Review of[1]
Should you Believe Wikipedia?
Online Communities and the Construction of Knowledge
Author of Book: Amy Bruckman
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Reviewer: William Gasarch `gasarch@umd.edu`

1   Introduction

Elon Musk could have saved himself $44 billion dollars if he had (1) bought *Should you Believe Wikipedia? Online Communities and the Construction of Knowledge*, (2) learned how hard it is to manage an online community, and (3) decided that buying Twitter was not worth the trouble.

The book is about online communities: how they evolve, thrive, or collapse. Also, of interest in the age of Facebook and Twitter, is the problems of moderation. Despite the title, Wikipedia is only a small part of the book.

2   Summary of Contents

The book has 8 chapters. I will describe several adjacent chapters that are on similar themes all together.

2.1   Chapters 1,2,3,4: Online Communities

Chapter 1: Are Online Communities Really Communities?
Chapter 2: What can Online Collaboration Accomplish?
Chapter 3: Should you Believe Wikipedia?
Chapter 4: How Does the Internet Change How we Think?

1. Are Online Communities Really Communities? Chapter 1 gives a resounding yes. The chapter also gets into the more basic question of *What is a Community?*.

2. When does group think set in? For some sites people are scared to propose an unpopular opinion.

3. How are the rules of discourse established? (This is discussed throughout the book.) Reddit is particularly interesting since each group decides for themselves.

4. How many are contributing and how many are *only* lurking? An interesting contrast: on technical groups there tend to be more lurkers, whereas on medical groups, people tend to talk about their problems.

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[2]The prices are lower on Amazon

5. What is the best way to get unpaid people to contribute to a project? This is obviously relevant to Wikipedia. The main factor is that people choose what they want to work on and hence will do a good job.

6. Should you trust Wikipedia? The book says yes—errors are corrected quickly, even on controversial sites like the vaccine hestiancy (which should not be controversial), and people are writing about what they know and care about. I think the book is to optimistic about Wikipedia. My issue is *not* that some of the websites are incorrect. I mostly look up science where its pretty good (though sometimes incomplete). My issue is that making a change to a page is hard. There are people who police Wikipedia, which is needed, but they also block perfectly good changes. I also have an issue with which topics are covered and by who. Around 90% of Wikipedia writers are white, and around 85% are male.

7. How to best moderate an online community (this is discussed in many chapters)? We all know what an *Echo Chamber* is: people who reinforce each others viewpoints. This book points out that this can be *positive.* If there is a group discussing feminism then this can be productive if they all agree that women are people to. The author does point out 2 downsides (1) if someone wants an honest discussion of whether women really are paid less than men, that would not be welcome, and (2) if the people in the echo chamber are objectively wrong (e.g., holocaust denial) then this can be very harmful. The author discusses various ways that different sites handle the issue of moderation.

3 Chapters 5,6,7: Behaviour Online

Chapter 5: How do People Express Identity Online and Why?
Chapter 6: What is Bad Behaviour Online and What can we Do About it?
Chapter 7: How do Business Models Shape Online Communities?

Chapter 5 is about how we present ourselves online. We have all heard stories about people who claim to be a different gender. But people are dishonest about other aspects of their lives as well. And some of how we present ourselves is not dishonest in that it may be how we see ourselves. Or, as George Costanza says, *its not a lie if you believe it.*

Chapters 6 and 7 are an intelligent unbiased discussion of the enormous tension between free speech and civil order. What regulates speech on line? Laws, social norms, technology, and markets. All of these are discussed and are complicated. Technology can help some; however, having an AI determine what is hate speech or otherwise objectionable is a hard problem. The biggest problem may be that hate-speech can be profitable. No real answers are given (sorry Elon) but the issues are all laid out nicely.

4 Chapter 8: How Can We Help the Internet Bring Out the Best in Us?

This chapter is a summary of the book and a plea to do better. It reminded me of Rodney Kings famous quote

People, I just want to say, can't we all get along?

Alas, if only it was that easy.

5   My Opinion

If I was to tweet one word to describe this book it would be *intelligent*. Much of what the author says we sort-of know but its really good to get it written down clearly in one place. COVID-misinformation and the Jan 6 insurrection make the issues raised more relevant.

The only drawback is that the book is a little to positive. The author is not angry enough about the problems with online communication.