MAKING THE NEWS: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF
NEWS NORMS AND CURATION ON TWO
COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM SITES

By

SHAWN TYLER MCINTOSH

A dissertation submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Program in School of Communication and Information
Written under the direction of
John Pavlik
And approved by

_____________________________________
_____________________________________
_____________________________________
_____________________________________

New Brunswick, New Jersey
January 2022
This study looks at two arguably “failed” online news sites, Wikinews and Allvoices, and examines how assumed news norms and practices of curation played roles in defining them among participants within a framework of what can be defined as collaborative journalism. Wikinews, one of the Wikimedia project’s family of projects, has been continuing since 2004 but with a relatively anemic output by small numbers of members. Allvoices, founded in 2008, used a combination of citizen reporting and algorithms to curate news stories from multiple perspectives before being bought in 2011 by digital marketing firm Datran and was radically changed as a digital advertising and health consulting platform. Between these two extremes of human-centered versus algorithmic approaches, analysis is offered on the potential of creating a sustainable model of collaborative journalism that could potentially play a role in creating an engaged, active citizenry in the networked public sphere.
Table of Contents

ABSTRACT..............................................................................................................................................................ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS..................................................................................................................................................iii

LIST OF TABLES........................................................................................................................................................viii

LIST OF FIGURES........................................................................................................................................................ix

1 CHAPTER 1: MAKING A CASE FOR COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM.................................................. 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................................................1

1.1.1 Why “Collaborative Journalism?” ..............................................................................................................4

1.1.2 Research Questions ......................................................................................................................................10

1.2 DEFINING COLLABORATION ..........................................................................................................................11

1.3 DIFFERENT “TYPES” OF NON-PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM TODAY ...............................................17

1.3.1 Citizen Journalism ......................................................................................................................................17

1.3.2 Social News ................................................................................................................................................23

1.3.3 Alternative Journalism ................................................................................................................................27

1.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM .........................................................................31

1.4.1 Influences from Professional Journalism Norms, Values, and Ideals .......................................................33

1.4.2 Curation .........................................................................................................................................................35

1.4.3 Social Production of News ..........................................................................................................................38

1.5 COMPARING F/OSS AND COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM .........................................................................40

2 CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .......................................................................................... 47

2.1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................................47

2.2 COLLECTIVE ACTION THEORY AND PUBLIC GOODS ............................................................................48

2.2.1 Social Production of Information ..............................................................................................................52

2.2.2 F/OSS, CNOs, and CBPP ..........................................................................................................................56
### 2.2.3 Collaborative Journalism as Social Production

- **2.2.3.1 Modularity of News** ................................................................. 63
- **2.2.3.2 Granularity of News** ................................................................. 65
- **2.2.3.3 Integration of News** ................................................................. 68

### 2.3 Communities of Practice ................................................................. 69

### 2.4 Field Theory ..................................................................................... 75

### 3 CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ............................................. 87

- **3.1 Introduction** ................................................................................... 87
- **3.2 Case Study Method** ........................................................................ 88
- **3.3 Ethnography** .................................................................................. 93
- **3.4 Netnography** .................................................................................. 97
- **3.5 Working with Participants** ............................................................... 102
- **3.6 Sourcing and Citing Wikinews Material** .......................................... 104

### 4 CHAPTER 4: WIKINEWS .................................................................. 106

- **4.1 Introduction** ................................................................................... 106
- **4.2 Origins** .......................................................................................... 112
  - **4.2.1 Differences with Wikipedia** ......................................................... 114
  - **4.2.2 Neutral Point of View** ................................................................. 117
- **4.3 Development** ................................................................................ 119
  - **4.3.1 Technological Changes** ............................................................... 124
  - **4.3.2 Usability and Design Changes** ..................................................... 125
  - **4.3.3 Policy Changes** ........................................................................ 129
  - **4.3.4 A Sense of Community** ............................................................... 130
    - **4.3.4.1 Defining Roles** ..................................................................... 132
    - **4.3.4.2 Discussions, Debates and Divides** .......................................... 133
- **4.4 Working Practices** .......................................................................... 138
5.4.2 Writing Stories ..................................................................................................................... 201
5.4.3 Promoting Stories ............................................................................................................. 206

5.5 ONGOING ISSUES IN COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM MODEL ........................................... 207

5.5.1 Payment ............................................................................................................................... 207
5.5.2 Management Practices and DMCA Lawsuit ................................................................. 209
5.5.3 Story Quality ...................................................................................................................... 211
5.5.4 Current Status ...................................................................................................................... 212

6 CHAPTER 6: NEWS NORMS, CURATION, AND COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE ........................................................................................................ 214

6.1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 214
6.2 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE DIMENSIONS WITHIN WIKINEWS AND ALLVOICES .................... 215

6.2.1 Mutual Engagement ............................................................................................................ 216
6.2.1.1 Wikinews ......................................................................................................................... 217
6.2.1.2 Allvoices ......................................................................................................................... 218
6.2.2 Joint Enterprise .................................................................................................................... 220
6.2.2.1 Wikinews ......................................................................................................................... 221
6.2.2.2 Allvoices ......................................................................................................................... 225
6.2.3 Shared Repertoire ................................................................................................................ 227
6.2.3.1 Wikinews ......................................................................................................................... 228
6.2.3.2 Allvoices ......................................................................................................................... 234

6.3 THE ROLE OF NEWS NORMS .................................................................................................. 236

6.3.1 Norms Used in Wikinews .................................................................................................... 236
6.3.2 Norms Used in Allvoices .................................................................................................... 242
6.3.3 Comparisons and Contrasts in News Norms Used in Wikinews and Allvoices ................... 244

6.4 CURATION ................................................................................................................................ 246

6.4.1 Curation in Journalism ......................................................................................................... 251
6.4.2 Curation in Collaborative Journalism .................................................................................. 254
6.4.3 Curation in Wikinews ................................................................. 257
6.4.4 Curation in Allvoices .......................................................... 259
6.4.5 Comparisons and Contrasts in Curation in Wikinews and Allvoices ............... 261

7 CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION ................................................................. 265

7.1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................................. 265
7.2 THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL NORMS AND CURATION IN COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM ...... 267
  7.2.1 Professional Norms: Helping and Hindering ........................................... 268
  7.2.2 Curation and Collaborative Journalism .............................................. 271
7.3 FIELD THEORY AND COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM ...................... 274
7.4 COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM: ISSUES AHEAD ............................. 279
  7.4.1 Production Issues ........................................................................... 280
    7.4.1.1 The Nature of News ................................................................. 282
    7.4.1.2 News Norms and Collaborative Journalism ............................ 288
  7.4.2 Organizational Issues ...................................................................... 291
    7.4.2.1 Training and Keeping Contributors ......................................... 292
    7.4.2.2 Organizing the Collaborative ................................................. 294
  7.4.3 Business Issues ............................................................................... 297
    7.4.3.1 Developing Sustainable Organizations ..................................... 298
    7.4.3.2 Avoiding Exploitation ............................................................ 300
7.5 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS ......................... 302
7.6 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY .................................................................. 306
7.7 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH ..................................................... 308
List of Tables

TABLE 1.1: MODELS OF CITIZEN MEDIA SITES (SCHAFFER, 2007) 7

TABLE 1.2: WOOD AND GRAY’S DEFINITION OF “COLLABORATION” AND COMPARISON TO
COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM PRACTICES 14

TABLE 1.3: SHARED CHARACTERISTICS OF F/OSS MOVEMENT AND COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM 42

TABLE 2.1: CLASSIFICATION TABLE FOR TYPES OF GOODS 49

TABLE 4.1: NUMBER OF ACTIVE USERS BY WIKINEWS LANGUAGE EDITION (TOP 20) 109

TABLE 5.1: TOP ALLVOICES CONTRIBUTORS BY # OF CONTRIBUTIONS 175

TABLE 5.2: ALLVOICES STORY CATEGORIES 203
List of Figures

FIGURE 2.1: COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL PRODUCTION 61
FIGURE 4.1: NUMBER OF ACTIVE EDITORS ON ENGLISH WIKINEWS 107
FIGURE 4.2: NEW ARTICLES PER MONTH ON ENGLISH WIKINEWS 107
FIGURE 4.3: RANKING OF WIKINEWS SITES BY NUMBER OF ARTICLES PUBLISHED 111
FIGURE 4.4: WIKINEWS FRONT PAGE ABOVE THE FOLD (MARCH 12, 2014) 121
FIGURE 4.5: WIKINEWS FRONT PAGE BELOW THE FOLD (MARCH 12, 2014) 122
FIGURE 4.6: WIKINEWS ARTICLE PAGE (MARCH 12, 2014) 123
FIGURE 4.7: WIKINEWS LOGO 127
FIGURE 4.8: PAGE VIEWS ON ENGLISH WIKINEWS (IN MILLIONS) 149
FIGURE 4.9: NUMBER OF ACTIONS WITHIN PAST 30 DAYS, BY USER (AS OF MARCH 14, 2014) 155
FIGURE 4.10: NUMBER OF ACTIONS WITHIN PAST 30 DAYS, BY USER (AS OF JUNE 16, 2016) 156
FIGURE 4.11: ACTIVE EDITORS ON ENGLISH WIKIPEDIA (JAN 2003-NOV 2015) 157
FIGURE 4.12: ARTICLE REVIEW ISSUES IN WIKINEWS (JAN. 2013-APRIL 2013) 158
FIGURE 5.1: HOMEPAGE OF ALLVOICES.COM (JUNE 2016) 167
FIGURE 5.2: ALLVOICES HOMEPAGE, ABOVE THE FOLD (JULY 14, 2014) 177
FIGURE 5.3: ALLVOICES HOMEPAGE, FIRST SCREEN BELOW THE FOLD (JULY 14, 2014) 178
FIGURE 5.4: ALLVOICES HOMEPAGE, BOTTOM OF PAGE (JULY 14, 2014) 179
FIGURE 5.5: TABBED DROP-DOWN MENU AND HORIZONTAL SCROLL (JULY 14, 2014) 180
FIGURE 5.6: SAMPLE CONTRIBUTOR PAGE (JULY 14, 2014) 181
FIGURE 5.7: NEW HOMEPAGE AFTER SITE REDESIGN IN AUGUST 2014 (AUGUST 23, 2014) 182
FIGURE 5.8: TRENDING STORIES IN SITE REDESIGN AUGUST 2014 (AUGUST 23, 2014) 183
FIGURE 5.9: FEATURED WRITERS SECTION ON REDESIGNED HOMEPAGE (AUGUST 23, 2014) 184
FIGURE 5.10: AUTHOR’S CONTRIBUTOR SITE ON ALLVOICES (JULY 14, 2014) 188
FIGURE 5.11: PAYMENT CALCULATION FOR ALLVOICES CONTRIBUTOR SCORES 193
FIGURE 5.12: REPORT YOUR NEWS PAGE (JULY 14, 2014) 201
FIGURE 5.13: TOP STORIES BY CONTRIBUTORS, BY CATEGORY (JULY 14, 2014) 204
FIGURE 6.1: WIKINEWS BARNSTARS AND TROPHIES 230
1 Chapter 1: Making a Case for Collaborative Journalism

1.1 Introduction

Bad news seems to be everywhere for news organizations. Budget cuts leading to declines in newsroom staff, decreases in advertising revenues for print publications and the move for some newspapers and news magazines such as *Newsweek*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* to digital-only formats, combined with the uncertainty about potential new business models have exacerbated a long-simmering “two-legged crisis” in journalism (Blumler, 2010). Although warnings about a crisis in journalism are hardly new with the rise of social media (R. Anderson et al., 1994; Rosen, 1996), today’s social media landscape has played a role in challenging journalism as a profession (Hermida, 2012; Lewis, 2012) and especially has challenged the business models of advertising-supported, commercial journalism. This breakdown in producer-audience relations and eroding business models have combined to create a greater sense of urgency among those warning about the decline of journalism and its effects on modern democracy (R. Anderson et al., 1994; Lowrey & Anderson, 2005; McChesney, 2012; McChesney & Nichols, 2010; McChesney & Pickard, 2011; Pickard, 2020; Rosen, 1996). With 57% of the people saying that they have little or no trust in the news they get from the mass media (Morales, 2010), and only 24% giving a “very high/high” rating on ethical standards and honesty (just below bankers and above business executives) (Sonderman, 2012), it does not bode well for a profession that has built itself on assertions of credibility, trust, and truthfulness and that claims it has a key role for
healthy, functioning democracies. The continued gutting of news organizations by private equity firm Alden Capital and its subsidiary Digital First Media is also an alarming trend for the future health of the news industry (Pickard, 2020).

This study argues that the typical categories of mainstream journalism and alternative journalism, or professional journalism and citizen journalism (or its variants, such as participatory journalism, DIY journalism, or hyperlocal journalism), cannot adequately explain the dynamic interactions and cross-fertilization that is taking place between professional journalists—the traditional producers of news content—and audiences, the traditional consumers of that content. Further, these categories leave us with conceptual blind spots when studying journalism, especially “journalism from the edges” (Lasica, 2003, p. 71) of mainstream or professional journalism.

This study examines two collaborative journalism organizations, Wikinews and Allvoices, looking at each in-depth during a particular “slice in time” over several years in the latter 2000s and early- to mid-2010s. This time period is a few years after Wikinews was founded in late 2004, and roughly correlates to the period when Allvoices was at its height before being bought by a digital advertising company and radically changed a few years after the purchase, before ceasing existence in the mid-2010s. It is hoped that this examination of these two sites during a particular point in history of the development of social media and attempts to find alternative modes of citizen-generated journalism provides some lessons as to underlying fundamental dynamics that are still relevant today as more organizations continue to experiment with new modes of newsroom production and new business models to counteract the decline in traditional news organizations.
Despite the closing of Allvoices, and Wikinews’s continued anemic output by a handful of regular participants, thus arguably classifying both of these organizations as “failed” attempts at citizen journalism, this study argues that the lessons learned from each can be applied to efforts being made today to find new and innovative journalism models that actively engage users or citizens in ways that traditional newsrooms so far have largely not utilized. Even with the ostensible failure of these two organizations as robust producers of high-quality, original, citizen-generated sources of news for a wider audience, the lessons to be learned from their failures can help inform researchers and practitioners today who are either studying or planning for new modes of journalism. Furthermore, even as social media tools have advanced and changed since this study was conducted, the underlying forces at work are still applicable to today’s online environment.

One of these forces is the continued blurring of roles of media producers and media consumers, which makes dichotomous categories of “media producer” and “media consumer” problematic for researchers. Further adding to the complexity of social media research today is a more fundamental dichotomy from a research perspective between industry-centric views of what constitutes “value” and user-centric views of “value” (Bechmann & Lomborg, 2013). Although this study focuses on the user-centric aspect, it does acknowledge that the two views are, in some respects, two sides of the same coin and that both views need to be addressed for a complete picture of the social media landscape, of which journalism is a part.

The categorizations of professional journalism and citizen journalism and its variants parallels and amplifies the limits of the dichotomous industry-centric and user-
centric research views, which hampers potential answers to how and why our notions of news may be changing. I propose that a different name, collaborative journalism, will help researchers avoid many of the conceptual traps seen in older research perspectives that focus on either the industry perspective or the audience perspective, and that make trying to bridge these gaps so difficult and unwieldy. Looking at collaborative journalism through the lens of the emerging work on collaborative cultural production and social production communities will give us a more robust conceptual framework from which to better explore and understand the interactions between professional journalists, news organizations, and “citizen” or amateur news production. Furthermore, it may show how our notions of news are changing or may change, and what that may mean for citizens, news organizations, democratic government, and the networked public sphere.

1.1.1 Why “Collaborative Journalism?”

Calling for a new name to categorize the practices and organizational structures that are as diverse and complex as Wikinews and Allvoices, the two organizations being examined here, is not merely about semantics. It is an attempt to reframe the discussion and the way we look at the interactions taking place today with the various types of journalism being practiced. Without a proper frame to situate our understanding, certain key concepts cannot be properly examined. I am staking a claim along social constructionist lines that language shapes our reality and is not merely a reflection of some objective reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 2003). Further, as Goffman argues, frames provide us with ways of seeing the world in certain patterns that help us organize and make sense of our experiences (Goffman, 1986). The importance of framing
has been recognized in cognitive linguistics and from scholars offering advice to
progressives and conservatives alike in choosing their words carefully when framing
debates (Lakoff, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Luntz, 2007).

Framing journalism becomes especially important because of the disruptions
taking place today in all communications professions, especially journalism, and the
“critical juncture” in communications we are at, as McChesney states (McChesney, 2007;
McChesney & Nichols, 2010; McChesney & Pickard, 2011). Considering what shape our
media and communication environment may take into the rest of the 21st century, it is
especially vital now to properly understand what is taking place today so we can examine
issues in ways that do not limit our ability to look at new or alternative ways of media.
More specifically, reframing may open the profession to new ways of seeing journalistic
work and the nature of news, letting us situate legacy practices that work well with
innovative practices in social production that may redefine journalism and news as we
know it today.

The term “collaborative journalism” works well on several levels. First, it avoids
the traditional dualisms seen in the more commonly used terms such as “citizen
journalism,” “participatory journalism,” or “alternative journalism.” It also is not without
precedent. In 2012, J-Lab released the findings of a two-year study funded by the Knight
Foundation for what it termed “nine collaborative journalism pilot projects” that involved
hyperlocal media outlets working with established media organizations throughout the
U.S. (Schaffer, 2012). Also in 2012, Mercer University opened the Center for
Collaborative Journalism at its Macon, Georgia campus, funded by the Knight
Foundation and in partnership with The Telegraph and Georgia Public Broadcasting
(Knight Foundation, 2013; Mercer University, 2013). There are, of course, other academic centers that are exploring new types of journalism in the digital world, even if they do not specifically use the term “collaborative journalism,” including Kennesaw State University’s Center for Sustainable Journalism, American University’s Center for Social Media, and Montclair State University’s Center for Cooperative Media, among others. The terms may be different, but the basic premises behind what centers like these are examining all touch on aspects of collaboration in its various complexities.

Second, and in alignment with how “collaborative” is being used by J-Lab and Mercer University, the term better captures the new ways in which professional news organizations are influencing, being influenced by, and interacting with sites like Wikinews and Allvoices, as well as a range of blogs, hyperlocal news, citizen journalism sites, and social media. Recent authors that have examined the future of journalism have stressed the collaborative aspect of journalism not only among journalists themselves, but among the public and other institutional players (Batsell, 2015; Jarvis, 2014; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). The ways that blogs and citizen media sites interact with professional news media sites are varied and complex, and Table 1.1 highlights models that were mapped by J-Lab in 2006 that show this complexity and the problems associated with trying to map models too specifically, as there is frequent overlap in practices, principles, and organizational cultures.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Cooperatives</td>
<td>Volunteers share labor and decision-making.</td>
<td>The Forum, Rye Reflections, ArborUpdate.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trained Citizen Journalism Sites</td>
<td>Sites embrace journalistic values and train citizens in journalism techniques.</td>
<td>Madison Commons, Chi-Town Daily News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Journalist Non-Profit Sites</td>
<td>Sites created and run by professional journalists independent of legacy media organizations, with user participation.</td>
<td>New Haven Independent, Voice of San Diego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Journalist For-Profit Sites</td>
<td>Sites created and run by professional journalists independent of legacy media organizations, with user participation.</td>
<td>Westport Now, New West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog Aggregators</td>
<td>Multiple local blogs gathered in one place.</td>
<td>Greensboro 101, PhillyFuture.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syndicated Multi-Site Models</td>
<td>Tries to create models that can have syndicated content to other sites.</td>
<td>YourHub, Backfence, WickedLocal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legacy Media Sites</td>
<td>Sites launched by news organizations that give precedence to user-generated content.</td>
<td>BlufftonToday.com, Northwest Voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo Enterprise Non-Profit Sites</td>
<td>Created and run by people independent of large organizations, often with little or no journalism experience.</td>
<td>OlyBlog, Toledo Talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo Enterprise For-Profit Sites</td>
<td>Created and run by people independent of large organizations, often with little or no journalism experience.</td>
<td>H2otown, Baristanet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The degree of overlap among the model names raises difficult issues for researchers. For example, the sites in the “community cooperatives” model were all
created by current or former journalists, and like the “trained citizen-journalism sites,”
most of the sites trained citizens in journalistic techniques. The “syndicated multi-site”
models were created by legacy media organizations, albeit relatively small or local ones,
making it hard to determine what exactly differentiates them from the role that legacy
media sites play within this media ecosystem. A simpler term that can encompass the
relevant yet differing aspects of these varied practices seems to be in order.

Like many of the models listed in Table 1.1, the founders of and participants in
collaborative journalism sites Wikinews and Allvoices have adopted certain norms and
practices regarding the nature, production, and role of news. However, the sites have also
presented challenges to taken-for-granted assumptions in mainstream journalism
regarding the role of the audience, experiments with new business models for journalism
(and the potential pitfalls accompanying these experiments), and even definitions of
journalism and news itself.

It is important to note that in August 2014 Allvoices underwent a radical change
in its policies and procedures toward contributors, shifting to a hierarchical and
traditional news organization structure between an editorial team and contributors. This
change, and subsequent changes to its current status as a pure content marketing site,
destroyed the collaborative working practices and usability of the site discussed in detail
in chapter 5. Although business models are not the focus of this study, the question of
whether or not collaborative journalism sites can create sustainable business models is of
course an important one and are looked at in chapter 7. For this reason, the business
changes within Allvoices will be explained in more detail in chapter 5, with critical
reflections on what they may mean for collaborative journalism in general in chapter 7.
Unless otherwise stated, discussions on Allvoices will be about the site before the August 2014 changes, as the kinds of practices and functionality of the site underlie fundamental aspects of what collaborative journalism may hold for the future.

These sites are of course not the only examples of collaborative journalism, but they exemplify some of the fundamental characteristics and practices of such collaborative journalism sites—and each offers its own unique cautionary tale. In this study I do not include examples of collaborative journalism from some of the larger and well-known not-for-profit journalism sites such as Voice of San Diego, MinnPost, the Texas Tribune, or ProPublica, among many others that have arisen in recent years, largely because their hierarchical organizational structures and practices essentially emulate mainstream news rooms and are largely staffed by professional journalists. Nor do I look at crowdsourcing news sites like Her Campus or Odyssey, both of which started in 2009 (Odyssey as a print publication, then in 2014 as an online site), which largely followed the model of Allvoices, except targeted to college students in general and female college students in particular in the case of Her Campus.

This is not to make a judgment on the value of the kind of investigative journalism being done at sites like ProPublica or Texas Tribune, with their not-for-profit business models. Rather, it is simply to say that it does not challenge our status-quo understandings of journalism and journalistic practices in the same way that collaborative journalism sites like Wikinews and Allvoices potentially do. Neither does it address the issue of sustainability for collaborative journalism business models since ProPublica, like many of the others, were funded primarily through single large donors such as philanthropic foundations (Usher, 2011). As the 2012 J-Lab project demonstrated,
removing funding sometimes led to a quick demise of the collaborative journalism project (Schaffer, 2012), just as any termination of a primary source of funding would seriously threaten any non-profit organization’s survival.

1.1.2 Research Questions

This study looks at Wikinews and Allvoices from a primarily sociological perspective, examining how professional norms influence actions and are also altered through actions, and critically examines whether certain assumptions about the definition of news and how it is produced can withstand social production practices. The two main research questions, with two additional questions within the first question, are as follows:

RQ1: What roles have professional journalism norms, values and ideals played in the creation of and working practices of participants in Wikinews and Allvoices?

RQ1a: How do participants use these norms as reified concepts from which to organize and make sense of their journalistic work in a community of practice?

RQ1b: How have the norms borrowed from journalism helped or hindered the practice of collaborative journalism?

RQ2: What role has curation played in collaborative journalism and what effect could emerging forms of curation have for online journalism in general?

In seeking answers to these research questions, I am able to draw some preliminary conclusions on whether or not sustainable collaborative journalism practices
can be developed and if so, what practices and/or conceptions of news production may need to change in order to do so. Furthermore, the answers could point to ways to reconsider the networked public sphere and the possibilities and problems around creating a more engaged, active citizenry through journalistic practices.

1.2 Defining Collaboration

It is important to properly define “collaboration,” which will also help explain why the term “collaborative journalism” is a better descriptor than alternative terms such as “participatory journalism,” “DIY journalism,” “hyperlocal journalism,” or even “citizen” journalism.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, collaboration is defined as: “united labour, co-operation; *esp.* in literary, artistic, or scientific work.” Because cooperation is mentioned in the definition, it is worth also seeing how *OED* defines cooperation: “The act of co-operating, i.e., of working together towards the same end, purpose, or effect; joint operation.”

Cooperation has been looked at from a number of research traditions, including sociology, anthropology, peace studies, psychology and even biology in the form of evolutionary theory. Game theory and the variations of the classic Prisoner’s Dilemma Game explain how cooperative behavior can form through tit-for-tat actions even in automated systems (Axelrod, 1984, 1997). In the research literature on cooperation, various concepts such as reciprocity, trust, power, and culture are used to help frame or define the various functions and types of cooperation, but the term “collaboration” is
rarely mentioned. When collaboration is used, it is not defined and often seems to be used synonymously with cooperation (Argyle, 1991; Axelrod, 1997).

Research on collaboration tends to be more focused on management science, organizational studies, and collaboration engineering (CE) (Kolfschoten et al., 2010) than research on cooperation, which has a wider social scientific range of research. Collaboration can take place in formal organizational arrangements, such as partnerships between government agencies and civic groups, or in more informal ways through networks and communities of practice (Kamensky et al., 2004).

The business literature on collaboration, depending on the target audience, tends to focus on one or the other of these possibilities for collaboration and often promises techniques and methods for managers to achieve success through collaboration within an organizational environment or between organizations (Hansen, 2009; E. Rosen, 2009; Straus & Layton, 2002). The general focus on organizational partnerships and production can be seen in one such definition of collaboration: “Collaboration occurs when people from different organizations (or units within one organization) produce something together through joint effort, resources, and decision making, and share ownership of the final product or service (p. 7, Linden, 2002).”

Even in the business literature, however, there is no agreed-upon definition of collaboration because of the range of perspectives different scholars come from when studying aspects of collaborative practices. This gives a surprising lack of theoretical cohesiveness to the notion of collaboration and what it entails, with the exception of research done by Gray and Wood (Gray & Wood, 1991; Wood & Gray, 1991).
In an article that tried to define a comprehensive theory of collaboration, Wood and Gray looked at research on collaboration from a number of different researchers and created a definition that was a revision of an earlier definition of collaboration by Gray: “Collaboration occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain.” (p. 146, Wood & Gray, 1991)

Wood and Gray were primarily interested in creating a comprehensive theory of collaboration in order to further future studies that could help answer research questions such as “who is doing what, with what means, toward which ends?” (p. 146) The term “problem domain” was meant to cover the possibility of stakeholders having either common or different interests, while “autonomy” shows that the stakeholders are participating by choice in a collaboration and able to make independent decisions in the collaboration. The term “interactive processes” indicates that there is a change-oriented relationship involved among participating stakeholders, while shared rules, norms and structures may be implicit but may also need to be agreed upon before collaboration can take place. “Shared structures,” in Wood and Gray’s definition, are evolving and flexible and in fact they suggest that the duration of the structures can be a way to classify different forms of collaboration. All of these components can be mapped out to the domain of collaborative journalism, as Table 1.2 shows.
TABLE 1.2: WOOD AND GRAY’S DEFINITION OF “COLLABORATION” AND COMPARISON TO COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM PRACTICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wood and Gray term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Collaborative journalism comparison and relevance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous stakeholders</td>
<td>Stakeholders are participating by choice and able to make independent decisions</td>
<td>News organizations and citizens or citizen media choose to participate or work together on short-term or long-term projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem domain</td>
<td>Stakeholders may have either common or different interests</td>
<td>Groups may share interests in getting more readers or site visits and increasing news coverage of certain topics, as well as developing sustainable business models.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive processes</td>
<td>Change-oriented relationship</td>
<td>The interaction between citizens and professional journalists can potentially change views and practices among both groups, along with changing audience and media producer relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared rules, norms, and structures</td>
<td>May be implicit, but may also need to be explicitly stated</td>
<td>Citizens adopt many professional news norms and practices, but sometimes rules or practices have to be explicitly stated or training given to citizens who want to practice journalism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some common themes emerge from empirical research done on collaborative projects that researchers say has led to success in collaboration. These themes include: common aims; communication; commitment and determination; compromise; appropriate working processes; accountability; democracy and equality; resources; trust; and power (Huxham & Vangen, 2001). Note how some of the themes mirror issues
examined in research on cooperation, especially trust and power. The notions of reciprocity and culture, although not stated outright by Huxham and Vangen, underlie most of the other themes they outline.

Michael Schrage, in his study of collaborative technologies, cites many of the same aspects of collaboration that practitioners have noted, such as communication. However, he emphasizes that simply having communication is not enough. He states that the creation of something new while working together is a vital component to collaboration that differentiates it from communication, other forms of teamwork, and even romance. He states:

“collaboration is the process of shared creation: two or more individuals with complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed or could have come to on their own. Collaboration creates a shared meaning about a process, a product, or an event.” (Schrage, 1990, p. 40)

A component of cooperation, as most operational definitions and as the *OED* definition suggests, is the act of working together toward a shared goal. Two men pursuing the same woman are not acting cooperatively; rather, they are pursuing individual goals with the same objective (Argyle, 1991). In collaboration, the agents may be working together toward a shared goal, but they may also be working together toward different goals. Kolfschoten, et al. (2010) state that collaboration does not require creation of a shared understanding and does not define it, as Schrage claims, although they recognize that shared understanding may have an important role in collaborative efforts. They reject the notion that creating a shared understanding as an objective defines collaboration.
I would agree with this point, but I also believe that Schrage is not saying that shared understanding is an objective in and of itself. Rather, he is saying that the process of collaboration will lead to a shared understanding between the parties involved. The parties may not be collaborating for the purpose of generating a shared understanding, but nevertheless a new, shared understanding results (even as the shared understanding does not necessarily have to be equally shared or given the same value within parties). This is different than making shared understanding an objective. The difference may seem trivial, but it is an important difference between collaboration and cooperation.

In short, cooperation can be defined as working together toward a shared goal, while collaboration is a process of shared creation and understanding that may be toward a shared goal or different goals. In cooperation, there is already some fundamental level of shared understanding that enhances the agents’ ability to cooperate, and no shared meaning may be generated. The Prisoner’s Dilemma Game does not need any notion of shared meaning to achieve cooperation as an optimal strategy. Collaboration does not preclude some level of existing shared understanding or shared rules or norms, as Wood and Gray state, but as Schrage highlights the process itself also helps create a shared meaning that did not exist prior to the collaboration, even as the agents may work toward separate goals.

The distinction is important when looking at Wikinews and Allvoices and how their participants produced stories and collaborated within their respective organizations. And even more importantly, the distinction helps show what makes the term “collaborative journalism” a better representation of the dynamics taking place today.
Before we examine the characteristics of collaborative journalism and how it can be better defined, we first need to look at other types of non-professional journalism today and note comparisons between them and collaborative journalism.

1.3 Different “Types” of Non-Professional Journalism Today

The following sections will briefly describe some of the major “types” of non-professional journalism being practiced today. Some, such as alternative journalism or radical journalism, have been around long before digital media but have experienced a rebirth or expansion thanks to the Internet. Others, such as social news sites, exist largely because of the communication tools that an interactive, digital networked media world allows in the form of social media.

Although collaborative journalism shares many characteristics with citizen journalism, alternative journalism, and social news it does have important differences that puts collaborative journalism into a more robust realm of social production that these other terms and practices simply do not adequately encompass. Along with the brief descriptions of these other types of journalism and how they have developed, they will be compared and contrasted with aspects of collaborative journalism to show how collaborative journalism shares some characteristics with all of them and in important ways actually encompasses them.

1.3.1 Citizen Journalism

In recent years, some respected mainstream journalists and former journalists have been advocating for and organizing around incorporating citizen journalism in the
news mix. From noted journalists such as Dan Gillmor and Jeff Jarvis, and organizations such as Journalism That Matters, which include a number of former and practicing journalists, there are strong voices advocating for fundamental changes in the news industry. Such individuals and groups have raised important questions about the challenges and changes that journalism is going through in the early 21st century (Gillmor, 2004; Holman, 2008). Like-minded organizations such as the Knight Community News Network, an initiative of J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism at American University, or the Center for Sustainable Journalism, founded by Leonard Witt at Kennesaw State University in 2009 through a grant from the Harnisch Foundation, are exploring ways to keep journalism viable and sustainable in today’s media landscape (Moro, 2009).

