 - ‘there are no rules’
- 2002
 - **Avoid bias.** Articles should be written from a neutral point of view,
 - **Don't infringe copyrights.**
 - **Wikipedia is an encyclopedia.**
 - **Respect other contributors.**
 - **Follow conventions.**
- By 2007
 - 5 key rules
 - 15 rules of thumb
 - 21 points of etiquette
 - 42 policies



The research question

- What is the role of the Wikipedia ‘Etiquette’ in creating and editing articles?
 - Does it determine article content?
 - Is it cited as justification when editing content?
 - Is it enforced with sanctions?



Sample

- 583 articles flagged by Wikipedia as controversial (in May 2007)
- Sampled one in 20 plus purposive sampling to ensure a more representative coverage
- Sub-sampled 9 of these 35, for this preliminary analysis
 - Analysis is continuing on the rest
- Examined Discussion pages (some as long as 6 A4 pages of text) of these selected articles
- The Discussion page text is the *only* means that those editing these controversial articles have for communicating
 - Every contribution is dated and signed



Language as only means of influence

- Analysis proceeded on the assumption that social influence should be apparent in the linguistic utterance strategies employed by editors.
- Focused on illocutionary force – i.e. the use of language to directly influence the behaviour of others
 - Focus on the pragmatic intent of the speaker rather than just the content of what is said.



Results

- Utterances which involved a specific invocation of a norm or rule were rare (3.2%).
 - Of these, 44% were generated in response to the form or presentation of an article, 28% in response to an editor's behaviour, 22% in response to an edit action and 6% an article fact.
 - 63% of all invocations involved specific Wikipedia rules or guidelines rather than general norms.
- 65% of all utterances were phrased in a neutral or objective manner a further 22% were negative and 14% positive.
 - The most common positive utterance was 'encouraging' (39% of all positive utterances).
 - 21% of all positively phrased utterances were explicitly validated (accepted)
 - 56% went unquestioned.
 - 3% of positive utterances were rejected
 - 20% ignored.
 - The most common negative form was 'dismissive' (55% of all negative utterances)
 - 8% of negatively phrased utterances were accepted
 - 24% unquestioned
 - 27% explicitly rejected
 - 41% ignored.



Results

- There are very few explicit praises, or put downs and few niceties like explicit acknowledgements of one another.
- Contributors seldom refer to one another by name – the exchanges are rather impersonal.
- Thus the ‘Etiquette’ seem to have little influence on the character and style of the Discussion pages
- The quality of interaction is not at all what one would expect of a ‘community’
- Most of the discussion proceeds without explicit invocation of the rules of etiquette, or any other explicit norm.
- Behaviour seems to accord with a convention that is not explicit, not formalised, but which is easily recognised from looking at previous discussion page contributions



Principles of Wikipedia Etiquette

- **Assume good faith.** Wikipedia has worked remarkably well so far based on a policy of nearly complete freedom to edit. People
- Remember **the Golden Rule**: Treat others as you would have them treat you – even if they are new. We were all new once...
- Be polite, please!
 - Keep in mind that raw text is ambiguous and often seems ruder than the same words coming from a person standing in front of you – what you intended might not be what others perceive, and what you read might not be what the author intended.
- **Sign and date** your posts to talk pages (not articles!), unless you have some excellent reasons not to do so.
 - If you have not registered yourself, do not construct a signature that might make it appear that you have.
- Work toward agreement.
- Argue facts, not personalities.
- Don't ignore questions.
 - If another disagrees with your edit, provide good reasons why you think it's appropriate.
- Concede a point when you have no response to it, or admit when you disagree based on **intuition or taste**.
- Be **civil**.
- Although it's understandably difficult in a heated argument, if other editors are not as civil as you'd like them to be, make sure that you're actively doing something about it: taking a hit and refraining from hitting back – everybody appreciates that (or at least they should).
 - However, don't hesitate to let the other party know that you're not comfortable with their tone in a neutral way – otherwise they won't know. (For example, "I'm not comfortable with the tone of your comment above, but I don't think that's helping us resolve the issue. However, I don't think your argument stands because...").
- Be prepared to apologize. In animated discussions, we often say things we later wish we hadn't. Say so.
- Forgive and forget.
- Recognize your own biases and keep them in check.
- Give praise when due. Everybody likes to feel appreciated, especially in an environment that often requires compromise. Drop a thank-you note.
- Remove or summarize resolved disputes that you initiated.
- Help mediate disagreements between others.



A Negative Example

Just Persian Gulf

[edit]

I'd like to ask the question, why is the middle east filled with morons?

I'd like to ask to some body, could you change the name of Gulf of Mexico? could you change the name of Guantanamo Gulf orso you couldn't change Persian Gulf's name by spending money or political games!!! Please be calm and think about what are you doing! this is just wasting your time and money.

I don't know why some users here are enjoying the ignoring and suppressing of information! Why some users here like to play a game against history and real life just for political sake of eliminating other's POV and culture?! Is it really good to keep suppressing and offending other's rights in practicing their own culture in their own language? If any other nations, organizations and bodies are already using the terms like something you don't "like", it will not be bad as naming sacred territories is not private right of one nation! If you brought a non-logical example for the Gulf of Mexico, I would like you to have more reasonable comparison like the English Channel/La Manche, or Sea of Japan name that will be better example for shared territories among nations of different cultures. I don't know when this big dispute will settle down and some users will respect other's POV and their cultural rights, besides History to reach a [neutral point of view](#). I don't want to see the day when I'll believe that there is a racial/cultural enmity behind this argument

Ralhazzaa 08:51, 8 April 2007 (UTC)



A Positive Example

Ah, I see, mentioning that photos of aborted fetuses exist is POV. Is it harassment too? [Ferrylodge](#) 17:56, 17 August 2007 (UTC)

[Ferrylodge](#), I think we are confusing several different issues. The sentence you would like to add belongs on the pro-life page. The article on abortion here should be concerned with medically accurate information, and describe the history and societal issues surrounding abortion using academic literature. Links to Priests for Life and the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform are inherently meant to persuade, not inform. --[IronAngelAlice](#) 18:47, 17 August 2007 (UTC)

I am not going to utter another word in this discussion, because I [seem to be on the verge of being accused of harassment](#). [Ferrylodge](#) 19:00, 17 August 2007 (UTC)

[Ferrylodge](#), you should not feel discouraged from discussing your ideas here. Please understand that abortion is a very polarizing topic, and passions are easily inflamed for all potential editors. This discussion was productive because we can establish the difference between an intent to persuade using emotions vs. an intent to describe using medically accurate information and academic literature. Please do not take any criticisms personally. --[IronAngelAlice](#) 21:00, 17 August 2007 (UTC)



Conclusions

- Lack of evidence of *following* of explicit rules, even if such rules exist.
- Rule invocations are frequently ignored
- Lack of evidence of appealing to explicit rules, for *justification of action*, even if such rules exist
- Instead, patterns in existing text are detected and used as guides for action
- Suggesting analogical, rather than deductive, cognitive processes



Implications for norms

- Explicit invocation may have limited effect
- Norms communicated more by example
- norms salience may be very sensitive to individual goals and group identification
- Participants use a range of cues to determine ‘rules of the game’ and employ a range of subtle strategies.
 - E.g ‘ignoring’, apparent neutrality to mask intent, breaking one norm to pursue another.