The seeds of advocating for citizen journalism, or at least encouraging more citizen engagement with news organizations, can be traced back to the notion of public journalism, sometimes called civic journalism. The public journalism movement began roughly from the early 1990s by some professional journalists as a way to deal with some of the flaws in journalism practices and news coverage and to re-engage citizens in civic life and with the news organizations that were covering their communities (Charity, 1995; Glasser, 1999; Haas, 2007; Merritt, 1998; Rosen, 1996). But the intellectual roots of the public journalism movement and the underlying dissatisfaction with the product of journalism and the role of journalism in democracy can be traced even further back, to the debates between John Dewey and Walter Lippmann in the early twentieth century (Carey, 1997; Haas, 2007).
Some have characterized public journalism as a “theory in search of a practice” (Merritt, 2010). The public journalism movement was criticized by many professional journalists for a variety of reasons, ranging from claims that it brings an advocacy role to the ostensibly neutral or objective role of journalists to concerns that it abrogates the journalist’s function in society to the whims of the public (Rosen, 1996). Public journalism advocates felt that the movement was often mischaracterized and marginalized in the press, saying public journalism often had “journalism done to it” (Merritt, 1998). A number of factors kept the movement from gaining widespread momentum, including debates within the profession, and sporadic and largely uncoordinated efforts at trying to find a unified set of practices that could be defined as public journalism that were better than existing journalistic practices.

The growing popularity of the Web and increased ability by the public to publish their own material through web sites, blogs, and social media outlets simultaneously confirmed some of the tenets of public journalism regarding an untapped desire among the public to engage with each other through news even as it superseded the public journalism movement to some extent (Merritt, 2010). The idea of better engaging citizens with the news through public discussions quickly became a revolution in which citizens could create, distribute, and discuss the news themselves through discussion forums, blogs, or social media like Facebook and Twitter.

The notion of public journalism has evolved into what is called any number of names: citizen journalism, participatory journalism, hyperlocal journalism, grassroots journalism, or even DIY journalism, leading some to say that citizen journalism is a practice in search of a theory (Merritt, 2010). However, the term “citizen journalism” has
been criticized as being inaccurate and more than a little smug, as if citizen-created media and blogs would make legacy media organizations obsolete (Safran, 2005). This has obviously not been the case.

Hyperlocal journalism, as its name suggests, focuses on the geographic aspect of citizen journalism. Even so, the term is still not concretely defined, although Metzgar, et al. do suggest a definition of what they call hyperlocal media organizations (HLMOs):

“Hyperlocal media operations are geographically-based, community-oriented, original-news-reporting organizations indigenous to the web and intended to fill perceived gaps in coverage of an issue or region and to promote civic engagement” (Metzgar, Kurpius, & Rowley, 2011, p. 774). Many of the sites listed in Table 1.1 are either hyperlocal sites or were created to aggregate hyperlocal news sources, but citizen journalism can of course encompass far wider topics than specific neighborhood or regional news.

Despite the limiting geographic focus in the term “hyperlocal journalism,” it does capture an important dynamic that has helped spur the rise of citizen journalism; namely the drastic reductions in newsroom staffs and news coverage of local communities that has left a gap in news coverage on topics that are, arguably, more important to most people than international news. Some news organizations have attempted to fill this gap by encouraging citizens to report or partnering with hyperlocal citizen journalism sites or blogs.

In order to best do this, news organizations recognize the need to train citizens in various news-gathering and reporting techniques so they can have the kind of trusted content they believe their audiences expect, especially for local news. This further complicates the traditional divide between citizen (read “amateur”) journalism and
professional journalism as citizens learn news gathering, production, interviewing, writing techniques and other professional journalism norms from professional journalists, acting as unpaid reporters or sources for raw information, which is then packaged by professional journalists. The implications of the attempts to professionalize and train citizen-journalists along traditional journalism standards has been criticized as a way for mainstream journalism to maintain their power as agenda setters and arbiters of what good journalism is (Usher, 2011). This is a valid point, but the issue is complex and deserves a closer look.

The attempts at training citizen-journalists in interviewing skills, research, acquiring public documents, copy-editing and writing, and other typical work done by professional journalists may actually be construed in two ways. One perspective places these efforts by mainstream journalism within a larger framework of media industry hegemony that, essentially, uses user-generated content (UGC) creators as a kind of digital slave labor (Bolin, 2012; Kperogi, 2011; Kreider, 2013; Ornebring, 2008; Petersen, 2008; Terranova, 2000). It is important to recognize actions by media organizations that attempt to co-opt or utilize user contributions in unfair ways in order to try to maintain profitability or hegemonic positions, and this is discussed again in the last chapter.

However, even if those motives may be evident, it is not necessarily the case that “produsers” and media companies must engage in a hegemonic and counter-hegemonic war (Bruns, 2012). Looked at from a different perspective, it can be said that many of the journalistic skills citizens are learning complement the skills and knowledge needed by an engaged and informed citizenry that can question, challenge, and make transparent the workings of government and business.
If journalism should be a conversation and not a lecture (Min, 2005; Morgan, 2009; Safran, 2005), then teaching citizens journalism skills is giving them the vocabulary and grammar to carry on that conversation. Training citizens about certain best practices in journalism does not necessarily mean they will blindly follow all of those practices, however, but it does influence the kind of work that citizens may do in defining and producing news, which will be explored in greater detail in this study. This does not necessarily mean that it will shut the door to new types of news that may evolve, or foreclose the potential of hybrid techniques of traditional news gathering and new forms of storytelling, but on the other hand its potential influence cannot be ignored.

The term “participatory journalism” is often used synonymously with citizen journalism and is becoming more commonly used by journalism and media scholars (Deuze et al., 2007; Domingo et al., 2008; Hujanen, 2013; Lih, 2004; Safran, 2005; Singer et al., 2011; Thurman & Hermida, 2010). The research on participatory journalism has tended to focus on audience participation in two main areas; either taking place as UGC primarily on news article discussion pages or other types of interactive communication platforms originating from legacy media organizations (Heinonen, 2011; Hermida, 2011; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Thurman & Hermida, 2010), or social media platforms like blogs as examples of participatory journalism (Singer, 2005). The former approach tends to subordinate the audience into a reactive, though potentially influential role based on news produced by legacy media organizations, while the latter focus struggles with defining “journalism” in a way that bridges professional norms with new practices without broadening the definition of journalism so much that it loses its
conceptual clarity. This is a problem that is shared with definitions of journalism and news when we look at social news in the next section.

In sum, citizen journalism and its alternative terms such as participatory journalism or hyperlocal journalism never quite bridge the rift created by conceptualizing professional journalism and citizen or amateur journalism as, if not exactly opposites, then at least as citizen journalism as somehow inferior to what professional journalists do. The focus on “citizen” moves researchers into a forced and artificial dichotomy that misses some of the important relational components of what is taking place in journalism today.

The term “networked journalism” (Beckett, 2008) takes some steps toward bridging this gap, but suffers to some extent from not being able to fully capture the components of collaboration and change that take place among participants in collaborative journalism projects. Its focus on the networked dynamics that occur today in the online digital media environment is not misplaced, but seems to ignore the people involved in those networks. The term “social news” may at first blush seem to better capture that relational aspects, but as we will see it falls short as an adequate descriptive term in other ways.

1.3.2 Social News

Social media make it very easy for people to widely distribute news that has been written and published elsewhere, and some of the most well-trafficked sites on the Web aggregate this kind of content, which Axel Bruns calls “gatewatching” sites (Bruns, 2005). Bruns includes Slashdot, Digg, MediaChannel, Kuro5hin, and Plastic as examples
of gatewatching sites, and popular blogs such as Huffington Post or Reddit can also be considered in this category, although the Huffington Post does also have original content in addition to reposted material.

Slashdot, Digg, and other similar sites, like many popular blogs, tend to be clearing houses in which articles or excerpts from legacy journalism sites are posted, commented on, and voted up or down in popularity by readers, which determines which stories appear on the home page. The format has proved popular, with a new term—the Slashdot Effect—entering the Web vernacular to refer to web sites crashing after they are mentioned on Slashdot because of all the users that then visit the site that appeared on the first page of Slashdot (Halavais, 2001).

Bruns categorizes these gatewatching sites as types of news web sites, saying that they subvert the traditional gatekeeping function of editors in news organizations by encouraging the publicity of information that then gets sorted out through online discussions (Bruns, 2005). This notion is echoed by Clay Shirky in what he calls the “publish, then filter” model of today’s Internet as opposed to the traditional “filter, then publish” bottleneck of traditional media (Shirky, 2008). Bruns even calls this model a form of participatory or peer-to-peer (P2P) journalism. Dutton likens the emergence of the Internet among networking individuals to an increasingly important “Fifth Estate” that challenges the institutional authority of the other estates, including the Fourth Estate of journalism (Dutton, 2009).

The popularity of aggregator or gatewatching sites like Slashdot or Reddit and generally high levels of interaction among users, combined with the various ratings systems that have been created does seem to indicate a new or different type of
journalism that emphasizes users rather than traditional news producers. By focusing on produsers (Bruns, 2008), it does seem to promise a radical challenge to the traditional producer/audience divide in journalism. Professional journalists have tended to push the relevance of audience comments to the margins within their own workplace milieu (Canter, 2013; Heinonen, 2011), even as news organizations have wrestled with the implications of allowing citizen journalism participation (Lewis et al., 2010) or continue to primarily see citizens as potential sources for raw news (Williams et al., 2011).

However, there is one blind spot in too readily defining gatewatching sites as participatory journalism or social news that offer multiperspectival views of the news, and that is the fact that the discussions primarily rely on news that has already been created, mostly by professional news organizations—and which often originated from public relations or official government sources. According to a 2009 study by Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism that looked at the media ecosystem in Baltimore over one week in July, 83% of the news stories in all media simply repeated information that originated elsewhere, primarily from legacy media organizations and of that mostly from newspapers (Pew Research Center’s Journalism Project Staff, 2010). The same study showed that Baltimore newspapers had reduced the number of their stories by 73% since 1991.

Gatekeeping sites may find hidden nuggets of news and widely publicize them, letting the broader online community discuss and dissect what has been posted, but the fact remains that the vast majority of these discussions are based on material that came from legacy media organizations—material that had already gone through the traditional journalism gatekeeping process of “filter, then publish.” Some scholars argue that in the
traditional news production process, news gathering is actually more important in
determining what gets sent through the gatekeeping process than news processing, which
occurs later in the production process and which was the focus of the seminal
gatekeeping study of the wire editor “Mr. Gates” (Bass, 1969). The news that a wire
service editor like Mr. Gates chooses to pass on through the news publication process has
already largely been vetted to a certain extent by the reporter who gathered the news and
put it into a form that is recognized as “news.” Similarly, the comments on articles from
traditional media, by and large, will only be as good as the stories they are derived from.

This does not mean that gatewatching sites should be dismissed or are
unimportant. The popularity of the sites says something about how they are filling a need
among online users, even if that need seems to gravitate more often toward personal
insults or diatribes than it does toward enlightening discussions on weighty political
matters. But the fact is that most social news derives from legacy media sources and
makes almost no effort toward original reporting.

As we will see later in this study, collaborative journalism does share some
characteristics of social news or gatewatching sites. Like social news sites, they have
many examples of participants commenting on or using sources from mainstream news
stories rather than creating entirely original news content. And also like gatewatching
sites, the discussions that arise from an article can often be more informative than the
original article, as well as introducing different views and challenging readers’
assumptions. Even more importantly, they share with gatewatching sites practices and
beliefs that assume there is little or no divide between knowledge producers and the
audience.
However, one important distinction between the collaborative journalism sites being studied here and social news in general is that collaborative journalism encourages or in some manner rewards news creation and production. This is an important difference, even if in practice Wikinews and Allvoices do not always match their ideals regarding focusing on original reporting.

Too readily defining social news as journalism ignores the fundamental role that newsgathering, reporting, fact-checking, editing, and gatekeeping play in determining what news stories are available in the first place for further comments and discussion. In the social news media ecosystem, legacy media organizations may not be in the spotlight in the same way that they are with participatory or citizen journalism, but they are clearly behind the scenes and serving an important agenda-setting function that gets masked when defining these dynamics as social news or gatewatching.

By masking the continued, and perhaps even more influential agenda-setting control legacy media organizations may have in the social news environment, it makes it harder for scholars to determine how corporate media influences news coverage in the first place, and does not call into question the business models being used in mainstream journalism. For that we can explore another type of journalism that has long been used even before the digital age and that has challenged many traditional assumptions about the role that corporate control has played in journalism over the years.

1.3.3 Alternative Journalism

“Alternative media” has come to be the most widely used term for media that attempts to challenge mainstream or corporate media, rather than the term “radical
media” popularized through John Downing’s groundbreaking 1984 book, *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* (Downing, 2001). Thanks in part to the Indymedia group, the term “independent media” has also become used even though it technically is the unofficial name of the network of Independent Media Centers throughout the world.

Like citizen journalism, participatory journalism, and social news, the key underlying elements in current conceptualizations of alternative journalism involve a blurring of the traditional divide between producer and audience (Atton, 2002, 2003). In this process, public discourse takes place and active communities of practice are formed, with a public that is more engaged in civic activities partly through media creation—even though creating media is not necessarily an end in itself (Downing, 1988). This sentiment is echoed by some public journalism advocates (Merritt, 1998), and seen in changes in community members’ perceptions and attitudes about their own neighborhoods when they are able to tell their own news stories (Costera Meijer, 2013).

Even when no explicitly political goals are stated, the differences that occur on a number of levels between people who passively consume media content compared to people who create and distribute media are great. The passive consumer becomes the active producer, and a discourse is started with others in which individuals can create, share, and debate meanings and values—the very dynamics that are required for a healthy public sphere and robust civic engagement (Balkin, 2004; Benkler, 2006; Lessig, 2004). This is the kind of multiperspectival view of news that Gans calls for and that we see in the kinds of discussions taking place occasionally on gatewatching sites (Bruns, 2005, 2008; Gans, 1980).
It would seem the term “alternative journalism” may be a good substitute for the other terms commonly used today, but the term “alternative” still begs the question—alternative to what? The simple answer is “alternative to the mainstream media (MSM),” which for media critics is often synonymous with “corporate,” “for profit,” and “undemocratic.” Self-defined alternative journalism sites like the Indymedia network take oppositional or radical stances against mainstream news topics and news story styles, even if some of their news production practices follow mainstream news practices (Atton, 2003; Downing, 2003; Platon & Deuze, 2003).

Unlike alternative journalism sites, Wikinews and Allvoices tend to emulate mainstream news styles and cite primarily mainstream news sources in the stories they use, rewrite, or comment on. The credibility or authority of material taken from radical or alternative media sources is often challenged by other participants in sites like Wikinews (McIntosh, 2008). In addition, collaborative journalism sites generally do not have the same radical or oppositional stance toward capitalism that alternative media sites hold.

Commercialism is commonly seen as one of the main reasons mainstream journalism suffers from the image and trust problems among the public it does today (McChesney, 1999, 2004, 2013; McChesney & Pickard, 2011). Many of the alternative media organizations that have been created since the mid- to late 1990s, such as the low-power FM (LPFM) movement and the Indymedia movement, have done so with one of their mandates being non-profit and not to “sell out” to corporate media (Opel, 2004). The executives at Allvoices had no such qualms, as will be seen, nor did some of its most active contributors who stayed on after drastic changes.
Despite the hardships that arise in under-funding, most alternative media organizations have remained committed to non-profit principles. Anti-corporate principles and practices protect alternative media from co-optation by mainstream media (Platon & Deuze, 2003). Other scholars likewise argue that anti-corporate principles are not a handicap, saying that lack of general audience and unprofessional production are factors that will make alternative media a force in a participatory public sphere (Harcup, 2003). However, this viewpoint is not supported by all activist groups and alternative media organizations, many of whom see a need to professionalize the look of their media content in order to reach a larger audience and to be taken seriously by potential audience members outside activist circles (A. Gupta, personal communication, 2005).

The issue of financial sustainability is not lost on collaborative journalism sites being studied here, and it is an issue that will affect what shape journalism may take in the future. Any examination of collaborative journalism must consider the effect that funding and finances play on the organization, not only for its own sustainability but for the viability of collaborative journalism as a sustainable and relevant model of journalism. To frame collaborative journalism as a category of alternative journalism, with alternative media’s generally anti-corporate stance, ignores the fact that collaborative journalism sites often do not share the same skepticism toward capitalism that alternative media sites do nor do they share the skepticism of traditional news story formats and story topics.

With these brief looks at the other types of “journalisms” being researched and practiced today, and the conceptual and philosophical blind spots that each has, it is hoped that it is now clearer as to why a term like collaborative journalism will serve us better. One reason it is better is not because it ignores or minimizes the dynamics and
characteristics of these other types of journalism, but because it encompasses them all in relevant aspects while also giving us new perspectives. In order to better explain this, I will move from what collaborative journalism is not to what it is.

1.4 Characteristics of Collaborative Journalism

In making an argument that collaborative journalism could encompass almost all of the types of journalism discussed above it may seem that according to the definition of collaboration being used here that even professional journalism is essentially collaborative and thus could be called collaborative journalism. Each person plays a role in producing what we see, read or hear as “news,” and each may be working toward separate goals within the larger news production process. A reporter is concerned with getting the facts right and writing the story by deadline and may have little, if any, say or concern over how her story is designed or its headline. A managing editor is concerned with deciding what stories will appear and where, and making sure all the processes are running smoothly and on time.

The difference between the mainstream model and practices of professional journalism or even its non-profit counterparts such as ProPublica and what I am defining as collaborative journalism is an important one. In mainstream journalism, roles are clearly defined by titles and largely hierarchical—a reporter has little if any say in her story after it has reached a certain point in the news production process, usually does not even choose which stories she covers, and there is little sense of creating shared meaning.

There is an equally large divide between professional journalists and the audience, or general public, despite the changes discussed earlier regarding news organizations
using contributions from users for raw news feeds, co-opting hyperlocal journalism sites within a part of the legacy media site, or encouraging online discussions of news stories. Collaboration, if it happens at all between the public and journalists, is infrequent and generally does not encourage the creation of shared meaning. If anything, as journalists feel increasingly threatened as professionals, they are more likely to create and demarcate boundaries both professional and institutional in order to separate themselves from non-professionals, much as we have seen in the debates regarding whether blogging is journalism or not even as blogging changes journalism (Hermida, 2009; Kim Bivens, 2008). For most mainstream news organizations, the audience has relatively little input in what types of stories are covered and is relegated to a reactionary or responsive role in the form of letters to the editor, op-eds, or in discussion forums at the ends of articles.

Broadly speaking, collaborative journalism differs from professional journalism in its organizational structures and practices. These structures and practices may borrow from professional journalism to a greater or lesser degree depending on the collaborative journalism organization, but overall they tend to be more heterarchical and more inclusive of the audience in the decision-making and news-creation process than professional journalism organizations. Barriers to entry are extremely low or non-existent, and participation on democratic principles is encouraged by most collaborative journalism sites. These characteristics will be explored in greater detail in later chapters.

In addition to the differing organizational structures and practices, there are three main characteristics that help define collaborative journalism. These are the influences from professional journalism norms, values, and ideals; the role of curation; and the
social production of news. Each of these will be discussed briefly here and explored in more detail in later chapters.

1.4.1 **Influences from Professional Journalism Norms, Values, and Ideals**

One thing that differentiates the news sites being studied here from other online forums and communities of practice such as fan sites, gaming sites, or even blogs in which people debate and discuss issues important to them is the focus collaborative journalism sites have on news and of a sense of a larger public interest or public audience. Fan sites and gaming forums have specialized, robust discussions over specific topics and usually do not consider a larger audience, or general public, outside their specific interests in the way that journalism sites do.

This notion of speaking to a wider audience, a public, is part of a worldview taken from professional journalism values and ideals. In reporting on something, even if it is simply taking video or photographs and sending them to CNN’s iReport, there is an implicit notion of providing new information as a public good to an unseen and imagined audience. Furthermore, as news organizations provide training in production and news reporting and writing techniques, citizens are simultaneously receiving definitions and norms of what is defined as “newsworthy” and what is not. This training in journalism practices simultaneously imparts certain professional norms on citizens, reinforcing the sense that professional journalists are the best arbiters of what news should be (Usher, 2011).
Collaborative journalism acknowledges this influence, but also acknowledges that increased citizen participation in news production can influence certain norms and assumptions regarding professional journalism. This dynamic has begun to be explored by other scholars (Aitamurto & Lewis, 2012; Heinonen, 2011; Hermida, 2011, 2012; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Lewis, 2012; Paterson & Domingo, 2008; Schmitz Weiss & Domingo, 2010), but deserves much further study (it is hoped that this study is a contribution to that body of knowledge).

It is understood here that citizens participating in collaborative news ventures do not simply accept every dictate and norm handed down from on high by professional journalism, but neither do they throw everything out and start with a tabula rasa. The variable influences create a flexible and fluid situation that simultaneously helps but that can also hinder some collaborative journalism practices, which are discussed in later chapters. For our purposes in this chapter it is enough to state that collaborative journalism borrows freely from professional journalism norms, ideals, and values—and sometimes does so unconsciously—even as its practices may in turn influence those norms, ideals, and values.

Schrage’s definition of collaboration nicely covers the main characteristics and interactions seen today among Wikinews and Allvoices participants. It also differentiates collaborative journalism from current practices by some mainstream newsrooms today that use citizen reporters primarily as raw news feeds with little or no editorial voice in what gets produced or written, or in defining what is newsworthy. The term “collaborative” covers multiple levels of relationships without making a judgment on the validity of one form of journalism over another. It emphasizes the relational aspect of the
situation, and covers the mentoring relationship between professional and citizen journalists, the work among citizens themselves, and what is done at the inter-organizational level between collaborative journalism sites and mainstream news organizations.

1.4.2 Curation

Largely because of the plethora of information available online, curation has taken on greater importance in social media in recent years. The definition of the term “curation” has been undergoing something of a transformation in the past few years, and the lack of definitional clarity needs to be addressed. Traditionally, curators are in museums or sometimes libraries and are seen as subject experts in their fields, are responsible for keeping abreast of new scholarly developments in their fields, choosing new materials for museum or library collections, ensuring the collections are well-preserved, and deciding what items are shown to the public. They also created knowledge as they researched the history of items and interpreted their meanings within the field or museum collection (American Association of Museums Curators Committee, 2009).

Museum curators could be compared in some ways with the gatekeeping role that journalists and editors play with media in the sense that both groups, through specialized knowledge or expertise, had access to information that the general public generally did not have access to. Part of both the curator’s and journalist’s roles were to decide what information was relevant to their respective audiences and give that limited and packaged form of the information to them. Like journalists, curators also interpreted existing information and created new knowledge.
Today, with the plethora of information online, the act of curation has taken on new meanings through new practices. Unlike the traditional gatekeeping model of journalism (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; White, 1950), in which journalists acted as an important filter of information to the public, today curation does not exclude information but rather acts on a “publish, then filter” model (Shirky, 2008). This signals an important shift in the role that curation plays, as the gatekeepers, who previously kept certain information from their audience as part of the gatekeeping process, now act more as “gatewatchers” (Bruns, 2005), who direct their audience to sources that they assume the audience will find interesting and that encourage the audience members to explore more or even access the sources directly. The gatewatching process is not only done by professionals, but can now be done by anyone, and can gain relevance and importance with more collaboration and participation from users, creating a kind of “crowdcuration.”

Ratings systems can be considered as a type of curation that uses this dynamic, as can the numbers of user comments or other displays of interest in articles, such as the number of times an article is shared. Ratings as curation are more relevant in Allvoices than in Wikinews, for two main reasons. First, Allvoices’s design and user interface have been created with much more of a social media focus in mind. Second, after the organizational and policy change Allvoices conducted in August 2014 and before it further changed to a pure content marketing site, it more closely emulated a traditional news organization media model than in its earlier incarnation. Wikinews, with its wiki-based system and more static design and user interface, does not tend to favor ratings as curation, and it likewise largely has remained the same in terms of policy and organizational structures.
Wikinews differs from Allvoices from a curatorial perspective in that many acts of curation take place in the discussion, or talk pages, among users as they negotiate and debate different news stories. In this way, Wikinews contributors serve the traditional gatekeeping role to some degree, even though their discussions are available for anyone to see and previous versions of articles are also able to be read. The limited social media interface and resulting lack of ability for users to curate in the same way that a user on Allvoices is explored in a later chapter as a manifestation of a way of thinking that fails to fully take advantage of the new curatorial dynamics taking place on the Web, and can be seen as a contributing factor for why Wikinews has not generated the same level of participation or users as some other collaborative journalism sites.

User feedback in the form of discussion comments can also be seen as a kind of curation in so far as some comments may add relevant information or correct errors in stories (though admittedly most comments do not do this). However, even stating an opinion and making comments is a tacit admission of the relevance of an article to a user, and rough measures of an article’s popularity (or controversy) can be gleaned from looking at the number of comments about it.

Wikinews has either refused to implement or been slow to adapt to social media features. Only in early 2007, about two years after being founded, did Wikinews reluctantly allow an opinion tab in which readers could make comments and state opinions about articles. Similarly, a proposal to include article ratings—a common feature of many content websites—was rejected by Wikinews participants because of fears ratings would deter new contributors.
As curational practices continue to evolve and grow and as better automated systems develop to let online users determine who they trust for their curated content, the kinds of practices we saw in collaborative journalism sites like Allvoices will only become more important. In this regard, the kinds of user-generated content that we see today that has been called social news or participatory journalism should actually be rethought of as a component of collaborative journalism. This is one area in which the established professional norms of journalism do not hold sway nearly as much as they do in news production and selection, and is an area in which the active public—or at least the audience—may have far more ability to affect the media ecosystem than when acting as citizen journalists.

1.4.3 Social Production of News

Collaborative journalism shares characteristics of the social production of news with citizen or participatory journalism, social news, and alternative journalism, especially regarding diminishing the differences between media producers and media audiences and the greater role that audiences play in creating or producing news.

In fact, as will be explained in Chapter 2, the term “social production community” (SPC) will be used to refer to how participants work in collaborative journalism organizations. Collaborative journalism is a type of social production, and the dynamics of social production will be explored in greater detail in this study to determine how viable collaborative journalism organizations may be from an organizational perspective. Wikinews and Allvoices provide the use cases in which to look at pitfalls and promising activities within the social production of news.
Collaborative journalism sites offer the same kinds of interaction and discussion for users about news that gatewatching or social news sites provide, but the discussions in collaborative journalism sites like Wikinews also expand into the realm of “meta-news” issues. For example, in Wikinews, debates range among active users about the validity of sources used, word choices, and headlines, as well as fact-checking and general content guidelines (Wikinews, 2013d). There are also active discussions in the “Watercooler” or “Talk” section of Wikinews about a range of policies regarding the site itself that affect its look and content (Wikinews, 2007k). This type of transparent conversation about “behind the scenes” issues of the news production process that are normally hidden from the audience, or that go unquestioned by professional journalists, gives participants in Wikinews a more complex and reflexive look at how news stories are produced and the nature and type of news, which the gatewatching sites do not do in such an apparent or reflexive way.

In the Talk section of Wikinews we can see how the ideal of transparency can often run against the real-world practicalities of news production and how it can affect the culture of an SPC. Furthermore, we clearly see in these meta-news discussions the influences that news norms and values have had on participants and their concepts of news and the news production process. Allvoices did not have the same degree of behind-the-scenes discussions and heterarchical structure that Wikinews does, but nevertheless we can still see how the social production of news took place.

A different framework from which to look at collaborative journalism as a type of social production may not seem immediately obvious but it actually bears many relevant similarities to collaborative journalism. In fact, collaborative journalism SPCs may do
well to model some of their production and organizational practices after an SPC that has
proved itself to be successful over the years not only from an organizational and
sustainable community sense, but from an economic one as well.

1.5 Comparing F/OSS and Collaborative Journalism

The free and open source software (F/OSS) movement is an excellent example of
SPCs, and its various success stories have been held up as examples of how collaborative
social production can successfully stand up against the growing commercialization of the
Internet and computing. Further, F/OSS collaborative activities challenge fundamentally
many of the assumptions we have in traditional economics and society regarding the
basic selfishness of people and our supposed lack of willingness to work together without
material rewards, or the need to work within the structure of a firm (Benkler, 2002).
Chapter 2 will go into more detail regarding the theoretical underpinnings of social
production communities; here we will focus on relevant comparisons between F/OSS and
collaborative journalism and in looking at how collaborative journalism may be able to
learn from the F/OSS movement.

The F/OSS community consists of various software developers, computer
programmers, and engineers who believe in consensus, transparency, participation, and
the power of an intellectual commons as a greater public good over intellectual property
(Stallman, 2010). They are largely responsible for a growing number of free or low-cost
software applications and tools that are accessible to more people than their higher-priced
proprietary counterparts. Government agencies in the U.S. such as the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Veterans Administration (VA), and local governments in the U.S. and abroad have either mandated their offices search for open source software solutions or have adopted open source in whole or in part throughout their organizations in order to save money.

After the massive problems regarding the launch of the Healthcare.gov website, which used proprietary software, an online petition was created to demand that the site be created using open source software, with some experts saying the problems were largely because the government did not use open source software (Grothaus, 2013). The city government of Munich, Germany was one of the largest migrations entirely to open source software in 2009, although it is far more common for organizations to use open source as support for or along with proprietary software systems (Romeo, 2008).

Making comparisons between the F/OSS movement and collaborative journalism may seem to be a stretch, but actually much can be gleaned from looking at their similarities, as seen in Table 1.3. Similar comparisons have also been made by some scholars looking at Wikipedia, and how journalism may be reinvented from adopting lessons from the F/OSS movement, or how journalism can be re-imagined within an open source framework (Lewis & Usher, 2013; Lih, 2004; Witt, 2006).
TABLE 1.3: SHARED CHARACTERISTICS OF F/OSS MOVEMENT AND COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F/OSS Movement</th>
<th>Collaborative Journalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and culture production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of social production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities of practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving a greater public good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about intellectual property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges toward established business practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakdown of producer/consumer divide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging audience activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is perhaps easier to see collaborative journalism as a type of knowledge or culture production than open source software, but the latter nevertheless is also knowledge and culture production. To be sure, it may not be as accessible to the average person as reading a news story is because far more people can read words than who can write computer code, but open source software as a type of social production nevertheless has important implications for knowledge production and business models (Chesbrough, 2003).

The role that social production of knowledge or culture plays in both fields will be explored in later chapters, especially the implications social production has for producing news content. At this point, it is sufficient to say that a social production framework can actually provide us with useful conceptual tools from which to better analyze collaborative journalism practices.
The breakdown of the traditional producer/consumer divide seen in the F/OSS movement parallels what was discussed above regarding participatory media, even though the technical knowledge required for software development makes for a higher barrier of entry to the layperson than most forms of media production. Even without technical or programming expertise, some F/OSS sites such as LibreOffice encourage users to participate in activities such as promoting the software or taking part in testing it and reporting bugs.

Aspects of social production also challenge conventional wisdom regarding business models, although this has been seen more in F/OSS than in collaborative journalism to date. Nevertheless, the fact that many people are willing to participate and work for free in both realms defies conventional market logic regarding incentives and rewards to work.

F/OSS software and projects have challenged corporate control of computing far more effectively than any alternative media business model has ever challenged mainstream media organizations. From operating systems such as Linux, databases like MySQL, Web software projects from the Apache Foundation, and Web browsers such as Firefox we can see examples of where companies have had to adapt to threats to their traditional business models from free and open source software.

For example, IBM obtained the largest number of patents of any company every year from 1993 to 2004, totaling more than 29,000 patents during that time (Benkler, 2006). However, IBM also has adapted its business models to the emergence of free software, primarily dealing with the Linux operating system. Within four years of adopting Linux, by 2004, the various Linux-related services and support that IBM offered
around free software provided $2 billion a year for IBM, double the revenue of their patenting and licensing components (Benkler, 2006). However, companies like Microsoft continue to see open source as a serious threat to their business, and have even gone so far as to ban the use of open source software by developers who create applications for their Windows Phone and Xbox gaming system (Weathersby, 2011).

The role of intellectual property regimes for creative works also touches both areas, though in varying degrees. F/OSS supporters are often very vocal about the detrimental effect proprietary computer systems have on a range of issues, including creativity, the rate of innovation, security, and economic health (Chesbrough, 2003; Lessig, 2001, 2004). Similarly, collaborative journalism needs to operate in a realm in which information and content is not walled off behind intellectual property barriers such as licensing or permission fees. Both areas share an inherent interest in keeping as much information and knowledge available in the public domain as possible, although in this they both face an uphill battle as intellectual property regimes become more comprehensive and restrictive (Lessig, 2001, 2004).

The collaborative journalism sites being studied here can be seen as some of several online projects that challenge modern assumptions about journalism, just as F/OSS projects have challenged assumptions about software development and the nature of the Internet. By extension, provocative questions are raised about the current state of journalism and its roles, our networked public sphere and the implications for democracy. On one hand, the democratic potential of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) has long been touted by many scholars, journalists, and activists...
On the other hand, the growing commercialization of the Internet and legislative changes that have greatly expanded intellectual property rights has lead some scholars to conclude that the Internet, like radio and other promising communication technologies before it, could easily fall far short of its democratizing potential as the Internet succumbs to corporate interests and the rules of the capitalist marketplace (Bagdikian, 2004; Balkin, 2004; Benkler, 2006; Curran, 2003; Lessig, 2001, 2004; McChesney, 1999, 2004, 2013; Morozov, 2014). At the heart of the debate is the viability of what John Fiske has called “semiotic democracy,”—“a society in which all persons are free and able to participate actively, if not equally, in the generation of and circulation of meanings and values” (Fiske, 1988; Madow, 1993, p. 146).

The collaborative journalism sites being studied here are examples at the heart of these issues which point to possible futures for the nature of news, the state of journalism, and the ability of citizens to engage in society in meaningful ways. I have made a case for why the term “collaborative journalism” best frames these issues, encompassing relevant characteristics of these dynamics while avoiding some of the conceptual pitfalls that have arisen from using other commonly used terms such as citizen or participatory journalism. I have provided some key aspects of collaborative journalism and compared some of these aspects to the F/OSS movement, of which it shares a philosophical heritage. In the next chapter I will provide the theoretical framework from to consider collaborative journalism at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.
2 Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

In order to place collaborative journalism within its proper context, this study draws from three different theoretical frameworks—that of collection action theory and public goods, communities of practice (CoP), and field theory. Collective action theory helps situate collaborative journalism within a larger context of social production communities (SPC), such as the F/OSS movement and other forms of open content cultural production. I will show how collaborative journalism news production, as a type of collective action, exhibits three characteristics of social production and how well or poorly the processes fit within this framework. This kind of analysis is relevant when I examine the viability of collaborative journalism news production, which is addressed in Chapter 7.

In order to better understand how the participants within collaborative journalism organizations use social norms to understand and give meaning to their news production practices in an online environment I will then examine the ideas behind the meta-theoretical concept of communities of practice. CoP provides an especially useful theoretical framework from which to understand how innovative processes form within a social group and how knowledge and learning intertwine (Schmitz Weiss & Domingo, 2010). It helps us understand how participants in collaborative journalism communities
create meaning through participation and reification, using various practices that help motivate participants, define their roles and activities, and give purpose to what they are doing.

Finally, in order to place collaborative journalism within a larger sphere of professional journalism, social engagement, and civic life, I will use field theory to demonstrate where collaborative journalism is within the field of journalism and how professional journalism and collaborative journalism influence each other.

In short, social production and communities of practice help us frame and explain the micro practices and workings of collaborative journalism organizations such as Wikinews and Allvoices, while also giving us a bridge to the more mezzo-level theoretical framework of field theory, which in turn helps connect collaborative journalism to larger social issues regarding civic engagement and collaborative journalism’s role in the networked public sphere.

2.2 Collective Action Theory and Public Goods

Research on collective action, defined as “actions taken by two or more people in pursuit of the same collective good” (Marwell & Oliver, 2007, p. 4), can span a number of disparate activities, ranging from membership in interest groups (Olson, 1965) to bidding behaviors on eBay (Kollock, 1999). What connects these activities are the more or less coordinated actions among individuals pursuing a common, or collective, good—a public good. This “public good” exists within the field of economics as one of four main types of goods, based on whether the goods are rivalrous or non-rivalrous and excludable or non-excludable, as shown in Table 2.1.
### TABLE 2.1: CLASSIFICATION TABLE FOR TYPES OF GOODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excludable</th>
<th>Non-excludable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(able to keep others who</td>
<td>(not able to, or not easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>have not paid for it from using it)</td>
<td>able to, keep others from using it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rivalrous</strong></td>
<td><strong>Private goods</strong></td>
<td><strong>Common-pool resources</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(one person’s</td>
<td>(consumer goods such as food, cars, etc.)</td>
<td>(fisheries, forests, ground-water resources, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consumption of it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>means others cannot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use it)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-rivalrous</strong></td>
<td><strong>Club goods</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public goods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(one person’s</td>
<td>(community services, cable television, computer software, etc.)</td>
<td>(parks, lighthouses, fireworks, national defense, knowledge, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consumption of it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>still leaves it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>available for others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to use)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from (Experimental Economics Center, 2006)

There can be overlap between the different types of goods, with many instances of goods in one category sharing characteristics of goods in other categories. An example are public roads, which would generally be considered as a type of public good but can be converted to a club good, for example, by making a toll road, or even a common-pool resource in the sense that a road can be rivalrous if it becomes overcrowded, barring others from use of the road.

Mancur Olson’s book *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965) became a catalyst for debates among collective action scholars that went on for decades. In the book, Olson claimed that self-interested, rational actors would not work collectively toward common goals unless there was some type of formal organization or authority that established rules and that could sanction the inevitable problem of free riders. The free-rider problem with public goods refers to the fact that an individual can reap the benefits of the public good without having to contribute anything to that public good. In other words, a self-
interested, rational actor would consider the costs incurred in contributing to a public
good versus the rewards from that public good, even if not contributing, and rationally
make the decision not to contribute. However, if all rational actors reach the same
conclusion, then nobody would contribute fully to the public good, thus reducing its
usefulness as a public good.

The debate Olson started among scholars has helped shape and advance collective
action theory and furthered our understanding of the free-rider problem beyond what
earlier scholars had considered (Dougherty, 2003). Olson’s statements that rational actors
would not cooperate unless external forces such as rules or laws were used has been
largely debunked by the findings from scholars looking at collective action and the
various experimental studies that showed that people are far more willing to cooperate,
even when it negatively affects them as individuals, than previously assumed (Bernhard
et al., 2006; Fehr & Gachter, 2000; Fehr & Schmidt, 1999; Kollock, 1999; Ostrom, 2000).

The empirical findings of collective action research challenged the fundamental
assumption that people would always act in their own self-interests, even at the expense
of the public good (Olson, 1965; Pickhardt, 2005). Some research on collective action has
looked at a type of public good called a common-pool resource, such as lobster fisheries
in Maine (Acheson, 1988) or irrigation agreements among California farmers (Ostrom,
1990) or farmers in India and the Philippines (Sengupta, 1991). The research showed
how communities could cooperate and organize effectively without formal laws or
government arrangements, and demonstrated how factors like social norms, community-
enforced sanctions, and trust played important roles in organizing and maintaining
effective collective action and mitigating the negative effect of free riders.
Research in the past several years has led to more nuanced understandings of the contexts and patterns of behavior seen with successful (and failed) efforts at collective action. It has also helped identify types of people and their various roles in groups that encourages or discourages cooperative behavior (Benkler, 2011b; Benkler & Nissenbaum, 2006).

The growth of ICTs, and the unique properties of digital information compared to other types of public goods, has led researchers to wonder if maybe digital information provided greater opportunities for collective action without the same physical resource limitations seen with real-world collective action cases (Bimber et al., 2005). These scholars wondered whether collective action based on the Internet was more or less successful than other examples of collective action (Bimber, 2003; Norris, 2002), and further research has been done to look at what characteristics online lead to greater or lesser chances for success with online collective action (Agarwal et al., 2012; Bimber et al., 2012; Massa, 2013; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003).

This study is not looking at the collective action characteristics of social movements, as some studies examining this question have done, but many of the questions raised by researchers who have examined various online activities and social movements do pertain to this study, especially in looking at the role that the production of information plays. Collaborative journalism differs from social movements in that the “outcome” of journalism is the production of information, rather than using information or communication as a means to some other end, such as social justice. In this regard, we have to look closer at the social production of information goods, especially in the digital
environment, and the unique characteristics and issues this type of production brings to the discussion of social production in general.

2.2.1 Social Production of Information
Looking at social production of information goods, such as news articles or other types of information-based cultural products, lets us explore how information differs from physical goods in terms of social production and how existing intellectual property regimes and other control measures have affected production of cultural goods, including news.

From an economic perspective, information is a non-rivalrous or non-subtractive good and a non-excludable good, putting it squarely in the “public goods” category in Table 2.1. Information can be considered an example of a “pure” public good, unlike many real-world public goods, which often share characteristics of other types of goods depending on a variety of factors. Remember that a non-rivalrous good does not have the same properties as most physical goods, such as food, because its consumption by one person does not diminish its availability for use by any other person (Baker, 2002; Hess & Ostrom, 2007; Kollock, 1999; Opderbeck, 2008). Information can actually become more valuable the more it is used, or distributed (Hess & Ostrom, 2007), although part of that increased economic value can be gleaned from altering another inherent property of information, it’s non-excludability.

By making information excludable, or forcing it to act more like a club good rather than a pure public good, the creator or owner of the information can gain economically (assuming people are willing to pay to access the information). Intellectual
property regimes are ways to force non-rival, non-excludable goods such as information to behave as rival, excludable goods within a traditional economic framework, essentially enclosing what would otherwise be public goods (Boyle, 1996; Lessig, 2001). With intellectual property, a creator is granted a temporary monopoly on his unique information product, limiting access and use by others and thereby creating resource scarcity, from which demand may be used to create a market for the information product (Fisher, 2001).

The notion that information is nonrival is not new; Thomas Jefferson notes this fact when discussing ideas in a letter to Isaac McPherson in 1813:

If nature has made any one thing less susceptible than all others of exclusive property, it is the action of the thinking power called an idea, which an individual may exclusively possess as long as he keeps it to himself; but the moment it is divulged, it forces itself into the possession of every one, and the receiver cannot dispossess himself of it. Its peculiar character, too, is that no one possesses the less, because every other possesses the whole of it. He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me (Jefferson, 1905).

As mentioned, economic value with information goods can be created by artificially forcing such goods to become rival goods, excludable goods, or both. Scarcity with physical information products such as books or CDs could occur in several areas along the production and distribution process. Shortages of materials for creating or packaging information products could be one bottleneck, as could a limited or expensive distribution network. With non-digital media, the high costs associated with mass producing, distributing, and marketing information products—books, newspapers, CDs, films, and so on—created insurmountable barriers for most people from being able to widely share or profit from anything they produced. Only large publishers and media
companies had the resources to reach mass audiences, and they created information products in an industrial production model that followed very similar patterns as other mass-produced, real-world economic goods, such as cars (Benkler, 2006). Furthermore, the abilities of companies to widely market and distribute information products gave them inordinate power in setting contract terms with actual content creators, which allowed them to do things like own the copyright from creators as a precondition to publishing their written, visual, or musical works.

However, with dramatically lowered production and distribution costs for information products brought on by increasingly powerful computers and widespread communication networks, many of the economic models media companies built themselves on in the twentieth century are less central to information production than they used to be (Benkler, 2002, 2004; Benkler & Nissenbaum, 2006). This has led to challenges for cultural production industries such as record labels, publishers, and film companies, especially as they try to protect their intellectual property and business models. But it also has opened up new business opportunities for companies like Amazon, Apple, and Netflix because it is economically viable to “sell less of more” in a long tail distribution pattern (C. Anderson, 2006). Within a few years, Netflix transformed itself into primarily a streaming content service, further reducing its costs associated with sending DVDs to subscribers and leading the way in a growing field of streaming competitors, most associated with existing large-scale media companies such as Disney, or television networks.

Today’s technology and the resultant lowered information production costs have also allowed non-market-oriented behaviors to become more common production types
than they once were. These kinds of collective action behaviors with public information
goods according to non-market principles have been looked at through various
frameworks and with different names, including commons-based peer production (CBPP),
social production, open content, collaborative network organizations (CNOs) and social
production communities (SPCs) (Benkler, 2004; Benkler & Nissenbaum, 2006; Dutton,
2008; Kollock, 1999; Lam, 2012; von Hippel, 2001). Some of these social behaviors,
especially ones that do not treat information as a commodity but rather as a public good
to be shared, directly conflict with established business models, assumptions about
consumer behavior, and even common sense wisdom about human nature and our
inherent willingness to either be selfish or to cooperate.

One simple example that Benkler (2002) discusses is distributed computing
projects such as SETI@home and NASA Clickworkers, both types of social production,
which rely on the same characteristics of excess computing power and broadband
networks that have enabled sharing music files. In distributed computing projects
participants allow their excess computer processing power to be used for complex
calculations or combing through parts of datasets, with the results sent back to the
organization and new data returned to the users’ computers, all done on a volunteer basis.

It is possible to critique distributed computing as a type of social production in
comparison with more complex projects like open source software development or
collaborative journalism because users in distributed computing really have to do very
little in order to contribute to the project. Although the amount of work involved by
participants does of course differ, social production proponents would claim that all these
types of social production share four main attributes of the networked information economy:

1) Information is nonrival and its input is the same as its output (information),
2) dramatically lowered physical costs of production and distribution,
3) the primary human input—creative talent—is more variable than traditional labor and can come from many sources, and,
4) communication and information exchange across space and time is cheaper and more efficient than ever before, allowing new potential for coordination of efforts (Benkler, 2002).

In the next section, we’ll look at how the F/OSS movement shares these four attributes to make it clear that even with social production projects that require substantial amounts of human effort the attributes still hold true.

2.2.2 F/OSS, CNOs, and CBPP

In the past several years the free and open source software (F/OSS) movement has been challenging the traditional economic notions of organizing production through either markets or firms (Benkler, 2002, 2003). With its roots firmly planted in the software development and programming community since the early 1960s, F/OSS did not reach a wider audience until the Internet made distribution easier (Lerner & Tirole, 2002). Industrial-era economics principles cannot adequately be applied to a networked information economy, nor does it fit comfortably with explaining the motivations of programmers and developers in creating public goods when there are no clear direct benefits to themselves (Benkler, 2003).

What has been even more baffling from a classical economics approach is the level of cooperation and collaboration seen in these projects that have little or no
centralized control and no traditional incentive management mechanisms typically seen in organizations, such as financial rewards. Some researchers have tried to explain why F/OSS has worked in creating public goods by exploring the unique characteristics of software as an object of production (Bessen, 2005).

Software as a unique type of object may explain part of this, but other researchers have taken a broader view in looking for reasons. For example, they have looked at how the unique properties of the Internet’s digital information environment have lowered various social costs that are typical in any kind of cooperative behavior in dramatic ways to make systems of sharing and cooperation practically zero cost (Kollock, 1999). It is not exactly a gift economy, although it may initially look like that, but actually behaves more along the lines of what economists call “generalized exchange.” This means that a member of the network may not expect reciprocation from the person he has helped, but can expect it from other members of the group (Ekeh, 1974).

For some scholars, the networks themselves play key roles in these self-organized forms of human interaction. Dutton explores the question of how to capture value of networked individuals in fluid and loosely defined organizations, termed “collaborative network organizations” (CNOs) (Dutton, 2008). He discusses types of communication network features that support various levels of collaboration, ranging from the “1.0: Sharing” (i.e., hypertext) to “2.0: Contributing” (i.e., hypertext and user-generated content) to “3.0: Co-creating” (i.e., hypertext, user-generated content, and cooperative work) (Dutton, 2008).

Within this typology, Dutton includes a broad range of distributed collaborative networks. He calls sites like Bugzilla and InnoCentive examples of sharing sites, Digg
and other news platforms contributing sites, and open source projects like Firefox or wiki sites such as Wikipedia as co-creating types of sites (Dutton, 2008). However, Dutton admits that there is some overlap in these typologies he uses, and some findings from this study reinforce that perhaps CNOs do not so neatly divide along the sharing-contributing-co-creating axes that he uses. This suggests that perhaps the typology is not as useful as an organizing device as he originally had hoped.

Benkler examines the production of free software and explores other types of information production, ranging from mapping craters on Mars, creating a peer-reviewed journal, crowd-sourced news about flaws in the Diebold voting machines, and how WikiLeaks challenges the Fourth Estate (Benkler, 2002, 2006, 2011a). His examinations of the role of open content and information in his writings about democracy, freedom, markets, and the potential shape of a networked public sphere put journalism squarely in the forefront of these issues (Benkler, 2011a), even when mainstream journalism organizations still take reactive stances to changes taking place (Benkler, 2000).

Benkler prefers an economic approach in his analysis because he believes the forces of the nonmarket, nonproprietary transactions taking place today through loosely affiliated networks are fundamentally changing today’s information environment (Benkler, 2006). Dutton makes a similar point about the changes being wrought as he explores an emerging “Fifth Estate” of networked individuals who have the potential to hold governments and other established institutional players more accountable and strengthen liberal democracy (Dutton, 2009). This Fifth Estate, enhanced by digital communication technologies and the Internet, enhances citizens’ communicative power and their ability to easily form networks with each other, especially through social media
This sounds very similar to concepts espoused by Beckett and others in their calls for a new “networked journalism” that utilizes the power of communication networks while still holding a special, though different, place for professional journalism (Beckett, 2008).

Benkler asserts that “if there is one lesson we can learn from globalization and the ever-increasing reach of the market, it is that the logic of the market exerts enormous pressure on existing social structures” (2006, p. 18). He suggests that the nonmarket forces as shown through CBPP production models could represent a limit to the ever-increasing reach of the market in our lives, and perhaps even indicate a genuine shift in direction in economics and therefore our social and political lives.

Other scholars are not as convinced that CBPP indicates a major shift. Critics would agree with Benkler that the market exerts pressure on social structures, but cite evidence that governments and large corporations are using the Internet to increasingly watch and track the public and are using the very tools of freedom against the public (McChesney, 2013; McChesney & Pickard, 2011; Morozov, 2014; Petersen, 2008; Turow, 2013).

Even optimists of the networked information economy like Dutton and Beckett acknowledge how institutional actors often try to resist the changes around them or insist on their roles as centralized players within our communications and information ecology. Where the two camps differ is the extent of the ability of these traditional institutional actors to influence our communication environment to their own ends, even at the detriment of the public good. The optimists tend to emphasize the creative power and examples shown to date with collaborative, non-market-oriented projects, whereas the
pessimists tend to emphasize examples of where these efforts have failed or been subsumed by ever-expanding market logic that is made even more powerful by the Internet and digital media (McChesney, 2013).

The potential role of market forces and market logic on collaborative journalism will be examined in the last chapter of this study, and does play a key role in being able to answer the question of whether a sustainable form of collaborative journalism can be developed. The major focus of this study, however, is looking at production and organizing practices to determine whether collaborative journalism can work at a micro level of production. If collaborative journalism is unable to function efficiently from an organizational perspective as a type of social production, then the larger issues around its economic sustainability are largely moot.

2.2.3 Collaborative Journalism as Social Production

In order to look more closely at collaborative journalism as a type of social production, we have to move beyond the superficial similarities of collaborative journalism and the four main attributes of social production in the networked information economy that were stated earlier.

Social production has certain characteristics that allow for wide-scale collaboration without the need for market forces or managerial hierarchies. According to Benkler, “peer production is limited not by the total cost or complexity of a project, but by its modularity, granularity, and the cost of integration” (Benkler, 2002, p. 435). These three components are worth exploring in more detail regarding how they relate to journalism as a type of social production, which Benkler refers to as peer production.
The modularity of a project refers to how it can be divided into components that can be produced independently and asynchronously of each other before being assembled again as a whole. Benkler says this is a salient feature of peer production because it allows for individuals involved in a project to tailor both the scope and type of their participation to suit their interests, which helps alleviate some of the potential motivation and incentive problems that can occur in social production when there are no market incentives for work. He states that heterogeneity of modules further helps a project succeed, as it provides more flexibility in terms of accommodating contributors’ differing
motivations for participating (Benkler, 2002). If a project can let highly motivated individuals participate as fully as they desire then it will be able to tap a greater range of human capital and abilities than a project that only demands a little from participants because all the modules are essentially the same.

Any given module can be further broken down into “granules” in terms of the time and effort participants must put into the module to produce it (Benkler, 2002). The finer-grained a module is (i.e., the less time and effort needed to complete the module) the more likely there will be larger numbers of participants to the project. Conversely, if a module is large-grained in that it requires a substantial investment of time, expertise, or effort, then fewer people will be able to participate. Benkler states that large-scale peer production projects must be relatively fine-grained in order to succeed.

Integration consists of two distinct components, quality control and combining the modules into a whole (Benkler, 2002). Quality control involves not only assuring the quality of the final product, but ensuring contributions are not substandard either through maliciousness or incompetence. Quality control and to a greater extent combining the modules into a whole seem like a natural part of the process in which some form of central control or hierarchy is needed, and this may seem to be a weak link in peer production. Indeed, one option organizationally is to institute some kind of hierarchical control with oversight, much as is done with the Linux kernel or Apache development processes (Benkler, 2002). Other options include peer review, as is done in Slashdot; norms-based social organization, such as the neutral point of view (NPOV) standard in Wikipedia and Wikinews; or aggregating and averaging redundant contributions, such as
is done with Mars Clickworkers (Benkler, 2002). We will see in later chapters how some of these mechanisms are used in Wikinews and Allvoices.

We will now look at how certain journalism practices and workflows in general—and collaborative journalism in particular—can be mapped to the three components of modularity, granularity, and integration in peer production.

2.2.3.1 Modularity of News

Sociologists and media scholars have long examined the organization and workflow processes of newsrooms (Gans, 1980; McNair, 1998; Schudson, 2003; Tuchman, 1973). Even though these and other studies have looked at traditional, professional newsrooms, and working journalists do not use Benkler’s terms to describe their work, it is clear that many aspects of news production processes are modular.

The various steps in the news production process, from news gathering, writing or producing, editing, and finally publishing or broadcasting news all have clearly defined steps and roles for journalists and editors throughout the process. Although time does play an important role in the production of news, some of the processes involved in news production can and do occur asynchronously. For example, space may be set aside in a newspaper for a story that is expected to arrive after the official story deadline set for production. Other stories and content such as photos, headlines, and captions may have already gone through the design and editing process by the time the late story arrives for inclusion in the paper. Another example is how obituaries of notable people are written in advance, leaving only the lead that explains how and when they died, so the story can get published as quickly as possible after the news breaks of their deaths.
Editorial production processes within professional news organizations are of course not types of CBPP or social production since they operate within a hierarchical management framework operating within the marketplace. However, in so far as the collaborative journalism sites being examined in this study emulate certain journalistic production practices, it is worth considering modularity as a way to highlight certain practices that may enhance or inhibit participation in collaborative journalism. It also shows how journalism practices and components can be examined through a framework of social production.

Time and timeliness are crucial components of most news stories (often being considered a fundamental definition of what makes something “news” as opposed to some other type of story). With relatively few exceptions, most news stories have some component of timeliness or immediate relevancy to them that helps define them as “newsworthy.” The time constraints placed on news creates inherent limitations on the modularity of news stories within a social production framework, as asynchronous production can take place generally in only a limited way.

The inherent limits time puts on modularity within a news production process can be mitigated within collaborative journalism if two things potentially occur. First, the types of content that are produced as “news” could become broader, perhaps less concerned with timeliness and breaking news events than is the case today. Second, the definitions of the forms that news takes would have to be expanded, changing our understanding of news stories as discrete, time-dependent units that remain largely untouched after publishing. This is already happening to some extent online as publications increasingly correct mistakes in articles that have been published. However,
the difference between correcting a simple factual mistake when updating a story and making more substantive changes with an understanding of news articles as changing, evolving documents is a large one. It would require a major shift in the definition of the news story away from how it is commonly perceived, even by many collaborative journalism participants. The implications of this taken-for-granted sense of the structure and form of news stories will be discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

2.2.3.2 Granularity of News

Within the news production process, there are various levels of granularity, ranging from the fine-grained to large-grained. In mainstream news production, various work specializations deal with this issue through clearly defined and assigned responsibilities, a hierarchical organizational structure, and through using shared organizational resources such as office space and news clipping libraries, or morgues.

An example of a relatively small-grained component in the news production process is copy editing. A copy editor checks news articles for errors and corrects them for stylistic or grammatical errors. Depending on the quality of the writing, this process can go relatively quickly and a copy editor can edit a large number of stories within a short amount of time.

By contrast, a typically large-grained component of news production is active news gathering and reporting—what some consider as a defining characteristic of modern journalism (Krause, 2011). It can take a lot of time to contact and interview sources, research background information, and put all the threads of information together in the form of a story and write it. All this effort could be for naught if the story does not even
get published, or is not published in a timely manner. Although the issue of a story getting killed by an editor has more to do with the integration function, it does directly relate to the various levels of granularity in the news production process in so far as one of the largest-grained aspects—news gathering and writing—also is the most vulnerable to subsequent “destruction” by other participants later in a social production environment.

There seems to be little incentive in a collaborative journalism environment to work hard gathering news, researching, and writing a story only to have someone else later in the process decide that it is not newsworthy and cannot appear, or get told that even more work has to be done on the story before it can appear. There have been various attempts at crowd-sourcing news, or getting many contributors to participate in this relatively large-grained aspect of the news production process (Benkler, 2006; Junnarkar, 2007). With some notable exceptions, such as the story about the Diebold voting machine problems (Benkler, 2006), crowd-sourcing has still not entirely solved this issue and has come with its own sets of organizational coordination and integration problems.

Even with small-grained components such as editing stories, disagreements can sometimes derail stories and lead to bitter fights and withdrawals from projects, as will be seen especially with Wikinews. At times in Wikinews disagreements on stories and even word choices in headlines have kept stories from appearing as finished products in a timely manner, finally appearing as finished on the home page days after the story has appeared in other news outlets (although the stories do appear on the Newsroom page in a number of possible sub-headings, such as “Undisputed, in development,” “Disputed,” or “Submitted for peer review”) (Wikinews, 2011d).
Differences in the granularity of news production may be one of the main factors that help explain the different rates of participation among collaborative journalism sites and other types of participatory social media. Even relatively small-grained types of content creation, such as writing brief reviews or contributing comments to a blog, are done by no more than 14% of people online (Li & Bernoff, 2008). According to Li and Bernoff, the number of people posting to a wiki or writing and posting original stories or poems online is only 7%. With such low percentages participating online it may seem hopelessly naïve to expect a widespread collaborative journalism movement to develop and become a major force in the networked public sphere. This is an issue that will be addressed in chapter 7, but for now consider that in most developed countries even a single digit percentage can represent millions of citizens. The important question may not be “Why do so few people actually contribute and participate?” but “How are the people who are participating possibly affecting civic society, politics, and culture?”

The especially large-grained nature of the early news production process can help explain why many collaborative journalism sites and most gatewatching sites continue to rely primarily on mainstream news sources and stories for their content, with only a very small percentage of original reporting being done. After all, it is much easier to repost or comment on a story that has already been published than to research, interview people, and write a story of one’s own.
2.2.3.3 Integration of News

Mainstream newsroom practices have evolved quite well to deal with the issue of integration, both from a perspective of quality control and in terms of combining the modules into a whole.

Quality control happens not only at the most obvious stage, in the copy-editing process, but even before news stories are produced. This happens in the early stages of the news production process when editors decide what stories will appear in the publication or on the news show. In other words, there are several built-in organizational mechanisms that have made quality control and combining modular components of news seem like “natural” parts of the news production process, happening in some cases well before a story is even created and unseen by news consumers.

Collaborative journalism does not have these built-in organizational mechanisms, nor the long history of developing social and professional norms that has been created with it. Social production, by its nature, cannot have the same kinds of pre-production barriers to entry that news organizations typically have, as social production tends to follow the “publish, then filter” model that Shirky discusses (Shirky, 2008).

We are seeing a rapidly evolving formation of social norms in collaborative journalism sites that are simultaneously being borrowed from real or perceived professional journalism norms and that are being negotiated and re-formed by participants themselves. Technological advances are also helping automate certain processes, both fine- and large-grained, such as weeding out malicious entries or attacks that affect workflow processes. Social norms are evolving in conjunction with an interesting mix of assumptions about professional journalism and what journalism and news is. This is a site of symbolic power contestation, in which the field of journalism, to
use Bourdieu’s terms, is being encroached upon by various forms of collaborative journalism even as these forms borrow from and adopt certain habitus from professional journalism. How these interactions are playing out and the implications for the journalistic field and collaborative journalism in particular is one of the areas of examination in this study.

Before we can explore these larger issues from a theoretical perspective, we first must examine how social norms and practices within social production communities are formed and how they help participants organize and conduct their work. For this, the concept of “communities of practice” offers a valuable theoretical toolkit from which to work.

2.3 Communities of Practice

The phrase “communities of practice” needs some unpacking, even though it should be thought of as a unit, according to the concept’s creator, Etienne Wenger. Wenger’s concept of “practice” is multi-layered and has several components to it, and has to be explained first before the phrase “communities of practice” can thoroughly be understood. According to Wenger, “practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life.” (italics in original)(Wenger, 1998, p. 52). Wenger locates and constitutes the notion of practice by making three fundamental points:

1. meaning is located in a process called the negotiation of meaning (italics in original)
2. the negotiation of meaning involves the interaction of two constituent processes, called participation and reification (italics in original)
3. participation and reification form a duality that is fundamental to the human experience of meaning and thus to the nature of practice. (Wenger, 1998).

The negotiation of meaning for Wenger is about much more than simply language or negotiating in the traditional sense of the world. Rather, he argues that it is a more fundamental human process that we all engage in continuously in our everyday lives. Even highly established routines, done largely without conscious thought, involve negotiations of meaning as we interact with the world and with others. The process is active, dynamic, contextual, and is influenced by the social environment just as it influences that environment. Wenger emphasizes this latter point in the process of negotiating meaning—we are not simply reacting to the environment, but our very actions are helping shape the environment that we end up reacting to (Wenger, 1998).

The way in which we shape that environment involves two components; participation and reification. Participation is easy enough to understand, as Wenger uses the common definition of participation in the sense of taking part in an activity with some social aspect to it. However, Wenger emphasizes the social aspect, considering participation on a broader level in which our activities influence us and our perceptions of ourselves even when we are not necessarily engaged in the activity itself. He uses the example of claims adjustors (the subjects he studied) and how they did not suddenly “turn off” after leaving work; there was some part of their participation as claims adjustors that continued with them even after leaving work, even if they did not self-identify as primarily claims adjustors (Wenger, 1998).
Reification is a more complex concept, as Wenger uses it. He defines reification as “the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into ‘thingness’” (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). This definition in itself is similar to the definition of reification and how we treat abstract concepts as concrete things. However, Wenger expands the ways that reification occurs, including creating, designing, building, encoding, interpreting, using, perceiving, and a range of other activities that include putting things in writing or otherwise archiving. Wenger claims that reification serves a fundamental purpose in practice in that it helps provide a focus around an abstract notion, creating a kind of concreteness that lets us organize our participation. In this way, reification and participation operate as dualities, each influencing the other as we continually participate in activities and reify some parts of those activities, with newly reified “things” becoming focal points from which we can reorganize participation. This dance of duality acts as organizing mechanisms as we negotiate meaning and thus shapes practice.

In order to associate practice and the notion of community, as Wenger uses it, he claims that there are three dimensions of relation by which practice creates or identifies a community of practice, as opposed to simply using the term “community” in the broader sense, such as a neighborhood as a community (which Wenger states is not necessarily—and often not at all—a community of practice). These three dimensions are shown in Figure 2.2 and are 1) mutual engagement, 2) a joint enterprise, and 3) a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998).
Each of the three main dimensions has sub-components that help further define and explain the main components regarding their roles in creating a community of practice. Mutual engagement has components that enable engagement in the first place, whether it involves communication tools that let distant participants interact or a specified place to which people go every day to work. It also includes diversity and partiality among participants that allow complementary and overlapping skills to enhance the practices, and mutual relationships. Wenger states that a community of practice does not necessarily mean it is a harmonious island of social togetherness; it often entails conflict and disagreements (Wenger, 1998).

Context and a certain fluidity of relations are two important aspects of joint enterprise, the second dimension of Wenger’s community of practice. There is give-and-take among participants and within the community or organization they find themselves
within, and one part of this is the kind of mutual accountability that develops which enables participants to explain their actions and reasons within the context of that community of practice.

The ability to work in a joint enterprise gives participants the tools to create a shared repertoire, the third component. Some of the shared repertoire is borrowed from existing practices within the profession or organization, but others are tailored or changed to be highly localized and specific to the particular context. The reification that takes place through stories, tools, archived materials, historical events, discourses and concepts give participants common points of reference from which to base further practices and interactions. This shared repertoire does not become static or petrified, thereby controlling practices, but acts as a kind of wellspring to draw from as practices are continually negotiated and altered.

Wenger says that the negotiation of meaning that takes place through mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoires is fundamentally a temporal process, and that “communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning.” (italics in original) (Wenger, 1998, p. 86).

The process of learning plays an important role in communities of practice for Wenger on multiple levels (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Participation and reification are processes of remembering and forgetting for participants, as well as tools for continuity and discontinuity. Reified objects such as archived documents provide concrete forms of memory for us, yet at the same time subsequent changes in the context and environment compared to when they were created leads to reinterpretations of the items and new ways of seeing or understanding them. Similarly, participation in a
community of practice informs our identities and is the basis of memories that further help us forge our identities. However, our identities are malleable as our forms of participation and perspectives change (Wenger, 1998).

Participation and reification are also important tools for power among communities of practice, and can be wielded in different ways. Wenger states that the politics of participation include influence, personal authority, charisma, trust, friendship, and ambition, while the politics of reification include legislation, policies, plans, designs, and contracts, among other things (Wenger, 1998). We will see how participation and reification are used in convergent ways among participants in Wikinews and Allvoices, and how they are used to wield power by participants within the respective organizations.

Communities of practice are more amorphous and malleable than other, more clearly defined organizational structures, such as traditional newsrooms, and Wenger calls learning “the engine of practice, and practice is the history of that learning” (Wenger, 1998, p. 96). The shared practices through participation and reification help forge not only individual identities, but a sense of shared group identity as well, or a “discontinuity” as Wenger calls it, between people who have participated in the practice and those who have not. This is essentially a type of boundary work in which participants within a community of practice use their practice as a way to differentiate themselves from others. For someone participating in a collaborative journalism site, he could define himself as a journalist because he is participating in ways that he and others within the community of practice would recognize as “doing journalism.” This of course is mediated and influenced by the participants’ assumptions and knowledge of what journalism is already, even as such definitions are being contested and negotiated through
the practices within collaborative journalism and within the larger context of other cultural production practices such as blogs, gatewatching sites, and online professional journalism.

By looking at the micro-level concepts of social production practices such as modularity, granularity, and integration discussed earlier, and combining them with elements of the notion of communities of practice, it gives us a more nuanced way to examine how journalistic and production practices work in Wikinews and Allvoices, as well as seeing how meaning and social norms are negotiated by participants. The theoretical framework of communities of practice was used to research online newsrooms of mainstream news organizations and how the participants adapt to technological changes in their organizations and advocated as a fruitful theoretical construct for further research (Schmitz Weiss & Domingo, 2010). It can similarly be fruitful for studying the more fluid organizational boundaries of collaborative journalism sites.

However, in order to get a more complete picture of the practices of collaborative journalism in a contextual societal setting, it will also be necessary to look more broadly and see how these practices are affected by—and possibly affect—practices of journalism from the perspective of the profession itself and its place within society. For that we need to look at field theory.

2.4 Field Theory

Scholars examining social production are not alone in borrowing economic terms and concepts to explain social phenomena. Perhaps the most prevalent example is the economic concept of capital and its conceptual expansion to include social capital, or the
idea that there is value in belonging to social networks and that belonging to networks requires investments of time and strategy to maximize those benefits (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin et al., 2001; Portes, 1998). The notion of social capital, even if it was not necessarily named as such, dates back to classical sociology but gained more widespread attention by sociologists in explaining a wide variety of societal issues in the latter part of the twentieth century (Portes, 1998).

Bourdieu further expanded the notion of capital to include cultural capital and symbolic capital. He says that there are four generic types of capital: economic (money and property), social (acquaintances and networks), cultural (cultural goods and services, including educational credentials), and symbolic capital (legitimation) (Bourdieu, 1986). These types of capital can all take different forms and be interconverted under various circumstances; he even called capital “the energy of social physics” (Bourdieu, 1990b). For Bourdieu, these four types of capital are resources that can be strategically used by actors as forms of power in social relations, much like how allocative and authoritative resources are used according to Giddens. Similar to Marx’s original sense of capital, these forms of capital can be accumulated and “spent” or exchanged in different situations (Bourdieu, 1986). One of Bourdieu’s main contributions to sociology is in thinking of capital beyond the purely economic sense, considering it as a power resource under a wide range of forms of labor that extend beyond capitalist relations, and how different groups use these forms of capital strategically within the social order (Swartz, 1997).

Bourdieu does not give all forms of capital equal weight within the social world, and in some circumstances certain types of capital may be favored over others.
Furthermore, not all types of capital are interconvertible in all situations. Bourdieu shows how in modern societies economic capital tends to dominate other forms of capital, such as cultural capital, often seeing these other forms of capital as subordinate to economic capital, though not necessarily derived from it (Swartz, 1997).

It is important to remember that cultural capital and other non-economic forms of capital do have realms of autonomy. Money can’t buy you love, as the song goes, and it can’t buy all forms of capital. For example, when looking at a lottery winner, it can be seen that economic capital alone may not provide the types of social capital, or acceptance into elite and powerful social networks, that would otherwise match a newly-minted multi-millionaire’s economic position. Similarly, the lottery winner may lack symbolic capital in terms of not being seen as legitimate by other sectors in society since he did not really earn (or inherit) his fortune. Although economic capital can be exchanged for cultural capital in the form of education and learning to appreciate a certain class-based esthetic, Bourdieu has shown in his research that one’s class and background accounts for a wide range of esthetic tastes and lifestyles (Bourdieu, 1984).

The reason such broad similarities can be seen among classes, Bourdieu claims, is in part because of a notion called habitus (Swartz, 1997). Habitus is a key concept for Bourdieu that attempts to avoid the classical sociological dualism of individual and society, or of objective structures and individual agency, in order to explain how people follow similar patterns of behavior while simultaneously experiencing a sense of free will.

Bourdieu defines habitus as:

a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their
outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 53)

Habitus occurs at the unconscious, practical level rather than the conscious or logical level, much like Giddens’s concept of practical consciousness (Giddens, 1984), or on a macro scale Habermas’s notion of lifeworld (Habermas, 1984, 1987). Similarities can also be seen with Wenger’s notions of participation and reification (Wenger, 1998), which could be considered components or different forms of habitus.

Habitus covers a wide range of actions, from gestures or verbal expressions to abstract concepts and ways of viewing the world that an actor does without realizing it or necessarily being able to explain. It stems from experiences early in life regarding how a person learns what has worked for him to achieve his goals even as it provides guidance, or a kind of frame, for how to navigate future situations. Habitus can be seen as a general “blueprint” that is formed through socialization that guides one’s life but that nevertheless is flexible enough to allow for agency and different outcomes for different people in different situations.

Bourdieu has not simply replaced the macro-level concept of social structure with the micro-level concept of habitus, however. As Bourdieu states, habitus also generates action even as it organizes and creates representations, or dispositions, for people within social classes. These dispositions, internalized from early socialization experiences, tend to frame what people within a given class see as “natural,” or what they see as likely or unlikely for someone in their class to expect in terms of economic, educational, or other types of outcomes. The notion is similar to Weber’s “life chances” (Swartz, 1997).
Despite how early socialization plays a role in creating internalized dispositions that organize one’s way of seeing and acting in the world, habitus does not play a direct role in determining one’s actions within social contexts, so in this sense habitus is more removed from daily interactions than participation or reification, such as in communities of practice. Rather, according to Bourdieu, habitus interacts with another key concept Bourdieu uses, that of field. Bourdieu defines field as:

a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97)

Fields define the structure of the social setting and “denote the arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize these different kinds of capital” (Swartz, 1997, p. 117). In other words, fields can be thought of as structuring forces for the various kinds of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) that Bourdieu says are used as resources in social actors’ struggles for power. Bourdieu is well-known for using the concept of fields to examine higher education (Bourdieu, 1988b, 1989), religion (Bourdieu & de Saint Martin, 1982), literature (Bourdieu, 1988a), housing policy (Bourdieu, 1990a), and media (Bourdieu, 1993; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1963). Field theory can be a powerful framework for the sociology of news, argue Benson and Neveu, one that can supplement other paradigms that have been typically used when studying journalism such as technological, hegemony, political
Benson and Neveu claim that field theory provides an excellent analytical framework that can be used in conjunction with other media research traditions to build knowledge in the mezzo-level, semi-autonomous journalism field (Benson & Neveu, 2005). In other words, it can help bridge the gap between some of the macro-level and micro-level research done about media (Compton & Benedetti, 2010), and help fill in gaps that other areas of media research have been unable to address. At the same time, they claim further research and theorizing will only refine and strengthen field theory as an analytical framework.

Journalism, as a type of cultural production, sits astride the fault lines of the forces of different types of capital. In such a position, it is often pulled in opposing or competing directions by the demands of economic capital and cultural capital. Further, journalism’s ability as a media industry provides it great power in generating symbolic capital, which also makes news organizations targets of institutions that control greater amounts of economic capital but that want to control the means of production of symbolic and cultural capital as well. As McChesney and other scholars have argued, the encroachment of the logic of capitalism within journalism has not been a good one for the profession (Beckett, 2008; McChesney, 1999, 2004, 2013; McChesney & Nichols, 2010; McChesney & Pickard, 2011). Bourdieu worried that journalism would interfere with other fields, such as the political and scientific fields, and likewise was concerned what effect encroaching fields would have on journalism (Bourdieu, 1996).
Journalism’s place in the field of power also makes it a fruitful area of study for field theory. The field of power acts as a kind of meta-field for Bourdieu, one that overlays and intersects other fields in some ways even as it is the most important or fundamental of fields because in Bourdieu’s worldview all social actions are struggles for power (Swartz, 1997). Journalism’s unique role as a kind of connector between powerful actors in other fields, such as politics, education, and science, and interpreter to the general public through the creation and dissemination of news, makes it especially important in the field of power. Contrary to the view that many professional journalists have of themselves simply as objective observers and reporters of “newsworthy” events (Mindich, 1998; Molotch & Lester, 1974; Schudson, 1978), field theory helps elucidate the role that the practices of journalism play within power relations beyond what journalists see themselves doing (Hummel et al., 2012).

Some scholars have questioned the usefulness of field theory when studying journalistic practices “at the edges” of established forms and institutions of journalism (Schudson & Anderson, 2008). Critics claim that field theory may work well as an explanatory framework or spatial metaphor with professions that have clearly established practices and institutions built around them, but it works less well for more fluid practices that have less clearly defined professional and institutional boundaries. Proponents of field theory have shown that it is possible to use field theory as an analytic framework even inside established fields (Marchetti, 2005), and with organizations that span traditional organizational boundaries, such as youth activist media groups (Klinenberg, 2005).
Field theory can be especially useful as a framework for examining a form of cultural social production such as collaborative journalism precisely because collaborative journalism overlaps with so many aspects of journalism, ranging from the economic concerns of creating and maintaining sustainable business models to freely borrowing from established journalism processes and practices to the competition and challenges they put forth in reaching audiences who are encouraged to participate in ways not normally seen in traditional journalism. The areas of overlap cannot be looked at in isolation, but must be seen in relation to each other and to the larger journalistic field. Field theory emphasizes the relational nature between social actors, organizations, and fields themselves, which Bourdieu claims is a structural property of fields.

According to Bourdieu, entry into a field, especially a professional field, requires certain tacit “rules of the game” that are understood by all parties within the field. The actors within the field have a tacit agreement that the field itself has value, and that the struggle within the field for power is worth it. If social actors participating in collaborative journalism sites did not have some basic sense of the value of journalism or professional sense of the definition of news, then there would be no competition or conflict within the journalistic field as the social actors would not see themselves as competing within the same field.

However, agreeing on certain fundamental “rules of the game” does not mean that all parties into the field are on equal footing within the field. In fact, fields can be seen as “structured spaces of dominant and subordinate positions based on types and amounts of capital” (Swartz, 1997, p. 123). Again, the relational aspect is key in Bourdieu’s thinking, as a subordinate player exists only in relation to a dominant player, and vice versa. The
actors will utilize whatever forms of capital that give them the best advantage in their struggle for power within the field, but Bourdieu recognizes other strategies that are used as well. He says that there are three different types of field strategies: conservation, succession, and subversion. Actors in dominant positions within a field tend to use conservation strategies, while newcomers tend to utilize succession strategies as they attempt to become dominant. Subversion strategies are used by actors who see little to gain in becoming dominant.

These strategies are being used by traditional news organizations and collaborative journalism sites today and how they do so will be explored in more detail later in this study. A brief, though dated, example of a conservation strategy has been used by traditional news organizations in the form of early attempts to stop journalists from blogging, even going so far as what the *Houston Chronicle* did in 2002 when it fired long-time journalist Steve Olafson for blogging (Connelly, 2002). This type of conservation strategy obviously did not work and has been completely reversed as many journalists now blog and blogs are included in online news sites.

Another conservation strategy, though more subtle, includes various attempts by news organizations and journalism foundations such as the Knight Foundation to instruct citizen journalists on professional journalistic techniques. To be fair, the Knight Foundation has also touted the Knight News Challenge, awarding millions of dollars to people and organizations that are exploring new ways to build sustainable journalism models. Even so, some scholars criticize the attempts by the Knight Foundation and professional news organizations to define how “news” should be produced (Usher, 2011), and attempts by organizations such as the Knight Foundation to essentially help define
what is considered acceptable “new” journalism can be seen as a conservation strategy. Other critics claim that mainstream news organizations continue their traditional practices of parroting national narratives as promoted by the political elite in order to maintain their privileged positions in the field and limit entrants who may challenge their authority to determine how journalism should be defined (Handley & Rutigliano, 2012).

Subversion strategies can be seen when looking at alternative journalism sites such as Indymedia, although as noted in the last chapter these have had little effect on the journalism field in terms of changes in professional standards or behavior, or in challenging commercial business models for news. In this regard, alternative journalism subversion strategies could be considered for the most part unsuccessful in challenging the journalistic field.

Journalism, like other fields of cultural production, such as the literary or artistic fields, tends to rely heavily on cultural and symbolic capital and have less economic capital than a field like business. This leads to another point Bourdieu makes about the structural properties of fields in that they have some measure of relative autonomy from other fields and operate with their own internal mechanisms of development (Benson & Neveu, 2005). This is not to say that they are entirely separate from other fields, just that there is a degree of relative autonomy from the external environment. However, economic capital does play an important role in different fields, partly because it can often be exchanged with cultural capital or have an effect on the types of cultural capital that is created or valued across fields. Bourdieu critically looks at the role that economic capital plays in the field of power and media’s role within that (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996).
At the heart of the notion of fields is the idea that they are “arenas of struggle for legitimation” (Swartz, 1997, p. 123). This is especially true in fields that have lots of cultural capital but not much economic capital, such as journalism. In Bourdieu’s terms, legitimation gives the actors within a field the right to monopolize the exercise of symbolic power, which he terms “symbolic violence.” Symbolic violence acts much like ideology in that it goes largely unnoticed as a form of domination by both the actors using it and the ones subordinated by it (Bourdieu, 1991). The ability to define what is seen as legitimate in the world and to essentially frame the world in a way that is seen as natural even as it hides the relations of power is why Bourdieu calls the exercise of symbolic power a worldmaking power (Bourdieu, 1987).

Legitimation plays an especially important role in a profession like journalism, which does not actually map directly to any standard definition of what makes a profession (Lewis, 2011, 2012). There is no governing body that determines or accredits journalists, and professional news organizations cannot prevent others from practicing—or claiming to practice—journalism. This has led some scholars to be critical of journalism’s fixation on appearing as a profession, even leading some to classify it as a hybrid “semi-profession” (Witschge & Nygren, 2009). Without the trappings of a classical profession, which provide recognizable mechanisms of legitimation and the exercise of symbolic power, journalists have had to rely on other means to supplement their striving for legitimation.

Journalism’s claims to professionalization have nevertheless played a role in differentiating journalism norms and practices, which have helped define the differences between “good” and “bad” journalism, and even differentiating journalism from other
forms of cultural production (Meltzer, 2009). This differentiation is one strategy used to gain symbolic capital by professional journalists. Another important strategy, and a key component of how journalists define themselves, is the profession’s claims to be necessary for democracy because of its unique role in being able to obtain, interpret, and report on information that citizens need to be informed about their government (Beckett, 2008). As Schudson and Anderson state, journalism simultaneously makes a grandiose knowledge claim as the best interpreter of relevant information for society even as it modestly states that professional journalists are simply generalists who ask questions (Schudson & Anderson, 2008).

Both claims have been seriously challenged by the rise of social media, collaborative journalism, and the networked public sphere, all of which have raised important questions about the role that commercial journalism plays in our democracy and the ability of citizens to collaborate in the creation, production, and distribution of news, questions that are examined more closely in chapters 6 and 7.
3 Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study focuses on the interactions and processes for how participants in two collaborative journalism sites create and produce the news, how assumptions of professional news norms have influenced that production, the role of curation in collaborative journalism, and how these factors may affect the creation of a sustainable journalism model. Using the theoretical constructs discussed in the previous chapter, the empirical investigation conducted through a case study approach helps situate these theories within the operational framework of the two sites under study. There are of course many possible ways to collect the necessary data, but in this study I will be focusing primarily on qualitative research methods.

This study uses primarily case study and netnography/ethnography research methods. The case study method is used to explain and contextualize Wikinews and Allvoices within their larger organizational contexts tracing their creation, development, and the issues they face today. Looking at how Wikinews and Allvoices have changed over time allows us to see how workflows and perspectives of participants have changed, as well as examining how the organization has adapted to changes in participants’ attitudes and values toward news, audience demands, and the larger media, technological, and business environment. The methodologies allow me to explore in chapter 6 how the theoretical constructs explain the communities of practice, thus providing insights as to how other collaborative journalism projects can be examined, which is explored in the final chapter.
3.2 Case Study Method

Case study, like any research method, is not without its strengths and weaknesses. Case studies are good to use when there has been little research done on the topic or organization (Gerring, 2013), which is the case for both Wikinews and Allvoices and, to a large extent, collaborative journalism organizations as a whole. In addition, case studies are good for generating new hypotheses, all other things being equal (Gerring, 2013). However, Gerring readily admits that there is a lot of conceptual and definitional confusion regarding case studies. Jennifer Platt argues that “much case study theorizing has been conceptually confused, because too many different themes have been packed into the idea of ‘case study’” (Platt, 1992, p. 48).

Yin (1992) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1992, p. 123). Case studies can be seen as a comprehensive research strategy (Yin, 2003). In this study the method fits particularly well as a research design as it fits with another point Yin makes regarding case study inquiry in that it “benefits from the prior development of theoretical positions to guide data collection and analysis” (Yin, 2003, p. 14).

As discussed in the previous chapter, although there has been very little theorizing done on collaborative journalism per se, we can look at collaborative journalism organizations and practices through the theoretical lenses of social production and public
goods theory, communities of practice, and field theory in order to provide a framework and contextualize the empirical findings in this study.

However, Yin’s definition does not completely clarify some of the important issues around what makes a definition of case studies so problematic. Gerring takes an important step in clarifying things by first defining what exactly is meant by “case.” He argues that a case “connotes a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time” (Gerring, 2013, Chap. 2, Loc 478). Units could consist of nation-states (looked at over a period of time), individuals, cities, organizations, and so on. Gerring’s reference to spatial boundaries has more to do with the concept of boundaries than it does physical or geographic space, thus is unproblematic for the study of online organizations that have widely dispersed members such as Wikinews and Allvoices. In this study, the boundaries are represented by the practices and production of news for the sites and, to some extent, the mental “space” in which participants find themselves when they are practicing collaborative journalism.

There has always been an underlying tension in the case study method between an in-depth examination of a single unit or small number of units and how well the cases being studied may be generalized to represent larger trends or phenomenon (Gerring, 2013; Hamel, 1992). Gerring argues that there really is no such thing as a true N=1 case study in that even when a single unit is being examined in a case study the researcher is still, in part, trying to draw relevant inferences to other, larger phenomenon that the particular case study represents. If a researcher attempts to study several cases in order to better show relevant similarities between the cases and the larger phenomenon that is being explained, that then becomes a cross-case study (Gerring, 2013).
Although the difference between a case study that may look at one or a few cases and a cross-case study that looks at several cases is one of degree, according to Gerring, the trade-off is essentially the ability of the researcher to be able to thoroughly examine and discuss a small number of cases compared to a more superficial or broader look at multiple cases.

Another issue arises in case studies versus cross-case studies regarding how representative the unit under analysis is of the larger phenomenon or larger population. Cross-case studies, through studying multiple samples or cases, attempts to demonstrate representativeness of the larger population because of its larger sample size and tends to favor quantitative analysis. Case studies also attempt to show some level of representativeness, but they generally attempt to show within-case variation (e.g., differences in observations either diachronically or synchronically within the case or cases themselves) more than cross-case variation (e.g., differences between cases) as in cross-case studies and tend to be qualitative in nature (although Gerring says they can also be quantitative). Case studies can also explore cross-case variations, and vice versa, although cross-case variation may be of secondary importance in a case study (Gerring, 2013).

This study primarily explores within-case variations of Wikinews and Allvoices, looked at diachronically and synchronically, but it also compares and contrasts them in cross-case variation ways in order to draw some conclusions about how different types of collaborative journalism organizations develop and are affected by larger economic or social contexts. This can be seen in terms of the production practices and the business models of the organizations, to name two of the main ways comparisons are used here to
draw broader conclusions. This latter point is especially relevant for Allvoices, given the drastic changes it has undergone as a media organization in its lifespan.

The cross-case variations are important for another reason. Because collaborative journalism organizations are heterogeneous in terms of their organizational structures and working practices, cross-case variations in combination with within-case variations can elucidate relevant fundamental dynamics at work among such organizations, helping us better determine which aspects may be replicated in developing sustainable collaborative journalism organizations and avoiding some of the pitfalls that we see in the two organizations studied here.

Case studies also favor exploration of a topic and hypothesis generation (Gerring, 2013), which also makes the method ideal for this study since so little explicit theorizing has been done on collaborative journalism organizations and their news production practices. It is hoped that through the observations in this study and the hypotheses generated from those observations that a starting framework can be used from which to further study collaborative journalism organizations and practices. However, I do not mean to overstate the potential external validity of case study research, as it naturally is weaker in that regard than cross-case studies because of its small sample size (Gerring, 2013), not to mention other factors such as the homogeneity of the cases being examined.

A strength with the case study method for this study is that as a research method it does not rely on one particular data collection method. Rather, a range of data collection methods can be used, both quantitative and qualitative, although case studies do tend to favor qualitative data collection (Gerring, 2013). This study uses primarily qualitative data collection techniques, but at times also employs some simple quantitative measures.
in order to better contextualize certain characteristics and production dynamics in Wikinews and Allvoices. These simple quantitative measures include quantifying the number of stories produced by each organization within certain time frames to get a rough measure of productivity and efficiency, or analyzing the numbers of stories participants have worked on or how many edits or discussions they were involved in.

Quantitative analysis used in these cases is not meant to necessarily lead to statistically relevant results or grand truth claims such as “participants who contributed over 300 stories became influential members of this collaborative journalism site.” Drawing such a conclusion would be faulty for at least three reasons.

First, it is an example of the logical fallacy known as correlation equals cause confusion if one concludes that the number of stories contributed causes one to become influential in the community of practice. There may be some correlation to the number of stories written and published and one’s level of participation in the community, but one does not necessarily cause the other (since one can be an active participant and become influential in ways other than writing stories, as will be shown especially in Wikinews).

Second, it is unlikely that some specific numerical value of contributions can be mapped out in statistical terms to some definable attribute such as influence or power because these concepts have many more attributes to them within a community of practice than some simple correlation to a number like the amount of stories produced.

Third, with such a small sample size it would be impossible to draw conclusions about the larger population of participants in collaborative journalism organizations, given the range of activities that participants can do as part of the community, making external validity largely meaningless.
The use of quantitative data collection in this study is meant to primarily support and enhance findings from the qualitative research, and any conclusions drawn from such data are a result from combinations of the two, where relevant, as opposed to relying solely on quantitative evidence. A mixed methods approach to case studies and ethnographies is not unusual, allowing researchers to utilize useful elements in both approaches (Kitchenham, 2010; Schensul et al., 2012).

Even with some limited quantitative analysis in this study, the primary overarching research framework is qualitative, which raises its own unique set of issues and concerns regarding verifiability, validity, and rigor (Gerring, 2013). These issues are best addressed in the next section, as they connect closely with not only the case study method but even more specifically with ethnography and, by extension, netnography.

### 3.3 Ethnography

Ethnography has long been used in anthropology as a theoretical orientation or philosophical paradigm, but has been adopted as a methodology within cultural studies, literary theory, and a range of other social scientific disciplines, including media studies (Tedlock, 2000). In this study I use it both as philosophical underpinning and a methodology, although the focus on the methodological component is really more netnographic than ethnographic, as will be explained below.

In ethnography, the researcher attempts to understand the culture he is studying through observations of and interactions with the “natives” of that culture (Chambers, 2000). The goal of ethnographic research is to understand and see the world through the eyes of the people being studied through firsthand involvement with informants.
(Murchison, 2010), even as the ethnographer recognizes his own biases and preconceived notions as he enters the milieu. “The ethnographer enters the field with an open mind, not an empty head” (Fetterman, 1998, p. 1), referring to the fact that ethnographers start their studies with some theoretical basis and specific research questions. Involvement with informants in the field can take place through a variety of interactions, ranging from conversations and interviews to shared experiences or rituals (Murchison, 2010).

Although fieldwork is the way that researchers experience and learn about the culture, the notion of “culture” is itself a complex and contested concept, and arguably the broadest concept in ethnography (Fetterman, 1998). “Culture is akin to a black hole that allows no light to escape” (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 3), meaning that the notion is so all-encompassing and yet so nebulous that one can easily become lost in it. However, if one considers that the concept of “culture” consists, in large part, of the practices, routines, understandings, and shared assumptions of knowledge members (natives) who are being studied (Swidler, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988), then the theoretical framework of communities of practice and field theory help connect the broader ethnographic goal with more granular theoretical constructs that help better understand the culture of collaborative news production in Wikinews and Allvoices.

It may seem obvious, but it is important to remember what place collaborative journalism occupies within the larger lives of the participants. Nobody abandoned all other social or Internet activities to devote themselves to writing news stories, nor should anyone expect that. The ethnographic aspects of this study look at a slice of activities among participants in their complex and busy social and professional lives. Nevertheless, the practices of collaborative journalism affect and are affected by other aspects of the
participants’ lives, such as their attitudes, backgrounds (both outside of and within journalism), and outlooks on what role they believe news should fulfill online and in the world. In this way, ethnography can help us understand how these views influence participants, giving us a window into how they see the world.

Through participating in both sites in editing and/or writing news stories, I was able to better understand the workflow and roles of participants in Wikinews and Allvoices, and got a deeper understanding as to how these communities of practice worked.

I kept my participation in the writing and editing in both sites at a minimal level, both by design and, as it turned out with Allvoices, by circumstance. With Wikinews, I joined the site a few months after it started and copy edited several stories. I chose not to fully participate as a member of the community in Wikinews primarily because with my background as a journalist, the relatively small number of active and regular participants at any one time, and the high rate of participant turnover over time I did not want to unduly influence the very topic I was studying: the development of news production processes and adoption of various news norms in a collaborative journalism enterprise. Especially in the first year or so of Wikinews, when many processes and norms were being debated and discussed, it would have been relatively easy (though by no means guaranteed, given some of the heated discussions and combustible personalities among Wikinewsies) to potentially have a strong influence on certain policies and norms. Most Wikinewsies had no journalism experience, and journalists who did participate in Wikinews tended to be listened to more than others when making suggestions about editorial and production processes that should be implemented.
I began studying Allvoices more than two years after its founding, and the organizational culture, large number of contributors, and much greater number of stories mitigated any serious impact I could have had on Allvoices’ editorial and contributor policies. The decision-makers within Allvoices consisted of a cadre of editors and staff, who for the most part were unknown to the majority of contributors. Furthermore, Allvoices, despite its rhetoric of collaboration and empowering the voiceless throughout the world, did not operate by the same democratic or participatory decision-making processes as Wikinews did, maintaining a firmer boundary between management and contributors than Wikinews.

The divide between management (and, by extension, the editorial board) and contributors continued to widen after it was purchased in May 2011 by digital marketing services Datran Media. This gap was shown even more clearly in August 2014, when Allvoices announced a new policy that would erase all contributor content and that potential contributors would have to apply and be accepted to the site in order to contribute stories. I had written three stories for Allvoices and rated several other stories in its earlier iteration, but when I applied after August 2014 to be a contributor I finally received a rejection several months after applying, despite telling them about my background as a former journalist. Many of the most frequent contributors to Allvoices, almost all based in the U.S., apparently were asked by Allvoices to remain as contributors and did not have to reapply. Thus, I was not able to make a comparison between workflow processes between pre- and post-August versions of Allvoices, although the design did not immediately substantially change in the revamped site and my relevant data at any rate applies to the collaborative journalism environment Allvoices had before
its transformation to a more traditional editorial and publishing model or its current content marketing model.

With ethnography’s foundations in anthropology, traditional ethnographic studies typically occurred in a specific geographic place, in which the anthropologist visited a tribe or locale and studied the people there in-depth over a period of time (Fettersman, 1998; Murchison, 2010). However, this is obviously not possible with online communities, where the “place” is the website where the “natives” meet and discuss, often without ever seeing each other physically, and where—as was the case with Allvoices—sometimes radical organizational changes can take place that greatly affect the community or culture.

Furthermore, the online environment raises difficult questions of identity, anonymity, and representation that traditional ethnographers generally never had to deal with to nearly the same extent. In order to overcome some of these types of barriers with traditional ethnographic research, I used a research methodology better suited to the online environment called netnography.

3.4 Netnography

Netnography is a research method that shares many similarities to ethnography in that it is a naturalistic research method, but it also has some important differences (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography lends itself particularly well to the online environment where questions are raised on the role of community in virtual environments (Kozinets, 2001, 2010). However, unlike ethnography, which is unavoidably intrusive as the researcher interacts and engages with the participants in a study, netnography can take
advantage of examining existing online conversations that are publicly available and thus be unobtrusive (Kozinets, 2010). Furthermore, by utilizing existing conversations that have already been written down online, the researcher gains efficiencies in terms of transcribing interviews, focus groups, or other ethnographic research methods and is able to more easily apply various qualitative or quantitative content analysis to discussions or posts.

With this efficiency also comes trade-offs that may not give the researcher using netnographic methods the same level of insight and depth as an ethnographic researcher in the field (Kozinets, 2010). One of the trade-offs is that in the online discussions the researcher may be only getting a small slice of life or a particular mode of discussion among participants, rather than a fuller and richer understanding of their social world. This may not be an issue for many research questions in which some aspect or phenomenon around that particular topic or online discussion is the topic of study, but it still must be recognized as a potential blind spot in netnographic research.

Another potential weakness with a netnographic approach is that in looking at archived material conversations may be taken out of context or hard to place within their proper contemporary context. Follow-up interviews with participants may be impossible as their email addresses may no longer be valid or they may no longer belong to the site. Even if participants can be contacted, they may not remember what they posted, may not want past postings to be dredged up, and may have faulty memories on what they said and why, or could even intentionally wish to revise history regarding their motivations on past online comments or discussions.
The relatively high turnover of many Wikinewsies makes it particularly hard to reach them for follow-up interviews, which is an issue because some of the most important early participants and decision-makers in Wikinews dropped out of the project. In one particular case, a user who had the highest level of administrative privileges unilaterally deleted all his posts (in violation of Wikinews’s policies) and entire history of his account at one point as he was upset with the direction Wikinews was going. A few years later he rejoined Wikinews for a short period of time before dropping out (but not deleting all his past comments) once again after disagreements with other Wikinewsies.

Related to the archived nature of written discussions or postings in netnography is the issue of identity and the perception that identities online are somehow not as real as face-to-face identities (Kozinets, 2010; Mann & Stewart, 2000; Tedlock, 1991, 2000). Identity has at least two main components to it; the verifiability of the authentic identity of online participants (i.e., they are who they say they are), and the ethical issues involving researching and writing about subjects who do not know they are being studied, or that their past writings and discussions in some online forum are being studied (Kozinets, 2010).

There are at least two ways to solve the first issue regarding validity and verifiability of online participants. One way is to not be concerned about it all, as the “real” identity of the participant may not matter as much as what is being said or the interactions taking place within the online environment being studied (Kozinets, 2010). This of course depends on the nature of the study, but it can also be looked at from the perspective of interactions with other online participants who may have no better idea of the “real” identity of the user than the researcher does and who react to the person simply
through his or her online discussions and perhaps any user or bio information the person may have on the site being studied, which may be falsified or exaggerated.

In studies in which understanding the authentic identity of online participants is important, then the researcher can try to find out more information about participants through online searches and possibly other social media accounts if names can be verified with user names. Ideally, the researcher should contact participants directly by email and then by phone or in-person for interviews, which is where ethnographic research methods complement netnographic research methods.

Both Wikinews and Allvoices have large amounts of textual material on their sites, ranging from actual stories to informational material for new contributors to various online discussions. With Allvoices, textual material ranged from data on page views of stories by contributors, how many followers they have, who they are following, and the archived stories they have published and how many views those stories received, among other data such as author bios when they chose to post them. With Wikinews, users could post biographical information, although most Wikinewsies did not or kept their bios very brief, but the range of archived online discussions and debates around policies and stories themselves was vast, in keeping with the wiki framework and over-arching policies of the site and the Wikimedia Foundation, the umbrella organization of Wikinews, Wikipedia, and various sister projects.

Wikinews and its collaboration pages (originally labeled “talk” pages by Wikinewsies, and still called that, even though the tabs now say “collaboration”) and revision history for all stories provides a fertile archival ground for netnographic research to better understand how participants put into practice their ideals of news within a
collaborative and consensus-driven organizational culture. Heated debates are carried out through evolving policy decisions and within the talk pages of stories and a Water cooler section of the site. Most policy discussions were later archived in sections by date in order to find certain discussions easier, while some of the discussions led to new pages of formalized policies or rules that were supposed to be followed by all Wikinewsies. The debates range from what makes a story newsworthy, what is counted as factual, and how to deal with a myriad of issues ranging from copyright infringement and fair use to naming and style conventions, as well as myriad technical and design issues and fixes.

The qualitative research presented in this study differs from most other past research on the wiki environment, most notably about Wikipedia, that has attempted to better understand issues of trust and workflow dynamics through a variety of mostly social network analysis or quantitative methods (Lam, 2012; Lih, 2004; Viegas et al., 2007; Voss, 2005; Zeng et al., 2006). Social network analysis can be used as a complementary research method to aid netnographic research (Kozinets, 2010), but for the purposes of this study social network analysis was not suitable as the research methodology tends to focus on structural components in an online community and does not adequately address the more qualitative-based questions being examined here around a community of practice and the development of workflow processes and news norms used by participants. In this way, the ethnographic/netnographic approach is in some ways comparable to Joseph Michael Reagle Jr.’s ethnographic exploration of the culture and norms of collaboration in Wikipedia in his book *Good Faith Collaboration: The Culture of Wikipedia* (Reagle, Jr., 2010).
3.5 Working with Participants

Both Wikinews and Allvoices are fully public sites, requiring no special log-ins to see articles, user bios, help or support pages, or in the case of Wikinews the article discussion or policy discussion pages. Similarly, no log-in is required to post comments on articles on Wikinews or Allvoices, or to forward articles through social media channels. Combined with the fact that the sites are dedicated to news and story dissemination, this makes the sites good examples of what Amy Bruckman calls a “semi-published” state, in which people posting such information could not reasonably expect privacy (Bruckman, 2002).

There has been debate among online researchers regarding how to treat online postings and archived material found on sites and whether they should be considered published, unpublished, or semi-published (Bruckman, 2002). The debate touches on tricky ethical questions involving human subject research, and some of these questions are unique to the online environment (Elgesem, 2002). Two ethical issues that are shared with traditional ethnographic research but that can have added complexities in the online realm are those of privacy and potential harm to participants. There have been numerous examples in the media in which teens particularly have sexted (sent nude or semi-nude photos to boyfriends), only to have those images be sent to many others or posted on web sites, leading to public embarrassment, even suicide in some cases, and sometimes child pornography charges against those who distributed the images (Cook, 2014; Jackson Citizen Patriot staff, 2011; Lenham, 2013). Emails have also been publicized online that have caused embarrassment or potentially damaged professional relationships, such as the hack of Sony’s computers (Cieply & Barnes, 2014). Although these cases do not involve academic researchers, the incidents do highlight the potential harm that could
come from a presumed, but mistaken, assumption that just because something is found online it is automatically considered published.

The discussions about how to consider online users goes beyond simply thinking about whether their online writings are not published, semi-published, or published, and touches on questions of whether online users should be given credit for their creative work (Bruckman, 2002). Bruckman decided to reconsider online users not as human subjects, the traditional social science approach, but call them “amateur artists.” She claims that this shifts the boundaries in the ethical debate and allows researchers to both give proper credit to online creators where credit is due and provide enough of a nuanced gradation of levels of anonymity to properly protect people being studied (Bruckman, 2002).

Although Wikinewsies and Allvoices contributors would likely not consider themselves “amateur artists,” they do identify to some extent on a professional level with journalists and the project of journalism. Given the news focus of the two sites and the fact that participants in both sites could choose exactly how much information about themselves they wanted to publicize on the sites—and that news stories were encouraged to be spread in order to get more readers—there was no ethical quandary regarding breaches of privacy in utilizing archived material from either site. Even behind-the-scenes contributions, such as editing stories or participating in discussions to improve workflows, technical or design issues, or to try to settle disputes are still ultimately public-facing acts to promote and make the sites more valuable to the wider online community.
3.6 Sourcing and Citing Wikinews Material

Wikis present unique challenges for citations because of the issues that arise in an online environment that does not use page numbers or other traditional bibliographic methods of keeping track of content, and in determining authorship in a collaborative online environment in which anyone can edit text. Although pages do include revision histories that include who and when edits and changes were made to those pages, letting someone revert a story to an earlier version, the process to do so for citations is both laborious and possibly disruptive to other readers as pages are reverted.

Fortunately, for this study, it was not necessary to look at the revision histories of individual stories. For the most part, documentary evidence that was used from Wikinews existed in the forms of past online discussions that had either been codified into policies or guidelines, or that had been archived within the Water cooler section of the site under various categories and separated by approximate date and amount of material to be a manageable, yet brief, archive.

Nevertheless, even with this format that included posts by various Wikinewsies that included dates and times of their postings, there are still difficulties in citing the material. I opted for a method that would let readers of this study understand approximately when a statement or comment was written by including in the text at least the year, if not month, of a comment or series of comments, but used a more comprehensive and consistent way to cite the reference. In citing Wikinews pages, I went to the last dated revision of the page and used that as the date for the citation. For some pages such as policy pages, these have remained largely unchanged and in fact for any pages where policies have been agreed upon, a statement at the top of the pages warns
users not to make changes to those pages unless first talking to an admin or other experienced Wikinewsie.

In many cases, especially for the archived pages in the Water cooler sections, the date was sometimes years after the comment was made because the archived page was transferred to its existing page at that much later date. The citation includes the archived page’s URL, which by the wiki default includes the name of the page (e.g., https://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wikinews:Water_cooler/policy/Archive/19). For something like Water cooler policy archive number 19, there often were multiple discussions on a variety of topics over a sometimes extended period of time, all of which would exist within that single archive, and they were separated by the topic stated in the initial post that started each discussion. For story talk or collaboration pages, the collaboration page URL was given as the cited reference when discussions were referred to, rather than the page of the story itself. Only when a particular news story was referred to was the URL for that page given as a cited reference.
4 Chapter 4: Wikinews

4.1 Introduction

Wikinews has largely been dismissed as a failed or flawed example of citizen journalism by the handful of media scholars or journalists that have written about the site at all (C. W. Anderson, 2009; Bruns, 2006; Gorenfield, 2007; Keegan, 2013). These authors make valid points regarding the weaknesses and problems that Wikinews has experienced, and I will highlight other issues as well in this chapter. However, I argue that in studying Wikinews’s ostensible failures—especially in comparison to the output of its much larger successful sister project, Wikipedia—we can better learn what dynamics work and do not work in a collaborative journalism environment, and what elements make collaborative journalism different than other types of cultural production such as a wiki-based encyclopedia.

Wikinews is one of twelve sister projects run by the Wikimedia Foundation (WMF), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in St. Petersburg, Florida. The Wikimedia Foundation’s most widely-known project, Wikipedia, is one of the top ten most viewed websites in the world (Wikipedia, n.d.).

Wikinews launched in December 2004 after a one-month beta launch, and has never gained nearly the same type of recognition, popularity, or level of participation that Wikipedia has. In fact, Wikinews has shown a slow and steady decline in almost all relevant categories as measured by the WMF for all WMF projects, such as the number
of active editors and the numbers of articles produced per month, as Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 show.

**FIGURE 4.1: NUMBER OF ACTIVE EDITORS ON ENGLISH WIKINEWS**

![Graph showing number of active editors on English Wikinews from 2004 to 2015.](http://stats.wikimedia.org/wikinews/EN/SummaryEN.htm)

Source: http://stats.wikimedia.org/wikinews/EN/SummaryEN.htm

**FIGURE 4.2: NEW ARTICLES PER MONTH ON ENGLISH WIKINEWS**

![Graph showing new articles per month on English Wikinews from 2004 to 2015.](http://stats.wikimedia.org/wikinews/EN/SummaryEN.htm)

Source: http://stats.wikimedia.org/wikinews/EN/SummaryEN.htm

In the English-language Wikinews, there was an early spike in participants and produced stories in mid-2005, when there were over 100 Wikireporters (defined by Wikimedia as those people doing ten or more edits in that month) between July 2005 and
September 2005. Numbers hovered between 80 and nearly 100 active editors between 2006 and 2007, spiking briefly in early 2008. Since then, Wikinews has seen a general and steady decline both in active editors and numbers of stories produced, producing fewer than two stories a day on average by the first half of 2016. Of special note is the large decline in active participants since January 2011, when it has fluctuated but steadily declined month by month between the high forties and even dipping into single digits into 2016 (Wikimedia, 2016d).

Although participation had already been declining slightly by the latter half of 2011, in September 2011 a long-simmering disagreement among some Wikinews editors led to the creation of a fork, or new version of the site using a different host and with different editorial policies going forward, with several Wikinews editors going to the new project, called OpenGlobe (Mono, 2011). Wikinews only had 45 active editors in August 2011, and reducing that number by half left 22 active editors as of September 2011 (Wikimedia, 2016d). This further seriously depleted its human resources and left an air of resentment even among some who stayed with Wikinews. OpenGlobe itself later failed.

The relatively small size and output of Wikinews compared to more robust WMF projects has exacerbated personality and other disagreements among some WMF members and Wikinews participants. Tensions have sometimes been heightened further by the focus on news, compared to other WMF projects, and how the more popular Wikipedia has often cannibalized breaking news by contributors to its encyclopedia entries. These issues and the ramifications of how “news” has been defined and conceived are explored throughout this chapter and in later chapters.
Wikinews publishes in 33 languages, with the English-language version containing the highest number of what are termed “active users,” or users who have been active on the site in some capacity within the past 30 days, either editing, writing, discussing, or contributing stories at least five times within a month (Wikimedia, 2016c). Table 4.1 shows the top 20 language editions of Wikinews by numbers of active users. Admins are users who also have extra privileges regarding blocking or deleting stories and blocking users, capabilities that regular users do not have, but who are also often actively involved in story production and editing.

TABLE 4.1: NUMBER OF ACTIVE USERS BY WIKINNEWS LANGUAGE EDITION (TOP 20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank (by active users)</th>
<th>Language (date launched)</th>
<th># of Active Users</th>
<th># of Admins</th>
<th># of Stories Published</th>
<th>Ranking by # of Stories Published</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>English (12/2/04)</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20,863</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Spanish (1/28/05)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10,074</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Russian (11/1/05)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10,538</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>French (1/28/05)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18,010</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Portuguese (2/19/05)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10,377</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Arabic (12/12/05)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,188</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>German (12/3/04)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12,935</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Italian (3/31/05)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8,458</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Chinese (3/16/06)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5,171</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Polish (2/19/05)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11,534</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Turkish (8/19/2008)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,128</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Persian (10/17/10)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4,762</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Czech (5/26/08)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3,271</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ukrainian (3/19/05)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,380</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Romanian (2/19/05)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,464</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Serbian (5/23/05)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>76,801</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Catalan (5/26/06)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,194</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Greek (4/8/11)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,808</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Swedish (1/28/05)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2,077</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Tamil (est. 10/10)*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,967</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikinews (automated count as of June 16, 2016)
Wikinews states it currently has 172 active editors, a higher number than what the Wikistats data shows. The discrepancy in numbers is explained by how an “active editor” is considered. In the Wikistats data in Figure 4.1, active users were those who actually did an activity within that month, while Wikinews generally counts active users as doing any activity (even less than five activities) within the past 30 days, not just a particular calendar month. An interesting point to note is that Wikipedia shows a similar decline in active editors over its history, although the drop in productivity is not seen because Wikipedia has so many more editors than Wikinews.

Note that the number of active users does not correlate to the number of articles published. The Serbian-language Wikinews ranked highest among Wikinews sites, at 101st place among all Wikimedia projects, with nearly 76,000 articles (Wikimedia, 2015) yet only 11 active users, as seen in Figure 4.3. This is because Serbian Wikinews does automated mass imports of articles from Voice of America and other government news sources, a practice not condoned by the English Wikinews site or other foreign-language Wikinews sites (McNeil, 2011).
As of May 2016, the English-language site, the oldest of the Wikinews sites, had just over 20,000 articles published after ten years (Wikimedia, 2016a). When compared to the newest Wikimedia project, the travel-related site, Wikivoyage, which launched in January 2013 and that had nearly 28,000 articles only nine months after it launched (Wikivoyage, 2013), the output of Wikinews seems anemic. English-language Wikinews ranks in terms of total number of articles 199th out of 849 active Wikimedia Foundation projects, one place below Multilingual Wikisource and one above the Hungarian Wikisource (Wikimedia, 2015). English Wikinews receives an average of nearly 8.4 million page views a month (Wikimedia, 2016c), a number that has remained fairly steady throughout the existence of Wikinews, except for a brief spike in November 2013.

Source: http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikinews (as of May 16, 2016)
This chapter examines the creation of the English-language Wikinews and circumstances that led to its founding, and then explores its work processes and how it has developed and changed since its launch. Wikinews is examined from primarily a case-study or organizational perspective in this chapter, saving the more in-depth discussions on the roles of news norms and curation for chapter 6 and some of the implications of their practices as a collaborative journalism site for chapter 7, drawing on the explanatory and case study material presented in this chapter, which is primarily descriptive.

4.2 Origins

The term “wiki” is derived from the Hawaiian “wikiwiki,” meaning “quick,” or “speedy” (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001). A wiki has been described by its creator, Ward Cunningham, as “the simplest online database that could possibly work.” A wiki is essentially a collection of interlinked Web pages, all of which are freely expandable and all of which allow users to freely create, edit, and organize content. The democratic and participatory potential for knowledge creation and knowledge sharing in a wiki was not lost on Cunningham, who states that a wiki is a unique collaboration space that “seeks to involve the visitor in an ongoing process of creation and collaboration that constantly changes the Web site landscape” (Leuf and Cunningham, 2001). The vision of an interactive and collaborative space for mass participation in knowledge creation was shared by Tim Berners-Lee when he created the World Wide Web, but never fully realized in the Web’s early development, which evolved into a largely one-directional publishing model (Berners-Lee & Fischetti, 2000).
Since the 1995 launch of the first wiki, WikiWikiWeb, thousands of wiki-based websites and wiki clones have been created (Cunningham, 2007). MediaWiki was one such clone and was written as a wiki software package for the online collaborative encyclopedia Wikipedia, which was founded in 2001 by Jimmy Wales (MediaWiki, 2007). Two years later, he started the Wikimedia Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that serves as an umbrella organization for several wiki projects. The stated mission of the Wikimedia Foundation, “Imagine a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge,” echoes the sentiments of Cunningham.

The idea of a wiki-based news project was first mentioned among Wikipedians on January 5, 2003 from an unregistered user, which by Wikipedia’s default shows up simply as an IP address. The user wrote, “I thought of another brilliant sistr [sic] project idea: Wiki + news = Wikews. The point of this project is to have the news on a wide variety of subjects, unbiased and in detail” (Wikinews, 2007a). According to Eloquence, a user who has been called by some the founder of Wikinews, it was not suggested until late 2003 or early 2004 that Wikinews could be more than a human news aggregator and should include original reporting. This was an important departure from established Wikipedia policies and raised serious concerns around verifying first-hand sources and original information, issues that Wikipedians never have to deal with as Wikipedia only publishes material that has already been published. Eloquence was aware of the larger possibilities and implications in creating a wiki-based news site when he wrote in May 2004 as part of a board election platform bid:

The democratic potential of truly free, international news media cannot be overestimated. Aside from open content and massive collaboration, there is one
key difference between this project and something like Indymedia: We would be able to maintain a neutral point of view. Indymedia is essentially an advocacy news site, while this project would be as unbiased as possible. (Wikinews, 2007a)

In discussions among some Wikipedians during the spring, summer, and fall of 2004, the form and scope of Wikinews began to take shape. Adopting Wikipedia’s neutral point of view (NPOV) policy was quickly accepted, as were ideas of news as being timely, including original reporting whenever possible, collaborative editing of stories, and having news articles as stand-alone articles rather than stories that were appended and revised over time, as Wikipedia articles are. As is pointed out later in this study, these proved to be important decisions regarding the viability of wiki-based collaborative journalism, especially regarding the role of original reporting and, to a lesser extent, the fact that stories would be discrete units that could not continuously be edited over time.

A formal proposal to the Wikimedia Foundation was drafted and a poll among Wikipedians was held in October 2004 on whether Wikinews should become an official foundation project, passing with 151 “yes” votes and 59 “no” votes (Wikimedia, 2012). Many of the reasons given for voting against the proposal stated concerns of spreading the Wikimedia community too thin over several different projects, rather than disagreements whether there was a need for wiki-based news, which most did not question.

4.2.1 Differences with Wikipedia
After the formal proposal was approved it quickly became apparent that the nature of news in a wiki-based environment meant that there were inevitable clashes with
accepted Wikipedia norms and practices, as well as some standard journalism practices. Many of the debates among Wikinewsies, as the participants soon called themselves, revolved around issues of timeliness for Wikinews stories, how to reconcile notions of neutrality and eliminate bias, the roles of article authorship, issues of accountability and trust (in sources and among participants and the audience), and workflow processes in a news story format while maintaining the collaborative and consensus-driven culture that the Wikipedia community had developed. The differences are great enough that a page outlining all of them for Wikipedians was created, with brief explanations regarding the major differences (Wikinews, 2014a).

“Locking” stories from subsequent editing after a certain time was a cause of great concern among some Wikipedians, who claimed it went against the spirit of the open editing policy in a wiki (Wikimedia: Meta-Wiki, 2004). Locking a Wikinews story changes the fundamental nature of that story, as it becomes a static, historical document rather than a fluid, living story that is continuously appended in the way that most Wikipedia articles are (Several years later, however, Wikipedia has also had to lock some articles, such as the pages of Mitt Romney’s potential vice presidential candidates in 2012, because of repeated vandalism and edits on those articles). Wikinewsies made a conscious decision to lock Wikinews articles a short time after publication, showing one of its earliest philosophical breaks with Wikipedia.

Timeliness of stories also is a major point of difference between Wikinews and Wikipedia, with Wikinews stating that if something happened more than three days earlier then it is not news (Wikinews, 2014a). The event-based, timely emphasis for Wikinews stories put greater limitations on what types of stories would be accepted than
what even most professional newspapers typically include, leaving virtually no ability to include feature articles, for example.

Partly as a result of the emphasis on breaking news and timeliness, one early policy debate was what to do about stories that develop over several days. “If a story is breaking over a several day span, then multiple articles should be written on the topic;” was a policy agreed upon and is part of the primary definition of what Wikinews is (Wikinews, 2013g). Davodd, one of the earliest active Wikinewsies, in a posting in late December 2004, used audience news-reading habits as a main rationale for why Wikinews should have separate articles.

“This isn’t WP – it’s WN - and we need to realize that the audience will not change the way it reads news to accommodate our little project or desire to make an older article better or ‘more complete.’ So, we’d better change the way we think of articles to accommodate our readers” (Wikinews, 2007d).

This led to a lengthy online discussion among several Wikinewsies on how exactly to best recap and contextualize news within the framework of a new story and what to do about past articles with errors. The consensus that was reached was that new stories should be developed but could include links to past stories on the topic as relevant.

Inserting news into Wikipedia articles was a point of heated debate among Wikipedians even before the development of Wikinews. Wikipedia continues to highlight news stories on its home page with its “In the News” box, with links to updated Wikipedia articles and sometimes links to Wikinews, and continues to be a popular site to check news online (Reuters, 2007a). In fact, Wikipedia often scoops Wikinews with breaking news updates in Wikipedia articles, whereas Wikinews articles on the same topic appear sometimes hours or even days later, if at all. These practices highlight some
of the continuing tensions that exist between Wikinews and Wikipedia, even as most Wikinewsies also participate in one or more Wikimedia Foundation projects.

Wikinews underwent an identity crisis in its early months, at least for some users, especially when it compared its coverage of a major news event, the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in December 2004, when Wikinews was barely a month old, with that of Wikipedia. It was unclear for some participants in Wikinews and Wikipedia what benefit Wikinews provided, aside from redundancy (Wikinews, 2007d).

The responses to these concerns showed how even less than four weeks into Wikinews’s official launch that a consensus was forming among Wikinewsies regarding concepts of what differentiated Wikinews from Wikipedia, even if some ideas still lacked clarity. “My take is that Wikipedia is good for writing a large issue, long-term events, etc. Things like local news and small news stories are not good for Wikipedia,” wrote Tomos. Eloquence weighed in with, “Wikinews should post detailed information about every single event related to the earthquake, while Wikipedia should contain summaries of these events (which could link to the Wikinews articles)” (Wikinews, 2007d). These discussions showed how notions of timeliness, combined with issues of globalism and localism, influenced how the earliest Wikinewsies saw their mission as different from Wikipedia.

4.2.2 Neutral Point of View

One area in which Wikinewsies did not differ from their Wikipedian counterparts was the need to maintain a foundational principle of Wikipedia: neutral point of view (NPOV). In an organizational culture dominated by volunteers, consensus-building and
collaboration, the NPOV policy is perhaps the closest thing there is to an unchallenged ideology. The Wikinews page explaining NPOV quotes Wikimedia founder Jimmy Wales on NPOV as “absolute and non-negotiable.” Part of his original formulation of NPOV stated, “The neutral point of view attempts to present ideas and facts in such a fashion that both supporters and opponents can agree.” Wikinews adopted this formulation and states that articles should be written “without bias, representing all views fairly.” Wikinews emphasizes the description of debates, rather than advocating any particular side and takes great pains to not insinuate that one side is correct (Wikinews, 2007b).

For Wikinews, three criticisms arose that mainstream journalism has long faced with the norm of “objectivity” in news coverage as an unintended consequence of striving for unbiased news articles. First, it is impossible for people to be entirely unbiased (or objective), and it is thus an unattainable goal. Second, attempts to be neutral or objective often filter out analysis or coverage of especially controversial views or points. Third, an ostensibly “neutral” stance actually ends up serving elite interests as alternative views are suppressed because of perceived lack of neutrality. It seems ironic that when much of mainstream journalism has largely abandoned the norm of objectivity, or at least realizes that “objectivity in journalism seems to have been destined to be as much a scapegoat as a belief and more an awkward defense than a forthright affirmation” (Schudson, 1978) that Wikinewsies have largely unquestioningly adopted the essence of the idea, albeit under the name of NPOV.

Another side effect of rigid attempts at neutrality in news coverage is that the writing tends to get watered down, and Wikinews has been criticized internally and by
other media for its bland writing style. The writing style stems in part from the collaborative nature of the project, but is mostly a direct result of NPOV. Simeon, an early active contributor in Wikinews who later curtailed participation partly because of dissatisfaction at how Wikinews was developing as an undemocratic bureaucracy, posted an essay on his User talk page on December 1, 2005 titled “Where I See Wikinews going” in which he sharply criticized how Wikinews tended to ape mainstream media.

As more people are drawn to Wikinews, and finding a nicely culturally appropriate, native language news source, which they can trust not to offend or challenge, the fare will become blander. Not richer. The diversity will increase. But the blandness will outpace it (Wikinews, 2007h).

An article that surveyed various citizen journalism sites in May 2006 noted about Wikinews: “There is no sensationalism here -- this is probably the least likely prose on the internet to raise hell, affectless and lacking the little pithy cues that make AP news stories easy-to-read ‘pyramids’” (Gorenfield, 2006). Wikinewsies either shrugged off the critical article as an example of a biased news outlet that did not understand or appreciate the value of NPOV for citizen journalism, or said that they should be happy that Wikinews was at least getting some attention from other media (Wikinews, 2007f).

4.3 Development

Although Wikinews inherited certain characteristics of Wikipedia such as its overall philosophy and some of its working practices and social norms regarding openness and collaboration, the vagaries of journalism as a unique form of cultural production meant that many new policies and procedures had to be developed from scratch as new issues arose. Most Wikinewsies had little or no direct experience working
as journalists, and tended to take their cues from mainstream news sources, advice from a few members who did claim to be current or former journalists, and from the community’s understanding of what journalism was supposed to be within a wiki-based environment. Debates online over the direction of Wikinews were often heated, and in some cases played a role in the departure of active participants.

Because of changes in design templates over the years that put all former pages into the latest template, it is impossible to get a visually accurate depiction of the changes in Wikinews’s main page in its earliest years. Even so, many of the basic elements on the current page are the same after the new template was used in 2014, and existed for much of Wikinews’s history. By examining some of these components seen today it will help contextualize aspects of the main page and story pages in the subsequent discussion of Wikinews’s development.

Figure 4.4 shows what a Wikinews front page above the fold looks like, with added markings that explain relevant parts of the front page. Figure 4.5 shows the remainder of the page below the fold, and Figure 4.6 shows an article page.
A: In the Media Wiki template all pages have tabs, which the community calls namespaces. The page one is on is called the namespace of that page. The Collaboration tab or namespace is where participants discuss issues with articles or the pages from a production standpoint. It used to be labeled “Talk,” but when discussions and opinions sections were added for readers the name was changed to avoid reader confusion.

B: The three tabs on the top right let users read the page as it is shown, view the source code of the page (though uneditable), and view the edit history of each page, allowing users to revert a page to any previous version if the page has not already been locked to editing. This allows users to easily undo edits that have been made.

C: The left-hand navigation bar has links to pages such as archives of stories; Water Cooler, a source of general discussions on technical, policy, and proposal matters as well as archived discussions; the Wikinews style guide; the Newsroom, where articles in development are seen; and other help, as well as a list of Wikinews editions in other languages.

D: The most recent articles appear on the homepage, getting moved further down the page as new stories take their places. The current design utilizes far more photos than the first few years of Wikinews, and highlights some kinds of stories such as Breaking News and Original Reports written by accredited Wikinews reporters. Older versions of the homepage included stories in development or that were being disputed, but these have been removed from the homepage to give it a more professional appearance and now exist on the Newsroom page.

E: Stories are categorized by region and by multiple categories, as relevant, and archived stories can be found by clicking on categories.
A: Users are invited to participate and write an article.
B: The latest iteration of the homepage highlights components like recent interviews and outstanding Wikinews articles, showing a more self-promotional aspect than in earlier homepage iterations.
C: Original reporting is highly encouraged, although it remains a small percentage of total Wikinews content.
D: All Wikinews content is published under a Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 License, which lets members of the public repost and mix the content in any form they wish, as long as Wikinews is attributed as the source. This Creative Commons license is different than what Wikipedia uses.
A: Unlike the homepage, on article pages there is an extra tab titled Opinions that lets users state their opinions on an article. This tab was added after many discussions about the role of opinion in Wikinews articles and as a way to try to better engage readers.

B: Users can go to the Edit tab to edit an article that has not been locked and view the editing history of an article.

C: The main article section, which includes links to the sources of the article (typical of most Wikinews articles, it is a synthesis of multiple news articles from different mainstream publications). The “Have an opinion on this story?” box template and tab on the top were added to the site in January 2007.

D: A feature box includes links to related articles by category and often a map that shows the country in which the story took place.

E: The “Share this” box encourages users to share stories on social media, while the categories in which the story is placed is shown at the bottom.

The current components of the homepage and article pages are the results of numerous debates and discussions among Wikinewsies in three main categories that we will look at next: technology, design, and policy.
4.3.1 Technological Changes

Many discussions took place over topics only tangentially related to the creation of news stories, such as ideas on having multimedia with Wikinews, creating a news service, and other organizational ideas that Wikinews has largely been unable to implement due in part to the low numbers of participants (Wikinews, 2005h).

The majority of discussions that involved technical issues were about seeking solutions to make various aspects of the site easier to use, more efficient, or better able to reach a wider audience. Discussions ranged from story development to templating story types to archiving and automating processes or trying to fix components that were not working properly.

Wikinews uses MediaWiki, a free software open source wiki package written in PHP and used by Wikipedia and the other WMF projects, as well as used by many other wikis throughout the Internet (MediaWiki, 2007). MediaWiki is regularly updated and has a number of extensions that can be downloaded to further customize the functions and look of a wiki.

Although discussing all the technological implementations in Wikinews over the years is not relevant in this study, some general trends are worth noting briefly. First, updates and new extensions used in MediaWiki are usually implemented in Wikipedia first, later being adopted by sister projects when applicable and after technical problems have been worked out. Second, newer versions tended to make editing and working in the wiki easier for users, primarily with more visual elements and less need for actual coding.
4.3.2 Usability and Design Changes

Despite improvements to the design of Wikinews over the years, the site’s design, primarily due to the limitations of the MediaWiki software, is not as social-media friendly as many other collaborative journalism sites such as Storyful or Allvoices, in which photos and other visual elements make the sites look and feel much more dynamic and interactive.

There are two main aspects to consider when looking at the design and user interface (UI) of Wikinews. One is the design and navigability from the perspective as a news consumer. The other is how well the design works for participants producing news stories. From a user perspective, the design and usability of the homepage and article pages has improved over the years and is clearly better than the first few years it existed, when the home page was primarily text with one or two small images and included stories in development on the homepage alongside finished stories.

Wikinewsies have shown a strong interest in improving the look and design of the site ever since its earliest days, and there are many archived discussions related to design issues both big and small. Eloquence started a design contest for the site in February 2005, asking anyone to create new CSS stylesheets that differed from the default monobook skin shared by Wikipedia (Wikimedia, 2009). Several mock-ups were submitted, with comments and critiques from Wikinewsies on the sample designs, but none were adopted for mostly technical reasons, such as designs that required specific HTML coding on the main page, which the monotype skin in MediaWiki does not allow.
Another suggestion was made in August 2006 to address design issues on the homepage, offering suggestions on a sample page that included more colors and images but no major design or usability changes (Wikinews, 2009a). However, agreement—let alone consensus—could not be reached on even these basic changes, with some Wikinewsies calling the added colors “eye candy.” The design discussion foundered in part because the conversation shifted to how many columns the page should have, how many days of latest news should appear, and other usability matters, with no decisions being made (Wikinews, 2009a).

In February 2008 AzaToth suggested a redesign of the homepage, offering a mock-up, which led to discussions and a vote over four days among several members (Wikinews, 2008b). Once again, no consensus could be reached, although many of the Wikinewsies who commented also expressed frustration at the slow pace of any design changes even as everyone seemed to agree that changes were needed. One active member at the time gave a harsh rebuke at the slow pace of anything getting done by the community, which was followed by two statements of support from two long-time and influential Wikinewsies, who suggested that at least AzaToth’s above-the-fold design be implemented. The changes were made and subsequent changes continued to address the design and usability below the fold.

Visual elements on the homepage like logos highlighting breaking news and original reporting have enhanced the design of the site in minor ways, and story design elements like template pull-quote boxes have helped make stories more visually appealing than they used to be. The country feature box templates within articles have also added a design element to the pages, and despite a mock-up and suggested design
change in September 2008 to make the templates horizontal they have remained as vertical visual elements (Wikinews, 2009d).

A look at the creation of the Wikinews logo as the site began provides a good example of both the consensus-driven nature of Wikinews and how design decisions and policies were intertwined with debates about the larger mission and identity of Wikinews.

A logo design contest was announced in October 2004, shortly after Wikinews was formally approved as a new WMF project but before it officially launched, to choose a Wikinews logo much as Wikipedia had held a contest a few years earlier when soliciting design ideas for its logo. One of the earliest suggestions was that the logo should emulate the Blackletter or Old English fonts that The New York Times and other newspapers use, although another user queried how that font could be used with other languages (Wikimedia, 2008). This shows that Wikinews participants were already thinking of the site in terms of global reach, a point further supported by subsequent discussions around designs that included a world map and the desire not to favor either the Western hemisphere or Europe by the positioning of the countries. Thus, the eventual design that was selected, shown in Illustration 4.3, is a flattened worldview from the perspective of the North Pole.

**FIGURE 4.7: WIKINEWS LOGO**
Over 25 designs were submitted, although some were variations of themes, with some members of other WMF projects submitting their rejected designs from earlier Wikipedia and Wikicommons design contests. Discussions centered on the need to show both globalism and localism in the design, and the desire to show that Wikinews was a stand-alone sister project within the WMF (Wikimedia, 2008). “Some of the things to think about when developing the logo are who the target audience is, who the writers are, and the scope of the project,” wrote Neolux on the discussion page of the logo contest (Wikimedia, 2008). “As far as I can see, this is a news service that has global reach, but also contains local and community based content. Having a globe as part of the logo emphasises the global content, but not any of the community/local stuff.” Neolux then went on to briefly discuss how he did not see Wikinews as competing against CNN or BBC because it would be about consensus and NPOV, but also did not understand how Wikinews “is a long-term viable project” because it seemed that it would simply be emulating what mainstream news organizations were already doing in ostensibly reporting news in an NPOV manner.

The fact that globalism, localism, NPOV, consensus-building, target audiences, comparisons and contrasts with mainstream news organizations and the future viability of Wikinews could be wrapped into a single comment ostensibly about a logo design is an example of how much organizational and sense-making work a design project like this did for a fledgling organization as it tried to establish its unique identity.
4.3.3 Policy Changes

As important as discussions about technology and design were to the evolution of Wikinews and its identity, by far the majority of Water Cooler discussions revolved around changes in policies and production processes. As would be expected with an organization starting up, there were many discussions on fundamental aspects of Wikinews the first several months of its existence as workflows and production practices were tried, refined, debated, and improved.

There were also many suggestions to expand the range and scope of Wikinews, including acting as a kind of news feed from other organizations such as Voice of America (VOA) and Baha’i Faith (Wikinews, 2006b, 2006c), a collaboration with the BBC (Wikinews, 2009f), feeds of sports scores or weather (Wikinews, 2006b, 2009g, 2010d), and many discussions, which are examined later in this chapter, about showing up on Google News. Most of the proposals were either rejected by Wikinewsies in discussions or were ultimately never developed to a stage that warranted further discussions or votes.

Most of the online discussions had to do with more mundane matters around editorial workflows, publishing new articles, and dealing with issues of managing participants and the disagreements that inevitably arose. Some of the topics were discussed off and on for two or three years before consensus was established and they became policies.

Wikinews still wrestles with many of the issues raised in its early discussions, including the role of opinions within Wikinews. A major change in January 2007 was the eventual acceptance by the community of allowing separate opinion pages as a tab on stories, alongside the collaboration, edit, and history tabs (Wikinews, 2007c). This
functionality allowed readers to post opinions about the topic of the news article on the
“opinion” page, while still maintaining the NPOV policy within articles. Editors and
others could still discuss issues about the article from a technical or editorial standpoint in
the talk page, which was renamed “collaboration” to avoid potential reader confusion
when posting opinions about the content of an article as opposed to discussions that took
place about the article while it was being created and edited.

Although the change was opposed by some in the community, there was a clear
realization by many that allowing users to post opinions on stories may not only attract
more people to the site, but may be a way to get them more involved in Wikinews and
help keep articles NPOV. “I believe that the opinions/comments will be able to help
combat POV, filtering it out of the article because the editors will be able to voice their
opinions in the appropriate page,” wrote Nzgabriel (Wikinews, 2007j). Technical issues
kept this implementation from being fully functional until late March 2007, and even as
late as September 2007 some members still voiced their strong opposition to the change
(Wikinews, 2007j). However, the consensus was that the addition of opinion tabs would
help increase participation in Wikinews, and a handful of articles developed active
opinion discussion threads based on the article similar to what is seen in sites like
Slashdot or Kuro5hin (Wikinews, 2007l), although most articles do not have any
comments in the opinion name space.

4.3.4 A Sense of Community
     Wikinewsies have a sense of their community as something different than
Wikipedia or other WMF projects, even as they share certain fundamental beliefs about
the value of working in a highly participatory, consensus-driven project, and as something worthwhile for the public good. In tone and in principle Wikinewsies try to welcome newcomers to Wikinews and encourage them to participate. The top of the homepage says “Wikinews is written by people like you” (emphasis in original) and in the left navigation is a “Write an Article” link, along with links to information on how to do it and what is expected in Wikinews articles. There are links to pages that help guide newcomers to established policies, answer common questions and issues, and provide basic information on news writing style (Wikinews, 2011d, 2013n, 2014b, 2014c).

Most Wikinewsies have shown a high degree of self-awareness regarding the various barriers to participation, such as user interface issues, understanding how to use templates and properly insert various codes in the articles, and simply understanding the components of what makes news articles different from other types of written works and how to maintain NPOV in articles.

Nevertheless, article Talk pages and the various Water Cooler archives are filled with vehement and lengthy disagreements among Wikinewsies, often degenerating into bitter name-calling and other personal attacks and references to past wrongs or slights. As counter-intuitive as it sounds, these debates also helped define the Wikinews community and are looked at in more detail in a later section.

For now, it is important to understand how the sense of community has been formed through two main processes and practices; that of the evolution of various roles and the formation of a rudimentary hierarchy among Wikinewsies, and how Wikinewsies attempt to maintain good relations and the spirit of collaboration through awarding badges of recognition to each other.
4.3.4.1 Defining Roles

Soon after the official vote to approve Wikinews as a new Wikimedia Foundation project, a loose hierarchy was created in Wikinews that emulated Wikipedia’s hierarchy, of which all of the earliest users were active members of. Users, or Wikireporters as they are sometimes called, are the most common level and anyone could participate if they registered for free on Wikinews or Wikipedia.

The next highest level is administrators, (called “admins” or “sysops”), who have the ability to delete or block stories and to block users or grant certain access privileges to some users, although admins do not have any special editorial authority (Wikinews, 2013o). Anyone could request admin status after working on Wikinews for a while (later it was stipulated as at least two months) and showing good faith in adhering to the community’s principles, and the request would be voted on and discussed by its members.

A higher-level and harder to obtain ranking was that of bureaucrat. Bureaucrats retain their administrator status but have greater administrative powers than admins and could rename users and grant admin or bureaucrat status to other members, among other user and story access or removal privileges (Wikimedia: Meta-Wiki, 2014). Throughout the existence of Wikinews, typically about 20-25% of admins have also been bureaucrats.

Participants promoted to admins are often the most active participants in Wikinews, taking part in a range of policy discussions as well as editing and reviewing stories. The hierarchy that Wikinews and Wikipedia use is largely based on meritocratic principles and assumes continued active participation in the projects. Nevertheless, the bureaucratization of Wikinews has been an occasional complaint by participants over the
years as some felt admins and bureaucrats either abused their power or did not participate in story creation and editing as actively as they should. This topic is discussed later in this chapter and in chapters 6 and 7.

In early August 2008 discussions began about formalizing a process that had already been used for some time in Wikinews as some established users acted primarily as editors of articles rather than creating articles. Wikipedia does not have a formal editor category or role, and it was agreed by Wikinewsies that the new category should be called reviewer rather than editor.

Reviewers essentially act as editors and have slightly more privileges than regular users but not as much as admins or bureaucrats, although like the other official roles in Wikinews the roles are not mutually exclusive. Reviewers check stories that are ready to be published and either approve or reject publication. The majority of the reviewers also have other roles such as admins or bureaucrats, and make up less than 10% of total active users.

4.3.4.2 Discussions, Debates and Divides

Despite the commitment to consensus and participation—or perhaps because of it—a lot of time and energy on Wikinews goes to discussions and debates, often about issues only tangentially related to story production. These debates often degenerated into bitter arguments and bickering that could last asynchronously for hours, if not days, with various participants weighing in at times to either take sides or try to calm down the antagonists.
Wikinews has clear guidelines on Wikinews etiquette, and outlines common-sense and sound principles to encourage participants to get along and to settle any differences amicably (Wikinews, 2013e). Guidelines such as “be polite,” “concede a point,” “be prepared to apologize,” and “help mediate disagreements between others” (Wikinews, 2013e) are all excellent pieces of advice for getting along that were not always followed, even by some established and active Wikinewsies. Wikinews created a dispute resolution process in order to deal with cases in which disagreements led to more serious accusations or that disrupted story publication.

One typical example of a disruptive process that harmed the production of stories is called an “edit war,” in which the creator of the story and a subsequent editor or reviewer would remove the changes made by the other and replace them with an earlier version of the story. Wikipedia had faced similar problems with its articles, and created a three revert rule (3RR) that Wikinews also used that forbade anyone from reverting an article to an earlier state a fourth time, upon pain of being banned from Wikipedia for 24 hours (Wikipedia, 2014b). Of course given the timely nature of news articles, edit wars could quickly serve to reduce the newsworthiness of a Wikinews article, given that one of the general requirements of a story is that it happened within the past three days, potentially resulting in a story being tagged as “not news” and thus killed.

Wikinews offered clear steps for participants to avoid disputes. It starts with the simple advice to avoid disputes in the first place by respecting others’ views, then suggests discussing on the talk pages of articles that are disputed, followed by bringing in the Wikinews community to mediate on the issue, and finally escalates to bringing the problem to a Wikinews arbitration committee, the highest judging body in Wikinews.
One step even includes the metaphorical advice to “have a nice cup of tea and sit down,” meaning, of course, to simply calm down and cool off (Wikinews, 2014d).

The arbitration committee, or ArbCom, would vote on whether to accept any cases brought to it by a simple majority (as of 2016 there were six members) (Wikinews, 2015). There were initially two elections a year for ArbCom members, but in 2008 the policy was changed to one election a year because members found the time involved in discussions and voting detracted from writing articles, given the small community of Wikinewsies (Wikinews, 2015). If the ArbCom members cannot reach a majority decision after five days then the case is not taken. If they do decide to take a case, they listen to the disputants and are authorized to make various punitive rulings, ranging from banning users for certain periods of time to forbidding users to work on certain types of stories. ArbCom clearly states that they do not arbitrate on specific article issues, such as determining the truth of a point made in an article, but on larger disagreements that may stem from article disputes but that have moved into a broader realm of arguing or abuse between participants.

Most Wikinewsies see using ArbCom as a failure of the collaborative system, partly because of the extra time and energy spent by all parties in resolving disputes, which is time spent not writing or editing actual news stories, but also because all the community and communication mechanisms that participants value in a project like Wikinews did not solve the problem. Some community members tended to take individual disputes to ArbCom at the slightest provocation, but for the most part
Wikinewsies had much more nuanced ways to deal with disputes, and one of the main ways was to raise the issue of NPOV in articles.

I am not claiming thatWikinewsies consciously understood from a sociological perspective how much organizational work a concept like NPOV did, but in practice most participants nevertheless did show a high degree of awareness of exactly how to use NPOV when it suited their needs, as the following examples out of many potential examples showcase.

Paulrevere2005, angered at the deletion of a story he submitted on February 15, 2005 about the rise in opium production in Afghanistan after the US ousted the Taliban, asked the Wikinews community if NPOV was being mis-used to “neutralize and censor news facts which ‘Big Brother’ (western government/businesses) would like to see neutralized/censored” (Wikinews, 2006d). The article in question, though sourced from several mainstream news organizations, read more like an opinion column or an attempt at news analysis than a news article and was poorly written, with some quotes used out of context (Wikinews, 2011a).

Another example is Neutralizer, a controversial Wikinews and Wikipedia user in the latter part of 2005 and much of 2006, who often invoked NPOV when editing articles, recommending them for deletion, or putting some of the various editorial flags that Wikinewsies developed in order to quickly categorize stories that needed further development or editing. Neutralizer was often sanctioned by the Wikinews community for disruptive behavior such as personal attacks or rude comments to other users, as well as what seemed to many Wikinewsies to be an unwillingness to work in a spirit of collaboration.
Examples of Neutralizer’s transgressions included creating sock puppets, or fake new user accounts, to vote on polls multiple times as different users, and citing NPOV issues with articles to delay or stop publication when in fact Neutralizer simply didn’t agree with the political views being expressed or the terms used by those quoted in the articles. Much of this disruptive behavior by Neutralizer had been seen earlier with his involvement in Wikipedia, when the user went by the name NPOV and was eventually forced to create a new user name.

Despite Neutralizer’s disruptive actions on Wikinews, the community continued to show a remarkable level of tolerance for such behavior. When Amgine, an early, active, and very influential (now former) member of Wikinews, announced he had blocked Neutralizer from Wikinews for six months after providing an extensive list of transgressions, with dozens of links to story talk pages as examples to support his case, Amgine was rebuked by other members—even those who had disagreements with Neutralizer—for not first seeking consensus among the Wikinews community to block Neutralizer (Wikinews, 2007i). Neutralizer was subsequently unblocked by another admin and the disputes between Neutralizer and Amgine went through a formal dispute resolution process with ArbCom, one of several that Neutralizer was involved in.

Another controversial user, MrMiscellaneous, likewise used NPOV as a rationale for deleting or delaying stories that he did not agree with, which included attacking sources used from any media he considered to be left-wing or biased. Considering that fewer than 50 articles in total include Indymedia articles as a source, and the vast majority of synthesis stories were derived from mainstream news sources, any perceived
left-wing or liberal bias would have been coming primarily from the mainstream media sources themselves rather than from editing biases among Wikinewsies.

The disruptions and disputes around Neutralizer, MrMiscellaniouls, and a handful of other members from mid-2005 to mid-2006 seemed at times to take on greater importance (and take more time) for some admins than developing news articles for Wikinews, and the debates also were said by some members to scare off new members from participating. In late May 2006, MrMiscellaniouls, facing yet another sanction in being temporarily blocked from the site, announced he would leave the site June 1. On his user talk page, several members who he had disputes with wrote to encourage him to either remain in Wikinews or said they hoped he would return at some point (Wikinews, 2007g), showing a remarkable generosity of spirit given the bitterness of earlier disagreements.

Few collaborative journalism projects—let alone social groups—would show the same level of patience to continually discuss and debate with users who were so clearly disrupting the goals of the project, and fewer still would have members so willing to quickly forgive and encourage future participation of those disruptive members. These examples show how in the midst of often heated debates the participants still saw even disruptive members as a part of a unique community in which communication, openness, and consensus-building were important values to uphold.

4.4 Working Practices
As humane and compassionate as most Wikinewsies showed themselves to be in showing good faith toward other users and in helping mediate and settle disputes, the fact
is that time and energy spent in dealing with such disputes detracted from the time available to the small Wikinews community to develop stories, which is the raison d’être for Wikinews. Wikinewsies were acutely aware that workflows and policies had to be developed to offer guidance on the unique production processes that Wikinews had to deal with, some of which differed radically from Wikipedia’s guidelines.

Although notions of editorial workflows and writing and editing processes in a journalistic setting are of course connected to notions of news norms, here I will just focus on the basic policies and workflows that have been created to show how a Wikinews story would go from creation to publication. In chapter 6 I will discuss why relevant policies were created within the context of news norms and how notions of news norms affected the development of various workflow processes and policies.

Over time, Wikinews has developed a range of policies, conventions, and guidelines. What are termed “core policies,” which were developed after long discussions and only after widespread agreement among Wikinewsies, tend to be the most rigid and least likely to change substantially. They include the following:

1. Do not promote any particular viewpoint
2. Do not revert any article more than three times in 24 hours
3. Cite your sources
4. Do not submit copyrighted material
5. Be respectful of others (Wikinews, 2013f)

Each of these policies includes a link to a page that explains the policy in much greater detail and that says in a box at the top of the page: “This is an official policy of
Wikinews. It has wide acceptance among editors and is considered a standard that all users should follow” [bold in original] (Wikinews, 2013j). These official or core policies represent a mix of what has been discussed throughout this chapter regarding the role of NPOV (policy one), specific working or dispute practices (rules two and five), and article creation and submission standards (rules three and four).

Conventions and guidelines are much more numerous, and although there is relatively little serious debate about them at this stage in Wikinews, they are more flexible and more open to discussions or alterations. Conventions and guidelines deal with aspects like copyright violations, image use policy, how to title articles, how to delete and archive articles, instruction creep, and general writing style and editorial guidelines (Wikinews, 2013f). The norms and agreement around many of these guidelines came after many debates and discussions over the years or developed through practices that were generally adopted as Wikinews evolved and became accepted norms (Wikinews, 2013f). Even so, Wikinews remains open to new suggestions and changes, although it recommends users review past discussions on guidelines to see how and why they are now there today.

The brief look below at the story development process mostly focuses on how stories are done in 2016, with only brief references to some of the design, technology, and policy changes that affected the story development process in Wikinews over the years.
4.4.1 Developing Stories

Potential contributors are encouraged to first understand if their story is actually news or not, taking them to a page that explains basic news writing style and norms (Wikinews, 2013d), and then asked to check to see if their story has already been started on Wikinews and to get familiar with editing a story in the MediaWiki. If the story has not been started, they are able to type in a title in a form box and click on a “create page” button that takes them to the {{develop}} story page template (Wikinews, 2014c).

The {{develop}} template tells other users that the story is in development and is not ready for formal review yet. Anyone can work on the story, although there is an option for the creator of the story to tag it with an {{editing}} tag, which tells other users not to do any edits (Wikinews, 2014c). This tag is discouraged, however, because Wikinewsies feel that nobody should “claim” a story by blocking others from editing or working on it.

Templates and tags are used throughout Wikinews stories in order to aid the story production and classification process and to easily tell others what stage a story is in. There are clearly explained tags for elements of stories such as sources and categories in which the story would be put in, classified in both subject and geographic categories. There are also tags to insert images or graphics from other WMF projects such as Wikicommmons or other public domain sources.
4.4.2 Promoting Original Articles

The idea of including original reporting has always played a prominent role in the ethos and mission of Wikinews, and is one of the biggest differences between Wikinews and Wikipedia, which does not allow original reporting. One project from 2005, the Wikinews Original Reporting Network (WORTNET), shows both how integral a role original reporting was perceived to be and the difficulties in living up to the ideals of including original reporting to any substantial degree. WORTNET, which is now inactive, was started to provide a handy list of volunteer translators who could translate stories with original reporting into other languages (Wikimedia, 2014). The project never gained traction, thanks partly to the dearth of original reporting in Wikinews and general low number of contributors to any of the Wikinews projects, and is now simply an archived page.

NGerda, an early active contributor, highlights how the self-perception of what theoretically made Wikinews necessary did not always match reality: “The advantage Wikinews has over other news sources, is that not only do we summarize from their stories and use their knowledge of an event, but we also add original reporting to those articles” [emphasis in original] (Wikinews, 2007e). NGerda never explained how people could add original reporting to events that took place far away, but presumably there was an assumption that, like Wikipedia, there would be enough active users worldwide that some Wikinewsie would be nearby a newsworthy event.

There are two major types of articles in Wikinews, synthesis articles and original reporting, with original reporting further subcategorized by “Exclusive Interview” (Wikinews, 2014b). Despite strong encouragement to include more original reporting, Wikinews has primarily acted as a human-edited news synthesizer of stories from the
mainstream media (Wikinews, 2013d). Original reporting in the English Wikinews accounts for only 2,395 articles out of a total of almost 21,000 articles, or 11.5% of the total number (Wikinews, 2016). Out of that 2,395, a total of 478 articles are also categorized as exclusive interviews, ranging from an interview with Israeli leader Shimon Peres in December 2007—a kind of high-water mark in terms of publicizing exclusive interviews by Wikinewsies—to athletes of various types and levels of fame to local politicians running for city councils.

Wikinewsies realize that original reporting is time-consuming and takes a lot of work, and guidelines have been written about how to conduct interviews, how to represent oneself, getting permission to record, talking to more than one source, and other interview techniques typical in journalism (Wikinews, 2016). However, some of the requirements in the official policy on original reporting add substantially to the workload of would-be reporters, such as insisting that all notes be transcribed and accessible to readers (Wikinews, 2016). In cases in which interview material is sensitive or sources must remain anonymous, a procedure was developed and debated that involves a Wikireporter sharing information only with a trusted Wikinews reviewer.

4.4.3 Reviewing Stories

Regardless of whether an article is synthesized or includes original reporting, once it has been completed to the satisfaction of the creator or another Wikinewsie who may have also worked on the article it is ready for review by a reviewer. The {{develop}} tag is replaced with a {{review}} tag, which flags the article as ready for review by a handful of Wikinewsies who have reviewer status (Wikinews, 2011c).
Reviewers are essentially editors, and go through a checklist of five items to determine if an article is ready to publish or not. The items they examine are copyright, newsworthiness, verifiability (all sources are properly cited), NPOV, and style (meeting Wikinews style guidelines). Reviewers have a rubric template they include in the document that says whether the article passes or fails each criteria, and reviewers cannot have been involved in the creation of the article he or she is reviewing.

While an article is under review, the reviewer places a \{\{under review\}\} tag on the article, which tells other contributors not to make any story edits while it is under review and reserve any comments on the article for the collaboration or talk page. If it fails any of the criteria (each criteria has its own tag), the article can either be fixed by the reviewer if changes are minor, such as style corrections, or sent back for further revision if it needs more substantial changes. If an article passes, it is called “sighted” by the reviewer and the \{\{review\}\} tag gets replaced with a \{\{peer reviewed\}\} tag, which places a template on the article’s talk page that shows each checklist item and whether it passed or not, along with who reviewed it and any comments he or she made regarding the article.

The current reviewing procedure was proposed in the summer of 2008, in part to help get Wikinews stories listed on Google News, which did not want to include stories that did not have some kind of official peer editing before publication (Wikinews, 2009j). It was also around the time that Wikinews had some of its highest numbers of active users, and the plan to revise and formalize the editing and reviewing process stirred a debate among Wikinewsies regarding further bureaucratization and means of control by some users over others. Heated discussions in late summer and fall of 2008 regarding the
reviewing process involved issues of dealing with spam or deliberately destructive content, how users could perhaps skirt the review process by putting a {{breaking news}} news tag on stories, and especially strong concerns that with a small number of people with special privileges it would create bottlenecks and undue power among reviewers to ban or stop articles they did not like or agree with (Wikinews, 2009e). Although abuse of reviewer power through bias has not been evident, the issue of bottlenecks did seem to be a problem. In October 2008 some users complained that their stories waited for review for 20 hours or more, which at the time seemed a typical problem (Wikinews, 2009c).

4.4.4 Publishing Stories

After a reviewer has inserted the {{peer review}} tag and all the checklist items are filled out, he or she then has to replace the {{review}} tag with a {{publish}} tag, assuming the article is ready to be published, and also create the opinion page (Wikinews, 2013a). Much of this otherwise somewhat cumbersome process has been automated with an Easy Peer Review function, making it simpler for reviewers to complete these final steps more quickly, and is an example of how both technological and design changes have helped the production process in Wikinews. After an article has gone through these steps, it appears as published on the home page of Wikinews.

Articles that are not deemed to meet the criteria for publication go into the “Disputed” category on the Newsroom page, where anyone can decide to edit or fix stories that have problems. Disputes between Wikinewsies typically happen when the creators of articles do not agree with reviewers’ comments or suggestions for changes, and some stories simply sit untouched for days. After four days of no edits to an article, it
gets the \texttt{\{subst:aband\}} tag, and if no other edits are done on it then it is deleted two days after that. This has been a sore point among some Wikinewsies (Wikinews, 2011b), who may see their work vanish and not know why if they have not followed the development and review process of a story they started or if they are not familiar with the Wikinews story writing and development pathway.

4.5 Current Issues

Now that we have a solid understanding of the development of Wikinews and how Wikinews stories have been produced, as well as issues Wikinews has faced in its twelve-year history, we will look at continuing issues Wikinews faces. Some of these have existed since its founding but have never been fully solved, while other problems have changed or become more prominent over time.

The issues can be divided into three main categories: readership, participation, and newsworthiness. The readership category involves Wikinews’s efforts to gain and retain readers, much like any traditional media organization wishes to gain an audience. The participation category is further subdivided into two categories, the number and quality of participants in Wikinews, and the level of productivity among those who are involved. Both of these aspects directly affect the number of stories produced and has ramifications within the Wikimedia community regarding the long-term viability of Wikinews as a Wikimedia project. The newsworthiness category can also be divided into two components; timeliness and relevance of stories. Each of these components plays a role in Wikinews’s product; i.e., news stories, and its perceived value among users, the Wikimedia Foundation, and Wikinews participants.
4.5.1 Readership

Gaining readership is a common goal for most publications, and Wikinews is no different. Although it does not sell subscriptions or advertising, there is still a fundamental sense of measuring success and validation in part by how many readers or users it has. Because of the participatory nature of Wikinews, there is also an unstated assumption that more readers leads to more potential writers and editors for Wikinews. In April and May 2005 there were discussions in the Water Cooler about what the page traffic numbers were so Wikireporters could use the data when requesting interviews, with the idea that it would make potential interview subjects more willing to talk to them if they knew it had a large audience (Wikinews, 2009i).

To get more readers, Wikinewsies have proposed a range of ideas and projects, ranging from the grandiose to the practical. Many ideas often involve tapping into the wider Web audience as well as utilizing the popularity of Wikipedia, which would seem a natural partnership. Wikinewsies are encouraged to link Wikinews articles to relevant Wikipedia articles, using a certain template to make the process easier (Wikinews, 2010c). There is also a Wikinews Importer Bot, an automated bot created by a user that imports certain dynamically-created Wikinews pages into relevant Wikipedia portal pages (Wikipedia, 2012).

Wikinewsies are also encouraged to look for blog posts mentioning Wikinews and comment on and share Wikinews stories on popular blogs, and are encouraged to share and link Wikinews articles on social media sites in order to drive traffic to Wikinews. Wikinews articles now include a range of social media site icons to make it easy for
readers to share articles on social media. Despite these efforts, traffic numbers remained fairly steady, at around 8 million page views a month, although after a new page count method was used that eliminated bot traffic the true numbers were closer to 1 million a month.

A now-defunct print edition of Wikinews, created regularly as a PDF by long-time Wikinewsie CSpurrier with only brief interruptions until 2011 and freely available for printing and downloading, was also considered as a potential source of gaining readership. Wikinewsies were encouraged to leave copies in common areas on campuses and other public spaces. Likewise, an audio version of Wikinews is also seen as a potential driver of traffic, as is various merchandise available on Cafepress (Wikinews, 2010c).

A big and ongoing concern for some admins and people in the Wikimedia Foundation from June 2007 was getting Wikinews listed in Google News, knowing how much traffic it could generate (Wikinews, 2009f). The current formalized review process was implemented in part to accommodate Google News’s requirements for peer edited work, but appearing in Google News also raised other issues, such as disputed articles and user pages also appearing in Google News searches. Some argued that this made Wikinews look unprofessional when a person searching for an article found a user page or unfinished article while searching for news on a story, so articles in development or that were disputed were moved from the front page to the Newsroom page to reduce the chances of them being indexed by Google News, along with some other technical changes that made unfinished articles harder to index by bots (Wikinews, 2009j, 2010a).
As Figure 4.8 shows, the number of page views historically is now hard to accurately know because of the new pageview definition that eliminated crawler traffic from the overall count. However, given that story production has continued to decrease, as have participants, it is safe to assume that the true numbers probably averaged around 1 million pageviews per month, with occasional spikes, similar to what is seen now.

**FIGURE 4.8: PAGE VIEWS ON ENGLISH WIKINEWS (IN MILLIONS)**

Source: http://stats.wikimedia.org/wikinews/EN/SummaryEN.htm

4.5.2 Participation

Given the participatory and democratic nature of Wikinews and other WMF sister projects, the issue of gaining readership has often seemed synonymous in the minds of Wikinewsies with increasing the number of participants in Wikinews. The evidence shows that this assumption is not correct, however, as page views have likely remained more or less constant while the number of participants has declined sharply since 2008.
4.5.2.1 Number and Quality of Participants

Ever since Wikinews launched, Wikinewsies have shown a strong desire to get more participants, partly because a high level of participation helps vindicate and legitimize Wikinews as a valuable WMF sister project so it can continue to receive funding and support from WMF. Some influential Wikinewsies have long felt that the WMF undermines and devalues Wikinews, which would be terminated as a sustainable project should the WMF decide to withdraw funding and cancel Wikinews. The feeling among some Wikinewsies of others not understanding the vagaries of journalistic production and of being slighted by Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales and the WMF has occasionally surfaced in sometimes bitter online exchanges between some Wikinewsies and Wales (Wikinews, 2014e).

Wikinews held two writing contests in 2005 in order to get more contributors to the project. The first, proposed for the English-language Wikinews by Eloquence in early March 2005, stipulated that the sole winner would be the last person who wrote at least one new article every day. During the 50 days of the contest, when it was stopped because Eloquence resigned, a total of 224 articles were created by participants (Wikinews, 2009k), most of who were already active in Wikinews.

The second writing contest, started in September 2005, attempted to include multiple language editions of Wikinews in order to “hopefully lead to a higher overall output of stories, and better cooperation across languages” (Wikimedia: Meta-Wiki, 2006). Rules were altered from the first one, allowing participants to use up to three “jokers,” or free passes that could be used in lieu of contributing a story a day, in order to try to increase the duration of the contest. The contest did attract contestants from several
different language versions and small cash prizes, but like the first contest most of the participants and the winners were already very active Wikinewsies.

Copying the idea from a writing contest that Wikipedia had held called Danny’s Contest, Messy’s Contest was held for the last two months of 2006 by user MessedRocker in which participants were given different points for doing different activities in Wikinews, such as editing stories and finding public domain images for articles, not only writing articles (Wikinews, 2009b). The winner, Nzgabriel, won $100, donated by two Wikinewsies, and Gmail and Orkut invitations offered by two other members (Wikinews, 2009b). In June 2007, McNeil proposed another writing contest and offered 100 euros as a top prize, soliciting more contributions so the prize could perhaps even be as high as 500 euros (Wikinews, 2008a). User Steven Fruitsmaak wanted to mitigate the individualistic aspect of the prize and added suggestions to reward teamwork and encourage more points for coverage from less-covered countries, which McNeil also liked. Writing contests held from 2010 followed the point system of rules, and further refined issues around what experienced users could do compared to new users. Despite these efforts, the contests failed to attract numbers of new users or sustained participation in story production.

In June 2008 Brian McNeil proposed a range of ideas to increase participation in Wikinews, including drawing people from Wikipedia and having a print edition of Wikinews that focused on news at the upcoming Wikimania 2008 conference in order to get more people to know about Wikinews (Wikinews, 2009c). At the same time, McNeil realized that making it easier for newcomers to start working in Wikinews right away was needed, and suggested some kinds of mentoring or coaching systems to help newbies.
On September 6, 2008, user Geo.plrd, a high school student (Wikinews, 2008c), asked about getting his high school journalism class to participate in Wikinews, and was met with enthusiastic responses from several prominent members at the time who asked him how long the project would last and how many students would be involved (Wikinews, 2009d). Suggestions were made for him to contact some Wikipedians who had had success with school-oriented projects on Wikipedia to get ideas of how to best run such a project for Wikinews.

Other Wikinewsies have also seen potential in gaining participants through an educational focus or as part of classroom journalism projects. Wikinewsie LauraHale took a leading role the past several years in promoting Wikinews as a viable partner for educators to use in their classrooms, offering to help guide educators who want to use Wikinews in their course instruction (Wikinews, 2013k). The Wikinews: Education pages include explanatory material and guidelines on Wikinews style and work practices, and suggest ways to incorporate wiki practices into a useful pedagogical framework, including fostering a community of practice among students and Wikinewsies (Wikinews, 2013l, 2013m).

Despite efforts by Wikinewsies to attract more participants and to make the story development process as smooth and easy as possible for beginners, the various tag elements and templates can be confusing to users who are not familiar with working in computer code, and can appear daunting. When combined with the growing number of general policy procedures in Wikinews and the actual practices of some Wikinewsies it sometimes worked against the welcoming and promotional rhetoric in attracting new contributors, as one example in 2006 demonstrates.
NewsHound, a new user, completed a story about a Web company’s second quarter earnings report that included original reporting and that from his list of what he did seemed to be a good-faith effort to adhere to the news standards of Wikinews, asking if he was really welcome or not when he received the following comments on the story Talk page (Wikinews, 2010b):

“Who the fuck is Web.com? I’ve never heard of them. If this is their second quarter results then they’ve been public for six months. Woopdee-doo. Over on Wikipedia we’d say this was “not notable”. Let’s (sic) just delete this attempt at using Wikinews for free publicity. --Imroy 13:54, 19 August 2006 (UTC)

I’ve never heard of Web.com either. FellowWikiNews (W) 14:01, 19 August 2006 (UTC)

So it appears that they’re patent trolls and spammers? Won’t someone delete this drivel? Leif 18:05, 20 August 2006 (UTC)

This “news article” reads like a press release. It’s also POV.” (Wikinews, 2006i)

There were several follow-up responses to his query, all with helpful tones and some apologizing for the breach in Wikinews etiquette by other members (and it should be noted that none of the negative commenters made any edits or improvements to the story). Others explained the skeptical reactions as, if not exactly welcoming in tone then at least warranted in spirit as Wikinewsies had already become wary of spammers trying to promote products and companies in the guise of news (Wikinews, 2010b).

Nevertheless, NewsHound only made three more edits on a subsequent story and never contributed to Wikinews again. The Wikinews Water Cooler archives have many other instances of users asking for help for various aspects of story production or to clarify policies, highlighting that it is not always an easy process to navigate when creating
Wikinews articles. These kinds of difficulties in story production have played a role in the relatively low number of stories actually produced in the past ten years.

The story review process, however, is recognized as being a major barrier to entry to new participants and to keeping people involved in Wikinews. User LauraHale conducted a study from January 2013 to April 2013 that examined rejected stories among different groups of Wikinewsies; accredited reporter, regular contributor with 10 or more published articles, new reporter with 9 or fewer articles, or University of Wollongong student. In her study, she explored the top reasons for story rejections by user category, and the success rate of users revising the stories to get them published (Wikinews, 2013b). Not surprisingly, new reporters had the most difficulty in getting stories to fit the criteria of copyright, newsworthiness, verifiability, NPOV, and style, and along with the university of Wollongong student had the most difficulty in doing the needed revisions to make stories publishable. Multiple stories had more than one review cycle before getting published, with one story getting reviewed six times before finally being published. “This confirms observational bias that English Wikinews has a high barrier of entry in terms of adapting to the local review process,” LauraHale noted in her report (Wikinews, 2013b).

4.5.2.2 Productivity

Besides the issue of the number of people participating, another important issue is productivity among those who are participating in Wikinews. Figures 4.9 and 4.10 show the number of actions (e.g., edits, comments, stories) by the top 20 active users between February 12 and March 12, 2014 and between May 17, 2016 and June 16, 2016, respectively. The figures clearly demonstrate two things. First, most of the actions are
done by a very small number of very active users, with more than 80% of Wikinewsies contributing ten or fewer times over 30 days. Without the contributions of these very active members (and the automated content contributed by bots, which is largely responsible for the extremely high output by Pi zero), the regular content output of Wikinews would be even more anemic.

FIGURE 4.9: NUMBER OF ACTIONS WITHIN PAST 30 DAYS, BY USER (AS OF MARCH 14, 2014)

The second point to note in these figures is that less than a quarter of active users remained with Wikinews between the two years, showing the relatively high turnover rate of Wikinews participants.

Using Wikipedia’s definitions of very active editors and active editors, only the top four or five Wikinewsies would qualify as very active editors (e.g., making 100 or more edits within a 30-day period). The remaining Wikinewsies in the top 20 would be classified as active editors according to Wikipedia as they made at least five edits within 30 days (assuming their actions were considered edits and not things like comments or reviewing documents). More than 80 of the remaining active users in Wikinews would
not qualify as active users for Wikipedia, as they made fewer than five edits in the previous 30 days.

However, it is important to note that Wikipedia shares a similar pattern regarding the number of very active versus active users, as Figure 4.11 shows. Approximately 10 percent of Wikipedia editors (3,065) are classified as very active, while 30,765 are active (Wikimedia, 2016c). With far greater numbers of participants, Wikipedia can still produce and edit a large amount of material even though a relatively small percentage of people are very active. Wikinews does not have that luxury with its small numbers.

FIGURE 4.11: ACTIVE EDITORS ON ENGLISH WIKIPEDIA (JAN 2003-NOV 2015)

![Active Editors on English Wikipedia](http://stats.wikimedia.org/EN/SummaryEN.htm)

Source: http://stats.wikimedia.org/EN/SummaryEN.htm

4.5.3 Newsworthiness

The notion of how Wikinews has defined and negotiated what makes a story news or newsworthy is explored in more detail in chapter 6, but here it must be addressed as one of the ongoing issues that Wikinews has faced with participants. LauraHale’s study of the Wikinews review process among four different groups demonstrated that the two
most common reasons for sending stories back to authors in the review process was newsworthiness and failure to follow the Wikinews style guide, as Figure 4.12 shows.

**FIGURE 4.12: ARTICLE REVIEW ISSUES IN WIKINEWS (JAN. 2013-APRIL 2013)**

Source: https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Research:Wikinews_Review_Analysis

The problem with grasping the concept of newsworthiness may be understandable for new contributors and university students—a fact shown by the smaller number of issues that accredited reporters and regular contributors faced with the notion. What was more perplexing, however, was the issue of not following the style guide, a document that is referred to frequently for contributors and that is clear in stating how to write Wikinews articles from a stylistic standpoint. LauraHale could only conclude that it meant that most newcomers did not bother reading the style guide before submitting stories (Wikinews, 2013b).
4.5.3.1 Timeliness of Stories

The timeliness of stories has added pressure to the story creation and review process, which has been likened to the Wikipedia’s Good article criteria but in a time-compressed format (Wikinews, 2013b). One of the main differences with Wikinews from Wikipedia, as has been stated earlier, is that the nature of news stories means they must appear in a timely manner before they lose their relevance as articles. The decisions made early among Wikinewsies to make news stories discrete content units rather than being appended from within over time, like Wikipedia articles do, means that a lot of work must be done when creating each new story, rather than simply building on existing stories like in Wikipedia articles. This policy decision by Wikinews has had serious ramifications for story production and workflow, and led to a lot of disgruntlement among some Wikinewsies who have seen their stories disappear after the three-day window of newsworthiness if the stories have not been revised and fixed according to a reviewer’s requirements.

The cumbersome editing and review process has led to delays in stories being published in a timely manner, which means Wikinews is an unlikely source for breaking news. Frequently stories do not appear on Wikinews until a day or more after they have appeared in mainstream news outlets, and stories of international significance are primarily synthesis articles rather than original reporting.

According to some Wikinewsies, news appearing in Wikipedia articles has hurt the development of Wikinews (Dan100, 2007). This perception is not helped by media reports that cite Wikipedia as one of the most popular online news destinations (Reuters,
The London bombings on July 7, 2005 is an example of how Wikipedia has acted as a go-to source for breaking news, with over 100 Wikipedia editors making 423 edits to the Wikipedia article on the explosions within the first two hours of it being reported (Zuckerman, 2010).

Another example of how Wikipedia has superseded Wikinews in terms of making and reporting news in a timely manner is illustrated in an odd story about the murder of Nancy Benoit, a professional wrestling valet and model, on June 22, 2007. Nancy and her son Daniel were murdered by her husband, professional wrestler Chris Benoit, who killed himself the day after murdering them. What made this story unusual was a Wikinews story on June 28, 2007 that reported that a Wikipedia entry was made several hours before her death was officially announced by an anonymous user to Chris Benoit’s Wikipedia article stating that Nancy had been killed (Wikinews, 2007c). The edit was removed after an hour when a Wikipedia editor noted that a citation was needed for such a claim. The source of the initial post was never discovered, but it shows how Wikipedia can be seen as a more important source for breaking news (in this case, even before official announcements) than Wikinews.

4.5.3.2 Relevance of Stories

A by-product of the issues mentioned above regarding the level of participation, a cumbersome story production process, and timeliness of stories is how relevant or original Wikinews articles are. Even at the height of story production, in 2005, Wikinews usually had fewer than 20 stories a day—hardly enough to offer the kind of full coverage of news events that most readers expect from a news source. Not only is news coverage
sparse and spotty because of the small number of stories appearing on any given day, but
the fact that most articles are synthesis articles also has raised concerns of story relevance.

Considering that most of Wikinews’s synthesis articles contain at most two or
three sources that are either from wire service stories or mainstream news organizations,
it is unclear just how many different perspectives are added to such stories or how much
perceived bias gets removed. This point was raised in August 2005 by Inebriatedonkey,
who wrote,

What is the point of wikinews? Wikipedia works great, because loads of people
who know a bit about a subject can come together, add their knowledge, and you
end up with an article which is a lot more than (sic) the sum of its parts. How does
this work with news? By its nature, only a few people are going to know what’s
going on, and very few of them, if any, are going to be on wikinews. The way
articles get written, (as far as I can see), is essentially a recycling of a couple of
other news sites. Which is all very well and good, but how exactly is this site any
better than, say, bbc news? It’s not less biased, because the facts are taken from
the other news sites, and nobody can really tell which is more or less true. It’s not
more comprehensive, for pretty much the same reason. Why is wikinews
necessary? (Wikinews, 2007e)

This comment, made barely nine months after Wikinews launched, shows a high
degree of awareness of some of the main issues that Wikinews continues to face. These
issues include how a relatively small number of participants have affected story
production, the story production process that evolved in the wiki format, the role of
potential bias in coverage, the larger number of synthesized articles compared to original
articles, and the overall relevance of Wikinews as a valuable news source. Whether these
issues can be overcome or not, and what they mean for other collaborative journalism
sites, will be explored in the last chapter.
4.5.4 Relevance of Wikinews as a Wikimedia Project

Many of the issues and problems mentioned above that Wikinews faced were further brought to light in November 2012 among the Wikimedia Foundation community in a proposal brought forth by a former Wikinewsie, a user named Adam Cuerden, who had contributed some articles in 2009 and 2010 and had vitriolic disagreements with some admins on stories around that time (Wikinews, 2010d). Cuerden made a formal proposal to close Wikinews, stating “quite frankly, this was an experiment that failed. The Wiki model has shown itself unable to produce news reporting. It's time to close the project” (Wikimedia: Meta-Wiki, 2016). Using statistics of output from Wikinews users, Cuerden said the site could hardly be considered collaborative given the small number of people who are actually active, and added that the “extremely hostile editing environment” drove potential participants away and kept the site from growing.

According to standard Wikimedia Foundation procedures regarding proposals to close Wikimedia projects, an active discussion ensued with votes of oppose or support the proposal. Even some participants who voted to oppose the proposal—thereby signaling their support for Wikinews—often admitted to the various faults leveled at it by its critics, with one user saying Wikinews is “the laughingstock of Wikimedia projects” even as he went on to praise Wikinews for how interviews he did when writing for it helped later get him professional media jobs (Wikimedia: Meta-Wiki, 2016).

Some participants accused Adam Cuerden of having a personal vendetta against some Wikinews admins, while others said that it was unrealistic to expect every Wikimedia project to be on par with Wikipedia. Supporters of the proposal to shut down Wikinews shared many of the same examples regarding “corrupt admins” who tended to
use Wikinews as a vanity project, an unwelcoming environment for newcomers, the
dearth of original reporting, and the anemic article output (Wikimedia: Meta-Wiki, 2016).
The proposal was rejected after the discussion period and votes, although it is clear that
many of the same issues and feelings around those issues continue to swirl around
Wikinews as a Wikimedia sister project.
Chapter 5: Allvoices

5.1 Introduction

In 2011, Allvoices claimed to be the largest open news site in the world, becoming one of the top 600 most-visited U.S. sites and top 25 online news resources worldwide by traffic numbers only two years after launching (PR Newswire, 2011). Allvoices has utilized social media principles, design, usability, and technologies since its inception, and technology and proprietary algorithms have played important roles in attracting readers and interest from potential company buyers. So much interest, in fact, that the company underwent two major transformations in its purpose and structure from its algorithms that now make the organization almost unrecognizable from its origins and what is discussed in this study and specifically in this chapter.

The founder and former CEO of Allvoices, Amra Tareen, used her experience in telecommunications management and as a venture capitalist in Silicon Valley to promote Allvoices through the business press and in obtaining two rounds of venture capital funding before Allvoices was acquired by digital marketing services Datran Media (now Pulsepoint) in May 2011 for an undisclosed amount (DMNews, 2011).

With Tareen’s calls for “bottom up media” and the site’s founding mission to give voice to people in developing countries who have not been able to be heard in the international news media (Weir, 2009), Allvoices as a company and Harvard-educated Pakistan native Tareen made for good copy. Allvoices also got attention with various
initiatives and incentives to attract—and compensate—contributors, even briefly offering health insurance for some contributors (PR Newswire, 2010c). The site’s launch of 30 global news bureaus, including in the Middle East, in which citizen journalists worked with professional journalists, was the first of its kind for collaborative journalism (Al Bawaba, 2010; PR Newswire, 2010b).

Allvoices uses a proprietary and patented algorithm called the Automated Newsroom that essentially acts as an aggregator and editor of content based on contributors’ stories, packaging their stories with related and relevant stories, video, and images from mainstream media and other Allvoices contributors that better helps contextualize stories and that ostensibly gives the user more information (Anonymous, 2009). Contributors and users rated and commented on stories that also played a role in giving credibility ratings to stories and contributors from the system.

With its rapid growth and claims of over 31 million page views a month, claims supported by Internet ranking sites like Quantcast and Alexa, Allvoices was hailed as an example of a successful citizen journalism business model (Entertainment Close-Up, 2010; PR Newswire, 2011). However, along with the glowing press releases and media puff pieces about Tareen and the site (Weir, 2009), there was also an undercurrent of dissatisfaction online among some contributors who complained that Allvoices was secretive, unfair, and frequently changed its payment policies at the expense of contributors, giving them less and making it harder for them to earn decent money writing for the site (Ang, 2011; Cornies, 2010; manhan2009, 2010; E. Smith, 2011; Witzheller, 2009). Some media experts wondered whether Allvoices was truly a sustainable business model or not (Glaser, 2009).
The acquisition of Allvoices in May 2011 by Datran Media, similar to what happened with Vancouver-based citizen journalism site NowPublic in August 2009 when it was acquired by Examiner.com (Stelter, 2009), delayed these concerns at least until 2014, and subsequent changes since then have shown how vulnerable the business model was, at least for the contributors who provided the site with valuable content.

A fundamental shift in its open journalism model was announced in August 2014 when Allvoices announced in an email to its contributors that it would be redesigned, would terminate its existing payment program for contributors, and would require all contributors to apply and get accepted by the Allvoices editorial team before they could contribute (Allvoices Team, 2014a). The shift in philosophy was exemplified in a phrase on the relaunched site, which stated “Allvoices is an exclusive community where great writers can connect, share their original content, gain exposure and earn money” (Allvoices, n.d.e). Another difference could be seen in a line that reflected a change in structure toward a more traditional news organization role: “Our team of professional editors curates all content to make sure our readers have fresh, interesting reads everyday” (Allvoices, n.d.e).

Today, www.allvoices.com takes the user to the URL create.pulsepoint.com, a site that provides content marketing services to companies, as Figure 5.1 shows. The page is targeted to two different audiences, brands that want to have content marketing services to promote themselves, and potential writers who want to write content marketing copy for brands.
Content marketing, also called native advertising, acts very much like how advertorials did in print media, where companies paid for a story to be written that would appear as a news story, although with the phrase “advertorial” typically delineating it as different from other types of news content (Sharethrough, n.d.; Wasserman, 2012). Today we see content marketing appended in the columns or bottoms of stories with tiny headings such as “promoted content,” “promoted stories,” or “sponsored links.” Content marketing has been growing in popularity across a range of publications, including The Atlantic, The New York Times, Forbes, and other big-name media companies (Hoelzel, 2014; Walford, 2015).

The change from an open journalism or collaborative journalism model to a traditional hierarchical news organization model with professional editors and then to a pure content marketing site demonstrates how established media or marketing companies are able to capitalize on early successes of collaborative journalism sites that have
attracted large audiences and numbers of contributors, and how vulnerable the founding principles of inclusivity and participation are to corporate control. This point will be explored more fully in chapter 7 regarding the viability of collaborative journalism organizational and business models.

This chapter primarily looks at Allvoices prior to the August 2014 change in policy, when most of the field research was done and while it still operated as an open journalism or collaborative journalism model. Comments on policies and practices refer exclusively to the pre-August 2014 organizational structure, unless specifically noted as a policy or practice after August 2014. For the main purposes of this study, the collaborative journalism framework is more relevant to examine than specific organizational policy changes that occurred subsequently, except in so far as those changes do not allow the same production practices or that have changed the nature of contributing to Allvoices.

5.2 Origins

Allvoices officially launched on July 10, 2008, after being online in beta release from April 2007 (Business Wire, 2008c). The idea for Allvoices came when founder Amra Tareen visited Pakistan after the October 2005 Kashmir earthquake and she felt that her individual pictures and stories were not enough to publicize the impressive work that Pakistanis who were affected by the earthquake were doing to rebuild and help others (Technology & Business Journal, 2008).

Tareen said that she was inspired by the people she met and wanted to create a place for individuals from all over the world to be able to report first-hand using photos,
video and stories to share their experiences. “At its core, Allvoices is about fostering democracy; about giving power to the people; about their voices having the effect that makes a difference,” said Tareen. “We believe that differing points of view complete the human story” (Technology & Business Journal, 2008). While Allvoices was still in beta release, Tareen returned to Pakistan in February 2008 with a cameraman to cover the Pakistan elections in several cities, providing original reporting with on-the-ground coverage and video (Business Wire, 2008a).

Tareen was able to use her education and work experience to create and eventually launch Allvoices. She was born in Pakistan and raised in Pakistan and Australia; she received her bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering and computer science at the University of New South Wales, and an MBA at Harvard University (Crunchbase, n.d.). She worked as an engineer and C programmer before becoming a product manager and product marketing director at Ascend Communications. She then became a partner at Sevin Rosen Funds from 2000 to 2006 before starting Allvoices, remaining as CEO for a short time after Allvoices was acquired by Datran Media in 2011. She left Allvoices later in 2011, and in 2013 Tareen co-founded direct-to-fan video platform Littlecast (Lawler, 2013), which received $2 million in venture capital funding before it closed in April 2015 (Crunchbase, 2016). After two years as Chief Product Officer at Decorist, which was acquired by Bed, Bath & Beyond in 2017, she became chief innovation officer at Bed, Bath & Beyond before founding and becoming CEO of All3D.ai in March 2020, a site that specializes in home brand 3D photos and video tours (LinkedIn, n.d.).
Tareen’s experience in product marketing and venture capital was demonstrated in the media-savvy approach Allvoices took shortly after its founding, hiring PR firm Racepoint in 2008 (Business Wire, 2008b), which helped get stories about Allvoices in the business and trade press. Tareen founded Allvoices with a small team of core people, renting space in a San Francisco office building cubicle farm that remained largely empty in part because of the recession and resulting hard climate for technology start-ups. Nevertheless, with only a small staff, Allvoices was able to attract hundreds of thousands of contributors worldwide and reach tens of millions of page views within two years of launching (Entertainment Close-Up, 2010). Allvoices had received $9.5 million in venture capital funding by the time it was bought by Datran Media in 2011 (Forbes, 2010).

Two factors—one human and one technological—helped Allvoices’ rapid rise in contributors and made it an attractive take-over target by a digital marketing service such as Datran Media. The human factor is outlined in its code of community conduct, which exemplifies the kind of community and site Tareen envisioned it to be. The technological factor is the patented Automated Newsroom, which played the main role in curating user-generated content and pairing it with mainstream news reports and other content from the Web to provide context for news stories and a more valuable user experience.

5.2.1 Code of Community Conduct

The code of community conduct for Allvoices listed in its Terms of Service page represented several telling characteristics of the company. The code had the usual legal disclaimers regarding not allowing obscene, illegal, or pornographic content, not
promoting illegal activities and not posting copyrighted content that is owned by others. It also prohibited hate speech against individuals or groups.

The first point in the community conduct stipulations emphasized one of Allvoices’ fundamental tenets regarding its attempts to build a supportive community of contributors. It stated that users agree not to use the Allvoices site to “Defame, abuse, harass, stalk, threaten, impersonate or otherwise violate the legal rights of others via comments, private messages or other means; do not instigate or participate in online arguments, flame wars or name-calling” (Allvoices, n.d.c). Although the first part of the clause is generally standard for many content sites, the second part of the clause showed the value that Allvoices put on not letting comments degenerate into nasty and meaningless back and forth between contributors.

The second point listed is equally telling of a characteristic of Allvoices—the criticisms by some contributors of secretive management practices and sometimes draconian measures against critical contributors. It stated users will not “Post content that criticizes or reviews Allvoices’ policies, staff members, or users; please contact us with suggestions or complaints using the links at Contact Us” (Allvoices, n.d.c). The issues around some of Allvoices’ controversial payment policy changes and at times heavy-handed and secretive management decisions are discussed later in this chapter. For now it is enough to note that it is the second point made in the community conduct code, even before points about prohibiting pornography or illegal works or activities.

Other prohibitions in the community conduct code were largely ignored on the site, especially the prohibitions about posting copyrighted material, including images, and marketing links to affiliate marketing programs in reports. Most reports included images
taken from mainstream news sites or other online sites, and it can be assumed that most contributors had not received permission from the copyright holders to use those images or video clips, nor had Allvoices paid for rights use. Furthermore, the vast majority of stories were largely rewritten from any number of online sources rather than original reporting, sometimes blurring the line between plagiarized material and summaries or rewrites.

Many reports could also be found that masqueraded as news articles, but which clearly press releases or promotional materials that essentially advertised a company’s services such as roofing repair or social media marketing and consulting (qiuhomeandgardenrecommendations, 2014; ResultFirst, 2014). To be sure, these types of stories usually did not receive high credibility rankings, essentially burying them deep within Allvoices, but nevertheless they were common and appeared multiple times each day from a variety of contributors.

The Allvoices community was expected to help flag or delete violations, but there was no payment model for such editorial work in the way that story contributors could be compensated, so there was little incentive for doing that kind of editorial clean-up work.

5.2.2 Automated Newsroom

One of the original members of the Allvoices team was Imran Khan, director of engineering. He was responsible for the backend engine, user interface, and network operations (Allvoices, n.d.d). This is a crucial role because Allvoices’ value proposition, largely relied on its patented algorithms called the Automated Newsroom that examined user contributions and matched relevant content from over 3,500 mainstream news feeds

Allvoices applied for a patent for the Automated Newsroom in 2007, with Tareen listed as a co-inventor, and was awarded the patent in January 2013 (Tareen et al., 2013). The patent claim says that the Automated Newsroom attempts to essentially replace the role of traditional human editors in terms of selecting appropriate stories and content quality, removing inherent biases that appear when human editors make story selections for readers.

According to the patent claim, a further problem is that reporters or editors may not know everything they need to know about certain locales where stories are filed, thus hampering their abilities to include relevant contextual content. In addition to these problems, the patent claim says, the process of reporting and editing by humans is labor-intensive and expensive and therefore not scalable to the kind of fragmented audiences we see today in the online landscape (Tareen et al., 2013). The kind of contextual processing that the Automated Newsroom does for users attempts to largely replace the role of human editors and provides users with more relevant and robust contextualized stories. In chapter 6 I examine how the Automated Newsroom plays an important role within a curatorial gatekeeping process in social media in general, and with collaborative journalism in particular.

Even with the importance of technology, humans are still needed to manage the site and contribute content, and Allvoices would not have generated the kind of articles about it being an exciting new model of citizen journalism that it did without large numbers of contributors reporting and writing stories (Anonymous, 2009; Entertainment
Close-Up, 2010). However, the Automated Newsroom allowed a very small team to manage a much larger number of contributors; far more than is typical for most newsrooms.

The Automated Newsroom’s capabilities regarding contextualization are also arguably Allvoices’ biggest asset from a business perspective, making it a likely acquisition target for a digital marketing service like Datran Media. It also made it easier for Allvoices to change its collaborative journalism model and become more selective in choosing contributors because technological components would be adding contextualized content to stories, not human editors.

5.3 Development

Before the August 2014 re-launch, Allvoices claimed to have over 500,000 contributors from 191 countries (Marketing Weekly News, 2012). As Table 5.1 shows, eight out of the top 15 contributors in Allvoices were from countries other than the U.S. Allvoices ranked its top contributors by the total number of views its users had received for stories, not the number of stories, comments, or ratings users contributed to the site. This is one example of the emphasis that Allvoices placed on the ability of contributors to successfully promote their stories in order to get more page views, which was a fundamental component of its business model for contributors and something typically seen today among online media companies, as opposed to focusing on the number of stories or original content as a way to rank contributors.
TABLE 5.1: TOP ALLVOICES CONTRIBUTORS BY # OF CONTRIBUTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>username</th>
<th>based in</th>
<th>total views</th>
<th>stories</th>
<th>comments</th>
<th>ratings</th>
<th>title</th>
<th>date joined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VeronicaS</td>
<td>New York, US</td>
<td>12,244,026</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>05/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>richwebnews</td>
<td>California, US</td>
<td>10,923,852</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>08/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinkinpark</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>9,155,434</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>894</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>reporter</td>
<td>08/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saleh1996</td>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>7,866,557</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>01/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbinchi</td>
<td>Illinois, US</td>
<td>7,123,361</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>05/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvendumaguit</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>6,419,401</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>10/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChelseaHoffman</td>
<td>Nevada, US</td>
<td>6,140,122</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>12/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pijushmitra</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>6,145,870</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>reporter</td>
<td>03/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prabirghose</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>5,979,981</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>03/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itoin53</td>
<td>Florida, US</td>
<td>5,772,870</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>08/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jthomasidymus</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>5,895,432</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>07/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NinaRai</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>5,789,632</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>03/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryangeneral</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>5,643,128</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>07/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robertweller</td>
<td>Denver, US</td>
<td>5,411,895</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>10/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punditty</td>
<td>California, US</td>
<td>5,241,282</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>anchor</td>
<td>08/08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Compiled from top contributor profiles at www.allvoices.com as of June 10, 2014.

The trajectory of Allvoices’ development was driven by a small team of executives and by business decisions that on the one hand were meant to enhance contributions and participation in the site and on the other to create a successful for-profit business. The participatory rhetoric of Allvoices did not extend to its business practices or policies toward contributors, which excluded contributors from decision-making processes and even removed postings by some members who had been vocal in their criticisms regarding policy changes (Ang, 2011; E. Smith, 2011).

We will look briefly at relevant technological, usability and design changes before discussing some of the most important business changes, payment policies, and policy initiatives and incentive programs, that Allvoices underwent.
5.3.1 Technological Changes

In May 2010 Allvoices hired David Warthen as chief technology officer. Warthen was a co-founder of Internet search engine Ask Jeeves (now Ask.com) and helped oversee Ask Jeeves during its IPO in 1999 (Technology & Business Journal, 2010). He was hired to lead the technical direction of the company, given his experience in a number of tech start-ups over the past 20 years. He said that Allvoices’s technology supports the human element, which he considered a special area of expertise: “These human/algorithm hybrid systems have been at the core of most of the work I have done, where the people involved are considered part of the system and not ‘outside’ of the system,” he said (Hopkins, 2010).

While CTO, Warthen re-architected parts of the system so the database and other components could run more efficiently and be scalable, and he added natural language processing technology to help with content matching between articles and related images (Warthen, n.d.). He also improved search engine optimization (SEO), helping raise their unique visitors and monthly page views from 3 million and 7 million per month, respectively, to 11.6 million and 62 million in January 2011 (Warthen, n.d.). He devised and developed Allvoices’s Social News Agent technology, which distributed news through various social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

5.3.2 Usability and Design Changes

Allvoices’s design and look has always been very social-media focused, reflecting the latest Web design styles such as large images accompanied by short text captions, heavy vertical and horizontal scrolling, drop-down menus that introduce inside sections
of content, and icons that encourage users to share material on other social networks or rate content, as Figures 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 show.

**FIGURE 5.2: ALLVOICES HOMEPAGE, ABOVE THE FOLD (JULY 14, 2014)**

A: The top navigation bar consisted of mouse-over drop-down categories, showing in a horizontal slide show scroll. Users could choose what types of stories to see, what types of media, information about some of the top contributors, and news about famous people.

B: Banner advertising appears at the top of pages, and as tower ads on the left side of the pages, as in H.

C: Users could choose what category of news they got on the homepage, or select news by location.

D: The left-side navigation and content area consisted of news stories from mainstream news sources, with tabs that let users see stories by their popularity (on the Web), their newness, or their popularity on Allvoices.

E: The middle part of the page consisted of contributor stories, along with information on what type of media elements the story contained, how many comments were made about the story, and the page views of the story. The green bar credibility rating was a rough measure of how trusted the contributor was based on the newsworthiness of past contributions and fellow contributor rankings.

F: The social media box that showed Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ was prominent and encouraged users to follow Allvoices.
G: The Cartoons of the Day feature box included cartoons from mainstream editorial cartoonists at various publications.
H: A skyscraper banner ad.
I: People in the News was a feature that included various news items about famous people as news stories dictated. Contributors could also “claim” famous people and curate news about them.

FIGURE 5.3: ALLVOICES HOMEPAGE, FIRST SCREEN BELOW THE FOLD (JULY 14, 2014)

The Allvoices homepage scrolls for four full screens, continuing with contributors’ stories down the middle of the page and with mainstream news stories on the left side. Various features boxes are displayed on the right side, including on this page a box for contributors that take users to the contributor pages to see what stories contributors have done for Allvoices.
The bottom of the page included links to subsequent pages of news, as well as the Images of the Day feature that included photos from wire services such as Reuters. At the very bottom of the page was a digest or compilation of headlines from top contributors (with a tab to switch to mainstream news) by story categories.

Despite the need for scrolling down on the homepage to see all the content, the design did include tabs with drop-down menus that had horizontal, slide-show scrolls for the categories of Stories, Media, Contributors, People, and More. When mousing over a category such as Media, the user could see further subcategories on the left hand navigation of Images, Videos, and Cartoons, and subcategories across the top that included Trending, Most Viewed, By Category, and By Location, as Figure 5.5 demonstrates. This kind of intuitive user interface made it easy for users to quickly find
the kind of content they wanted, differentiated by several different criteria. Similar subcategories existed for the other main categories, where users could look at contributors, for example, by most popular or other criteria.

FIGURE 5.5: TABBED DROP-DOWN MENU AND HORIZONTAL SCROLL (JULY 14, 2014)

Contributor pages allowed contributors to showcase their stories in a visually appealing format, using images from the stories in a variety of box sizes, as shown in Figure 5.6. The picture and user name appeared on the left navigation, along with the contributors’ rank (stringer, reporter, or anchor), how many views their stories received, when they joined Allvoices, and their location, which was self-reported. Further information could be found in various drop-down menus that included more information about the contributor that he or she chose to make public, more detailed information on their various story statistics and views, the reach of stories (how much they were forwarded by others), any badges they received from the Allvoices community, and links
and tags. Below that showed how many followers within Allvoices the contributor had and how many contributors that person was following. The contributor pages of the most popular Allvoices contributors clearly showed that the vast majority of the content that they generated came from repurposing or summarizing mainstream news articles. In Figure 5.6, for example, it is clear that user prabirghose, based in India and with 12,000 stories had by far the most stories on Allvoices, had not been to Madrid, Ferguson, or Siberia within the past to do first-hand reporting.

FIGURE 5.6: SAMPLE CONTRIBUTOR PAGE (JULY 14, 2014)

In the August 2014 redesign of the site, as Figure 5.7 shows, the front page became much more image-heavy and many of the original navigation and features disappeared. Story categories appeared across the top of the page, with a large, dominant image for a story followed by several smaller images below the fold. Contributors were now slightly more prominent visually as part of the stories they wrote, with a small circular thumbnail image taken from their user pages.
Even with the redesign, the page still required at least five screens or more scrolling down to see all the content, including the masthead material regarding the site and its policies at the very bottom.

FIGURE 5.7: NEW HOMEPAGE AFTER SITE REDESIGN IN AUGUST 2014 (AUGUST 23, 2014)
In the new design, trending stories appeared two or three screens below the fold, separating the most recent stories from a section called “Story Stream,” as shown in Figure 5.8.

FIGURE 5.8: TRENDING STORIES IN SITE REDESIGN AUGUST 2014 (AUGUST 23, 2014)
Gone also in the redesign was the top-level navigation and drop-down and side scrolling menus that let users see contributors. Instead, as shown in Figure 5.9, some of the most frequent and popular contributors were highlighted with the same circular thumbnails, though larger than on stories, and brief biographical information toward the bottom of the homepage.

**FIGURE 5.9: FEATURED WRITERS SECTION ON REDESIGNED HOMEPAGE (AUGUST 23, 2014)**

Overall, the August 2014 redesign and relaunch of the site reflected a more traditional, hierarchical editorial approach for Allvoices, even as it refreshed the look of the site to be more up-to-date and more image-intensive. Similarly, it reflected the dramatic change in its organizational model and the first step toward what would become a pure content marketing site by 2016.
5.3.3 Business Changes

Except for the seismic shift in policy toward contributors in August 2014, and
subsequently in its modern form, arguably the technological or usability and design
changes that took place with Allvoices since its founding were of less relevance to its
contributors than the various business and policy changes that affected how they were
paid. In any event, organizational and policy changes had attracted more media attention
and more discussions, debates, and disgruntlement from contributors than technological
or design changes (Ang, 2011; manhan2009, 2010; Witzheller, 2009). However, it is also
arguable that from a business perspective the technology itself has proved far more
valuable than the contributors or even audience that Allvoices reaches.

By February 2010, within the first two years of Allvoices’ founding, Tareen said
that Allvoices had received a total of $9 million in funding; $1.5 million from Silicon
Valley Bank and $7.5 million from Vantage Point Venture Partners (Forbes, 2010). The
biggest business change for Allvoices occurred in May 2011, when it was acquired by
Datran Media, which itself later merged with ContextWeb to form the company
Pulsepoint in September 2011 (Peterson, 2011). Although Datran kept all Allvoices’ top
executives after the acquisition, albeit with different titles, two out of the three left the
company within a few months. Founder and CEO Amra Tareen, whose title changed to
SVP of strategy at Datran, left within a few months to found Littlecast (LinkedIn, n.d.),
and CTO David Warthen left in August 2011 (Warthen, n.d.). Chief Marketing Officer
Aki Hashmi was named general manager of Allvoices (DMNews, 2011), and was senior
vice president and general manager of Pulsepoint’s Media Group until April 2014, when
he left to become CEO of HER Incorporated (LinkedIn, 2016).
Datran Media was a digital marketing services firm that had clients such as Microsoft, digital agency Razorfish, and Sony. It saw value in Allvoices’s technology platform that helped create and match content from users and from across the Internet and in the numbers of unique visitors and page views Allvoices had. Pulsepoint further focused on this aspect of itself, claiming to be “a global programmatic advertising platform, [that] fuses the science of programmatic targeting, distribution and optimization with the art of brand engagement. The PulsePoint Platform is powered by terabytes of impression-level data, allowing brands to efficiently engage the right audiences at scale while helping publishers increase yield through actionable insights” (Pulsepoint, 2015).

Since late 2020, Pulsepoint has further focused its business on the healthcare sector (Pulsepoint, 2020).

In short, the same technology that allowed Allvoices contributors to easily create and curate news stories is even more useful for digital marketing firms to create and deliver branded content for specific audiences, promising more exposure for clients and being able to charge higher advertising rates because of better targeting. Native advertising, or content marketing, was hailed by some as a potential savior for digital media publishing firms desperate to figure out workable business models for news content online (Hoelzel, 2014). However, as can be seen with the radical shift in focus within Pulsepoint to a targeted digital advertising firm that is now devoid of any sort of user-generated news content, it seems more profitable to focus on the algorithms and impressions to serve potential corporate clients in specialized fields than to be a general crowdsourced collaborative news site.
5.3.4 Initiatives and Programs

One of the other most important changes from an organizational and business perspective came on August 20, 2014. Allvoices re-launched under a new structure for contributors that fundamentally changed the nature of the site from one of open participation to a gated site controlled by an editorial team that included contributions only from people who were either invited by the editorial team to join Allvoices, or who were accepted by them after submitting an application.

I had joined the site in 2013 and wrote a couple synthesis stories in early 2014 on the site as part of my ethnographic research (neither of which I tried to promote on social media, however), as Figure 5.10 shows. I applied to be a contributor shortly after the relaunch in August 2014, including some information on my background as a journalist and editor, and included a couple writing samples from published work. On January 5, 2015, I received a short email from the “Allvoices team” saying that after reviewing my samples they decided not to accept my application. This precluded my ability to see what, if any, changes had taken place from a contributor’s perspective with the relaunch and redesign.
No clear reason was given publicly for why Allvoices changed its design and policy so drastically, except boilerplate marketing platitudes stating “the world of digital media is constantly changing and, in order to stay at the forefront, we need to change with it” (Allvoices Team, 2014a). Contributors were informed in an email on August 8, 2014 that the Incentive Program that promised payment for writers based on page views would be discontinued from August 18, 2014, that all existing contributors would have to apply to be accepted as contributors going forward, that the site would be redesigned and re-launched August 18, and that all existing content prior to August 18 would be removed from the site (Allvoices Team, 2014a). The site actually re-launched on August 20, two days later than originally announced (Allvoices Team, 2014b).

Almost since its founding, Allvoices had announced a number of initiatives and programs that showed a level of empathy for the difficulties freelancers face in today’s
social media world that was rare among citizen journalism sites, making their shift to a
traditional editorial format all the more surprising. For example, in June 2010 Allvoices
announced that it would begin offering health care to some of its most active U.S.-based
contributors in order to see if doing so could further help citizen reporters sustain
themselves with the pay-for-performance business model Allvoices used (Drug Week,
2010). Allvoices also stayed true to its founding mission of trying to become a voice for
citizen journalists throughout the world when it launched its Global News Desk.

In April 2010 Allvoices announced the launch of the Global News Desk, which
included the first citizen media news bureaus in the Middle East (Al Bawaba, 2010). Bureaus were opened in Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan,
and in 30 major cities around the world, including London, Beijing, Shanghai, Kolkata,
Johannesburg, Nairobi, Manila, and Yerevan, among others. Citizens in Middle Eastern
countries, especially current and former journalists, were encouraged to submit stories
that could be featured in a “Best of the Middle East” section on the homepage, and
contributors from other countries could have their stories appear in the Global News
section of the site.

“Our international news bureau operation integrates local and regional issues—
that normally receive little to no media coverage—into the greater global conversation,”
said Hashmi, chief marketing officer at the time. “At this point, only 50 percent of the
world events are covered by major media. Of that 50 percent, 80 percent feature the
Western, developed world. Allvoices is committed to changing this and our News
Bureaus are a leap in filling this void” (PR Newswire, 2010b). In March 2010 at a media
summit held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Allvoices claimed to have 8,000
citizen reporters throughout the Middle East and 340 in Abu Dhabi alone (PR Newswire, 2010a).

The Global News Desk fit well into the founding mission of Allvoices. “This is an invitation for citizens of the Middle East to use our powerful news platform to bring their own views to citizens in the U.S. and Western World whom generally get their information from solely Western news sources,” said Hashmi (Al Bawaba, 2010).

The global news bureaus Allvoices created did not mean they created and staffed traditional news bureau offices in all these locations. Rather, it was more akin to stringers in various locales that contributed to news or wire services, operating with their own equipment and out of their own homes or home offices. Nevertheless, the scope of what Allvoices was trying to create can be seen in their choice of calling them news bureaus, which is far more expansive than what other collaborative journalism sites had done at the time.

5.3.5 Payment Policies

Allvoices’ lofty rhetoric about enhancing the power of citizen journalists did not always live up to the reality when it came to payment rates for contributors, and several policy changes between 2010 and 2014 created growing frustrations among contributors as they saw their earnings potential, which was never large to begin with, shrink even more. Like other citizen journalism sites such as NowPublic (post-Examiner acquisition) and Patch.com (pre- and post-AOL downsizing), the vast majority of Allvoices contributors found pay rates to be extremely low (Ingram, 2010). In addition, the payment policies heavily favored U.S.-based (or at least Western) contributors over
international contributors, despite Allvoices’ founding mission of trying to give voice to people who were typically not covered by Western media.

With a growing awareness that citizen journalists and other amateur content producers in participatory media forms can largely be exploited by media companies (Petersen, 2008), a major question becomes how citizen journalists could earn enough to support themselves. Promises of “exposure” to budding freelance writers can only take people so far before realities like rent and living expenses set in, and Allvoices has recognized that contributors cannot live on exposure alone. Nevertheless, Allvoices had at least paid lip service to recognizing that contributors need to be able to earn money in order to continue providing content, and had devised various programs and incentives to do that.

In September 2008, two months after officially launching, Allvoices announced an Excellence in Citizen Media program that promised to pay contributors up to $10,000 during the six-month period that the program would be running, from August 19, 2008 to February 19, 2009 (Telecommunications Weekly, 2008). The initiative was meant to encourage contributors to promote their Allvoices stories on social media, attracting more page views to stories and their profile pages, where their stories are aggregated, to develop a readership base of fans. “With the Excellence in Citizen Media Initiative, Allvoices is experimenting with new models to support citizens, writers, journalists, bloggers, students, photographers and videographers,” said Tareen. “We give them a platform to succeed and the ability to build a global community around their reporting and contributions” (Telecommunications Weekly, 2008).
The Excellence in Citizen Media Initiative became the model by which Allvoices paid its contributors, later developing into the Build Your Brand (BYB) program. “Citizen reporters and freelance journalists are under a great deal of pressure to create and showcase their content and get paid,” said Tareen (Telecommunications Weekly, 2008). The program basically paid contributors not by how much they produced but by how many page views they drove to the stories that they did produce. Allvoices utilized journalistic norms of quality and value in contributions, awarding “first to cover” badges for timely stories and original reporting, and ranking stories on the home page according to a variety of criteria, including the numbers of comments stories received, viewership, and the reputation and trustworthiness of the contributors.

Allvoices claimed that some anchors earned more than $2,000 in August 2010 alone (PR Newswire, 2010e), although criticisms of Allvoices payment policies indicated that most contributors received far less (manhan2009, 2010; E. Smith, 2011; Witzheller, 2009). One former Allvoices contributor said that stringers, the lowest level of Allvoices contributors, got $1 per 1,000 views, reporters got $2 per 1,000 views, and anchors got $3 per 1,000 views (E. Smith, 2011). Although there was a three-tiered hierarchy that roughly correlated to a contributor’s reputation ranking, it actually was not quite as simple as Smith outlined.

The payment policy for stories was a point of contention among contributors ever since the Excellence in Citizen Media program, partly because of the way Allvoices paid its contributors. Contributors were paid in $100 increments each month either through PayPal or by check, with amounts less than $100 carried over to the next month (E. Smith, 2011). The policy was also contentious because of the inherent tension between the types
of stories contributors wrote and how promotable those stories were to a wider audience that Allvoices wanted to sell to advertisers, which were primarily based in the U.S. For example, although Allvoices touted the benefits of non-Western contributors taking part in the international media conversation, payment to contributors was calculated only on page views from the U.S., UK, Australia, and Canada (Allvoices, 2011). This effectively meant that contributors had incentives to write for a Western audience about topics that those audiences would find interesting.

Later payment policy changes created more disgruntlement among many contributors when Allvoices altered its payment rates and criteria, effectively reducing the amount most contributors got paid. Under the Build Your Brand (BYB) Incentive program, officially announced in September 2011, contributors were paid according to a Contributor Score, which was based on a complex set of criteria that calculated and weighted a number of factors, as shown in Figure 5.11.

**FIGURE 5.11: PAYMENT CALCULATION FOR ALLVOICES CONTRIBUTOR SCORES**

Source: Allvoices BYB Program, www.allvoices.com/incentives/byb
At the end of each month, Allvoices contributors got a Contributor Score that was totaled from the points and percentages of the Participation, Reputation, Promotion, and Engagement scores. If the total score was lower than 70, then the payment rate for contributors was 50 cents per 1,000 page views. If the total score was between 70 and 90 then contributors received $1.50 per 1,000 page views, and if the total score was over 90 then the payment rate was $3 per 1,000 page views (Allvoices, 2011).

Participation score, making up 45 percent of the total Contributor Score, was the largest portion of the total Contributor Score. Participating on Allvoices included writing reports, uploading images and videos, and commenting on and rating other stories (Allvoices, 2011). Allvoices incentivized contributors to complete their profiles and use their real names. One way it did that was by awarding 10 participation points automatically to contributors who had a completed profile and who used their real names. The score further increased during the month by doing such things as posting a minimum of new reports every month (ranging between 6 and 15, depending on which level of total score), rating other reports (minimum of 10 per month), numbers of images uploaded (minimum three), commenting on and engaging in discussions with other reports on Allvoices, adding videos to your own or other reports, and sharing content on at least two of the three major social networks (Allvoices, 2011).

Reputation Score consisted of 35 percent of the total Contributor Score. In contrast to the lengthy and complex explanations and point breakdowns for the Participation Score, the Reputation Score was straightforward and simple. Basically, as long as contributors did not violate the terms of use policies regarding posting plagiarized,
copyright infringing material, inappropriate content, or other content that was flagged by the community (Allvoices, 2011), they received points for reputation. To keep a high Reputation Score, contributors were encouraged to focus on writing original content “that the Allvoices community appreciates” and write frequently (Allvoices, 2011). How “community appreciation” and “writing frequently” were actually measured was not explained in the guidelines.

Although most media reports that discussed Allvoices’ payment model emphasized the fact that contributors were paid by how many views their stories received and that contributors were encouraged to promote their work, in fact the Promotion Score only accounted for 10 percent of the overall Contributor Score. Contributors started with a baseline Promotion score, which increased as contributors shared their content on Twitter and Facebook. Allvoices made it easy to do this by allowing contributors to automatically tweet their reports when adding their Twitter account credentials to their profiles (Allvoices, 2011). When logged into their Allvoices accounts, clicking the Facebook Like button on any article they had published on Allvoices also increased their Promotion Scores.

The Engagement Score made up the final 10 percent of the Contributor Score and was based upon how much engagement contributors’ content created on Allvoices. Similar to the Promotion Score, engagement was measured by how much contributors promoted content by tweeting or liking on Facebook, except in this case the content came from other Allvoices contributors (Allvoices, 2011).

Because Allvoices advertising clients are trying to reach a Western audience, page views are categorized as “monetized” only if they come from the U.S., UK, Australia, or
Canada. Therefore, if a contributor had 100,000 page views at the end of the month but only 60 percent of the traffic was from the U.S. or other included countries, then in fact the page view count would be 60,000.

An example of how Allvoices contributors calculated their monthly earnings was explained on the BYB Program page (Allvoices, 2011). An example contributor’s total Contributor Score is 75 for the month, which puts the contributor in the Level II category of payment, or $1.50 per 1,000 monetizable page views. His monetizable page views for the month are 120,000, which calculates to $1.50 \times (120,000/1,000) = $180.00. However, note that according to Allvoices’ payment policy, contributors were paid in $100 increments each month. Therefore, $80—nearly half his Allvoices earnings for that month—would be carried over to the following month and paid if he reached over $100.

As with most other collaborative or citizen journalism sites, the vast majority of stories that were written on Allvoices were synthesized articles from mainstream news reports. Very little content, with the exception of some opinion pieces or commentary added to the end of synthesized stories, was entirely original or included original reporting. Allvoices tried to encourage more original reporting and original stories through a number of programs and initiatives, most of which involved monetary rewards of some kind or that attempted to capitalize on the site’s most trusted and prolific contributors who had large followings of readers.

**5.3.5.1 Financial Rewards for Original Content**

In September 2011, Allvoices announced the Allvoices Select Media Program, building from the payment model used in the Build Your Brand (BYB) program that they
had promoted earlier, but offering more money to contributors for stories. In the Select Media Program, Allvoices offered $4 per 1,000 page views, a dollar more than the highest level of payment in the BYB program, and more than twice as much as the second highest level.

The Allvoices Select Media Program was open to all anchors, the highest level of contributor in Allvoices, and open by invitation only to reporters and stringers (the next two levels, respectively, below anchors) (Allvoices, 2013a). The program encouraged original news stories and opinion pieces between 400 and 1,000 words, written for a U.S. audience, which provided a unique perspective or new information to a news story. The piece could not have been published elsewhere, and Allvoices contributors gave up all rights to the piece to Allvoices if it was accepted as part of the Select Media Program.

In September 2012, Allvoices promoted its American Pundit Contest, offering $5,000 to a grand prize winner who wrote the best articles about the 2012 U.S. elections. Although the promotional YouTube video for the contest only received 343 views (allvoicescom, 2012), the contest itself proved popular enough that Allvoices did it again the next year. In June 2013, Allvoices offered the contest for the upcoming fall 2013 U.S. elections, back-dated for stories that had been done since February 13, 2013. Allvoices encouraged contributors to not only voice their opinions about a range of political topics, but to also conduct original reporting. The contest included semi-monthly winners who were chosen based on a weighted combination of writing strength, originality, adherence to theme, popularity and SEO success (Allvoices, 2013b). Winners of the semi-monthly prizes received $250 and automatically were promoted to anchor status, the highest reputation level among Allvoices contributors. From these semi-monthly winners, a
grand prize winner was chosen in December 2013 by a panel of judges that included journalists Eleanor Clift, Gary Marx, Nicky Penttila, San Francisco State University journalism professor Yumi Wilson, and Darren Richardson, administrator of the program for Allvoices and one of Allvoices top contributors. The grand prize winner was Reno Berkeley of Santa Fe, New Mexico, who won $5,000, and two runners-up tied, Rob Lafferty of Eugene, Oregon and Robert Myles of Rennes, France. They each split the total for runner-up ($1,000) and honorable mention ($250), earning $625 each (The American Pundit Contest, 2013).

Including the semi-monthly winners, Allvoices awarded over $25,000 in prize money to contributors for the 2013 contest. Although 2013 was an off-year for elections, Allvoices received 12.4 million page views for stories submitted for the contest, 4 million more than they had for the 2012 contest (The American Pundit Contest, 2013). They received 66,000 submissions for the 9 months the contest ran.

The promotions around the American Pundit Contest and Select Media programs underlie two important points about collaborative journalism sites such as Allvoices. First, it shows how executives are still trying to find sustainable business models that connect to page views and advertising, much as traditional media outlets are also trying to do online. Second, it shows how events like contests with financial rewards can generate greater interest among potential contributors, even as it masks the underlying question of whether contributors can earn enough to make a living as freelancer writers or citizen journalists.
5.4 Working Practices

Allvoices claimed in its promotional materials prior to the August 2014 relaunch to be the largest open media site in the world, encouraging contributions from people all over the world, and the site made it easy from a usability and technology standpoint for people to contribute stories. Because contributors were paid by how many views their stories received, contributors were also encouraged to promote their stories on a variety of social media, a practice that is now widely used among online news organizations.

5.4.1 Contributor Rankings

There were three different ranks or levels that contributors had, using terminology borrowed from mainstream journalism, which Allvoices called credibility or reputation levels. Stringers were new to Allvoices and were starting to build a following. According to Allvoices, in August 2010 stringers contributed an average of 9.3 stories and enjoyed 221 page views per post (PR Newswire, 2010e).

Reporters had a sizable and growing “fan” base and were building their credibility among the Allvoices community through original reporting and quality writing. They averaged 15.7 reports in August 2010 and saw their work viewed 432.8 times per post (PR Newswire, 2010e).

Anchors were the highest level that Allvoices contributors could achieve. Anchors were experienced contributors, having achieved the highest credibility ratings, and they had become trusted sources and grown large reader communities from their stories. According to Allvoices, each contributed an average of 47.13 posts in August 2010, with an average of 860 page views per post.
The average page views per post that Allvoices claimed appeared wildly inaccurate when looking at any number of contributors at any of the levels, even some of the highest-ranked anchors. The vast majority of stories had fewer than 100 page views, with perhaps a handful reaching into the low thousands or into the hundreds, even for the most popular contributors.

The relevance of the titles, except for purposes of overall reputation or status within Allvoices, was unclear, as is how such titles were granted. As Table 5.1 showed, two of the top fifteen contributors in Allvoices were ranked as reporters rather than anchors, even though they had more stories produced, more views, more ranking, more comments, and by almost any other measure would seem to deserve the rank of anchors compared to people who had the title with far fewer contributions.

There was another ranking system used for Allvoices users who chose to take on more of an editorial or oversight role rather than purely through contributions. These were called social badges and consisted of three ranks.

The first rank was Readers. Readers could flag content as inappropriate, which was then sent to the Allvoices editorial team for review. After the team approved 20 flags by a Reader, the Reader was promoted to Moderator status. Moderators could flag content for the editorial team to review, but could also delete inappropriate comments from stories. After the editorial team approved 50 flags by a Moderator, he or she was promoted to Super Moderator status. Super Moderators could delete inappropriate comments and articles without needing to flag material for the editorial team (Allvoices, n.d.b).
5.4.2 Writing Stories

Regardless of the title of the contributor, the story production process was the same and was made to be as easy as possible, walking contributors through the process to add images or multimedia and writing and categorizing the story, along with using keywords or tags to help search traffic, as shown in Figure 5.12.

FIGURE 5.12: REPORT YOUR NEWS PAGE (JULY 14, 2014)
Allvoices used several typical categories for news, including politics, sports, entertainment, business, health, travel, and lifestyle, among others, as Table 5.2 shows.
**TABLE 5.2: ALLVOICES STORY CATEGORIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical News Categories</th>
<th>Unique News Categories</th>
<th>Missing Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Conflict &amp; Tragedy</td>
<td>Crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Odd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Your Story</td>
<td>Editorial/Op-Ed*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science &amp; Technology</td>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Causes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Funny</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obituaries</td>
<td>Spirituality &amp; Religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Allvoices allowed opinion pieces, although they were not categorized and only listed as “opinion” in a sub-title of each opinion piece.

Allvoices did not have one typical category, crime, and had several unique categories in which contributors could place their stories. Although some of these categories may be seen in mainstream publications by different names, such as Allvoices’ “Green” category showing up as environmental coverage in mainstream publications, other unique categories reflect a non-standard, sometimes confusing, view of how to categorize news and what types of news is considered important for users. Figure 5.13 shows how the categories appeared on the pre-August 2014 version of Allvoices, at the bottom of pages, including the home page.
### FIGURE 5.13: TOP STORIES BY CONTRIBUTORS, BY CATEGORY (JULY 14, 2014)

#### TOP STORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLITICS</th>
<th>SPORTS</th>
<th>ENTERTAINMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illinois Republicans will find it tough to beat...</td>
<td>Hall of Fame basketball player Dennis Rodman to...</td>
<td>Great communicators: Five presenters who wowed at...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vladimir Putin goes to China to sell natural gas</td>
<td>Baseball owners elect Rob Manfred to succeed Selig</td>
<td>Julian Assange of WikiLeaks fame to appear as a...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President Obama vows to stop the progress of ISIS</td>
<td>At least 10 killed in trolley bus explosion in...</td>
<td>US rappers Pacman and Pezlo feel North Korea is...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BUSINESS</th>
<th>SCIENCE &amp; TECHNOLOGY</th>
<th>CONFLICT &amp; TRAGEDY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is a Good Home Based Business - An Absolute...</td>
<td>Fossilized skeletons of 47 prehistoric flying...</td>
<td>Syrian Justice Ministry says photos of mass...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSOCAM says Global investors got Modi call from...</td>
<td>98 different species of aliens inhabit the Earth</td>
<td>The Pentagon feels that there is no need for any...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to make paper from stone? Click here to find...</td>
<td>Early warning systems to predict natural disasters</td>
<td>Student caught in Heathrow Airport as she tried to...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ODD</th>
<th>YOUR STORY</th>
<th>HEALTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State failed to imprison convicted armed robber...</td>
<td>Where to buy accredited degree</td>
<td>Walking time not pace linked to reduced risk of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beegain: The next paranoia craze gripping parents</td>
<td>Residence Cleansing Solutions Excellent Or...</td>
<td>Fastfood customers ignore calories, nutritional...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman Confesses To Filming Porn In Church After...</td>
<td>The best ways to Find The Gold Buyer That Pays The...</td>
<td>Confusion over anatomy only arises with a male...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAVEL</th>
<th>GREEN</th>
<th>HUMANITARIAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top 5 Cities to Celebrate Christmas and New Year</td>
<td>Learning from Davao integrated farms</td>
<td>ADE Provides $3 Million to Cambodia for Urgent...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists in New York do not follow footpath...</td>
<td>Climate change: Coal fires carbon emissions to...</td>
<td>Samahan Operasyon Sagip (SOS) volunteers to...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is easyJet doing right?</td>
<td>ADB to Help Samoa Boost Energy Security and Hydro</td>
<td>Helping rebuild livelihoods in disaster-hit...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAUSES</th>
<th>OBITUARIES</th>
<th>ARTS &amp; CULTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona couple stranded while scuba diving in...</td>
<td>Ex-Barcelona coach Tito Vilanova dies aged 45</td>
<td>Remembering President John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantheon of democracy’s heroes will include...</td>
<td>Salsa Star Chico Feliciano Dies</td>
<td>A friend reminds about the American Thanks Giving...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cops in Detroit suburb humiliated black men in...</td>
<td>Kaseem wasn’t a star, but he told us about the...</td>
<td>California Author And Lawyer Releases New High...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As an example of some of the conceptual confusion that came from Allvoices’
categories, the “Humanitarian” category included mostly stories about aid given to
various countries, as would be expected, but also included some politically-oriented
stories that were not directly related to any humanitarian topics. Similarly, the “Causes”
category tended to be a hodge-podge of stories that reflected the beliefs or causes of
contributors more than it reflected news about different social or political causes. Stories
ranged from polemics on geo-political issues to hyper-local stories about crimes,
accidents, or just local happenings such as welcome events for veterans.

Because categories were chosen by the contributors themselves with no editorial
oversight as to how relevant the category may be to the actual content of the news story,
stories could easily be put in categories other than where they should have seemed to
belong.

It is also interesting to note that there is no specific “crime” category, like most
news publications have, a point that came up when I wrote my first article for Allvoices,
a synthesis article about a man who posed as a restaurant manager at a local restaurant
and was arrested for stealing a customer’s purse. The story could not easily be put in any
of the categories, as it did not involve conflict or violence so could not be in the Conflict
& Tragedy category, which seemed to cover larger issues of international scope. There
was also no op-ed category, although Allvoices allowed contributors to opine or write
commentary within the articles as long as it was clearly marked with a “Commentary”
sub-head in the body of the text.

In some of the categories I have classified as unique news categories in Table 5.2
there was considerable overlap in the types of stories that appeared. For example, stories
that were categorized as Humanitarian could often appear just as well in the Causes category, or even the Green category at times. Similar issues arose between the Green and Causes category. The Causes category had a range of types of stories in it that seemed to tangentially be related to actual political or social causes. For example, stories of police abuse that seemed racially motivated may be put by contributors in the Causes category, although it would have fit better in the Conflict & Tragedy category perhaps. The Odd category seemed to be a kind of catch-all category when stories did not fit elsewhere—which is how I categorized the local crime story I did—as it was never clearly defined what would make a particular story “odd” as opposed to “funny” or some other category.

5.4.3 Promoting Stories

Contributors were expected to actively promote their stories on social media sites in order to generate more page views, especially page views from U.S.-based viewers, even though in terms of calculating payment for contributors the act of promotion only accounted for 10 percent of the overall payment calculation factor.

Contributors were not only expected to promote their own stories on social media, but to help promote others’ stories by commenting on them and rating them. This policy raised complaints among some contributors, especially when contributors did not get paid for rating or commenting on other stories (Ang, 2011).
5.5 **Ongoing Issues in Collaborative Journalism Model**

Allvoices could be considered an example of the type of post-hegemonic power, or power through the algorithm, that Lash and Morozov speak of (Lash, 2007; Morozov, 2014). In this view, power has moved from power-over (hegemony) to power-within, or a world in which ubiquitous media and computing technologies allows power to become immanent and to encapsulate us in ways we are not aware (Lash, 2007). This form of “power up close” does not necessarily replace the old forms of power, Lash notes, but is more insidious in that it could create new forms of digital divides because algorithms gather and sort data, classifying us in ways that we have no control over and thereby affecting what type of media appears to us (Beer, 2009). Morozov further questions how the hidden assumptions behind the creation of the algorithms affect what type of information is gathered and measured, thus fundamentally skewing our online perceptions and behaviors (Morozov, 2014).

Although Allvoices contributors were fully ensconced in this post-hegemonic power both through their consumption and production of media content, their interests and issues regarding contributing to Allvoices tended to be much more mundane. Generally, they revolved around two main issues; payment for stories and Allvoices’ management practices. Allvoices itself had to wrestle with issues of story quality from contributors in order to avoid spam and to best utilize its story algorithms that targeted relevant content to readers (and thereby attract advertisers).

5.5.1 **Payment**

One of the chronic complaints among writers was how much more difficult it was to get paid decent wages for stories, even as the number of media outlets online has
grown quite large. In an environment that would seem like it provides many more opportunities to get published and paid, it has been a cruel irony that the first of those points has greatly overshadowed the second, and writers for several up-and-coming online publications such as Her Campus or Odyssey are either promised “exposure” or other vague, non-monetary rewards for online stories or are expected to get unrealistic numbers of page views before they do earn any money for stories.

How well Allvoices’ payment policies succeeded in bridging the gap between giving freelance writers living wages is a matter open to debate, and led to criticism from several former contributors and freelance writers. Even though some of their much-publicized efforts such as the American Pundit Contest and other contests would seem to promise sustainable income for prolific freelancers, it often fell far short for the majority of contributors. Furthermore, as noted earlier, Allvoices’ changes in its payment policies generally meant contributors felt they were getting short-changed even for the amounts they were able to make if their stories received large amounts of traffic.

One established freelance writer, Larry Cornies, wrote about his experiences working with Allvoices over five days as he covered the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010. He submitted a couple stories on the first day, but then later got in a disagreement with an Allvoices editor who did not see the news value of subsequent stories he pitched, trying to encourage him to write on topics that would generate more page views rather than considering true news value (Cornies, 2010). He quickly realized that because of the need for large numbers of page views in order to get paid, his stories would garner him very little money, if anything, unless he spent most of his time trying to promote the stories on social media to attract more viewers.
Even after Allvoices’ relaunch, some still complained about the payment policies, saying they still did not provide enough income for the majority of contributors (Kersey, 2014).

5.5.2 Management Practices and DMCA Lawsuit

For a collaborative journalism site that trumpeted itself as the largest open journalism site in the world, it proved to be remarkably secretive about its own decision-making processes and management decisions, even with its own contributors. The fact that the second bullet point in Allvoices’ code of conduct stated that contributors could not criticize or make negative comments about Allvoices staff, polices, or users says something about the management culture of Allvoices. Some contributors who did complain, even using reasonable language, had their accounts removed from Allvoices (Ang, 2011).

One source of complaints from some contributors was the opaque methods for determining which stories appeared on the homepage of Allvoices, which of course had a huge effect on the visits (and therefore pay rate) stories received. Accusations of the editorial board playing favorites with home page selections, either with their own stories or with favored contributors, were made over the years, especially among United Kingdom contributors (E. Smith, 2011; TEKJournalismUK, 2014).

A management oversight led to a lawsuit that Allvoices lost in June 2014 against a professional photographer who sued it for copyright infringement. In February 2011, professional photographer David Oppenheimer learned that a contributor to Allvoices had posted some of his photos in January 2011, and demanded that Allvoices remove the
photos. However, because Allvoices had not officially designated an agent to comply with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) (a process that involves a processing fee and providing the DMCA with the name and contact information of the person responsible for overseeing compliance to the DMCA), Oppenheimer initially did not receive any response from Allvoices. In March 2011, Allvoices designated an agent, but as late as August 2011 still did not respond to his cease and desist letters regarding his photos on the site, nor did they ban contributors who Oppenheimer claimed were repeat copyright infringers (Jaffe, n.d.).

In January 2014, although his photos had been removed from the site by that time, Oppenheimer sued Allvoices over the infringement incidents in 2011 (Justia, 2014). Allvoices tried to have the case dismissed, stating they had since complied with designating a DMCA agent and were therefore under the safe harbor of the DMCA. They also claimed that a user had posted the material, not Allvoices, and that their terms of service clearly indicated that contributors are considered independent contractors. However, Oppenheimer argued that the relationship was closer than that, partly because Allvoices claimed to provide health insurance to its top contributors (Justia, 2014), and contributors could not therefore be considered independent contractors. In addition, he argued that Allvoices was not immune to copyright infringement from contributors because Allvoices did not already have a designated agent when the infringement occurred (Esquenet, 2014). A judge rejected Allvoices’ argument that retroactively complying after an infraction provided safe harbor protection (Kluft, 2014).

Given that the vast majority of stories on Allvoices were synthesis stories and did not include original reporting, and Allvoices’ apparently cavalier attitude about copyright
infringement (at least with photos, based on the Oppenheimer case), it would seem that Allvoices would be vulnerable to similar copyright infringement claims from journalists or writers whose stories were used as the source material by Allvoices contributors, but this was not the case.

5.5.3 Story Quality
The quality of stories that appeared on Allvoices, given its open-door editorial policies until August 2014, was another concern among both contributors and editorial staff. As mentioned earlier, some stories were clearly promotional pieces written by companies, but Allvoices’ curational system generally flagged these types of pieces for what they were and gave them low trust ratings, thus ensuring they did not appear on the homepage or get wide circulation in social media.

Although rare, stories that included original reporting showed glimpses of the potential of collaborative journalism in creating good public service journalism. One active contributor, Maryann Tobin, used Allvoices and other citizen-journalism sites like Examiner.com (formerly NowPublic) to publicize abuses she found at a Florida horse farm that claimed to take adopt unwanted animals. Allvoices publicized this story as an example of how powerful citizen journalism could be (Allvoices Community Manager, 2012).

In November 2011, Tobin saw a Facebook video of a horse that had been severely injured when the owner of Domino Effect ranch came to take the horse to the ranch and mishandled the horse, causing the injury. She followed up on Domino Effect ranch, a place she had visited several months earlier, and over several days in November 2011
wrote about several unsavory things regarding the owner and ranch, including his past
criminal history, the fact the ranch was inaccurately characterizing itself as a non-profit
organization, and other examples of fraud and abuse of animals on the ranch (Tobin,
and local media attention, with a subsequent visit and newscast by a television reporter,
which further publicized the problems at Domino Effect ranch (Tobin, 2012c).

In early 2012 Allvoices began a slightly different type of coverage that utilized its
contributors providing original content for a specific event, in partnership with a local
news outlet. In March 2012, Allvoices partnered with the San Francisco Examiner at
Macworld | iWorld to provide coverage of the event based on reader interests, with
Allvoices contributors doing everything from long-form stories to live event reports
(Marketing Weekly News, 2012). The ability of the Automated Newsroom to curate and
combine relevant material from the coverage with other stories was touted. This kind of
coverage was a precursor to subsequent coverage done by contributors that included
sponsored content from digital media companies, featured by Allvoices as separate
content from other contributor stories, and can be seen today as some of the earliest steps
toward what is called content marketing.

5.5.4 Current Status
As discussed in the introduction of this chapter and mentioned throughout, in
August 2014 Allvoices abandoned its open journalism model in favor of a traditional
editorial approach in which contributors were vetted by an editorial team. This shift was
also the first move toward its current business model—that of a pure content marketing
site that caters to writing articles for corporate clients. This direction has taken Allvoices firmly away from its people-oriented focus as espoused in its founding and earliest years and toward a focus on touting its ability to match content (and page views) by its algorithms. In the new model, the content producers are expected not only to do the difficult work of reporting and creating stories, but are also supposed to play key roles in helping promote those stories through their social media outlets.

The potential issues around this new model being used are discussed further in Chapter 7, where the potential and pitfalls of collaborative journalism organizational and business models are analyzed.
Chapter 6: News Norms, Curation, and Collaborative Journalism as Communities of Practice

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters were case studies of Wikinews and Allvoices, respectively, explaining their origins and different paths of development up to the present. Although the two organizations differ in significant ways, they shared some surface similarities and were created with like-minded missions in that they encouraged citizens and users to collaborate on news story production.

Using Wenger’s concepts of communities of practice (CoP), this chapter explores two important commonalities between Wikinews and Allvoices as collaborative journalism organizations. According to Wenger, the dimensions of communities of practice include mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire, each with their own aspects that help further define the particular dimensions (Wenger, 1998). Both Wikinews and Allvoices share multiple aspects of these dimensions that help define them as communities of practice, although the relative importance of certain dimensions varies between the organizations.

Specifically, this chapter examines how professional news norms (real or perceived) and curation connect to dimensions of communities of practice as two of the main characteristics of collaborative journalism shared by Wikinews and Allvoices. Participants in each organization adopted, altered, and sometimes ignored professional
news norms, but nonetheless news norms acted as reified concepts to order and critique journalistic work. This is important to understand from a social production community (SPC) standpoint how contextual and professional influences can affect a specific community, and how this brings both strengths and weaknesses that affect the sustainability and productivity of that community.

This chapter also shows the increasingly important role of curation in the online world and in online journalism and particularly in collaborative journalism, and how curatorial practices are used as important mechanisms within each of these communities of practice. The concept of curation is explored in detail, demonstrating how it connects to but differs from traditional notions of gatekeeping and gatekeeping theory. Understanding developing online curatorial practices is important for all online news organizations, not only collaborative journalism sites.

### 6.2 Communities of Practice Dimensions within Wikinews and Allvoices

Before we look at news norms and curation, however, we will first look more specifically at how Wikinews and Allvoices interaction and production practices map to the specific dimensions of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire that show how each of these are communities of practice. The following analysis provides a useful framework from which to situate and conceptualize the practices, giving us a basis that can be applied to other SPCs.
6.2.1 Mutual Engagement

Wenger calls mutual engagement “the first source of practice as the source of coherence [in] a community…of participants” (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). Practice does not reside in the abstract, but in the negotiated meaning among participants who are interacting with each other within a given environment. Mutual engagement, says Wenger, is what actually defines a community and makes it different than simply an aggregate of people in a group, team, or network that is defined by some characteristic.

Wenger emphasizes the active involvement of people with each other through mutual engagement as the defining characteristic of a community of practice, while acknowledging that factors such as proximity, membership, or who one knows in social networks may also play roles in helping create communities of practice. However, he emphasizes that these factors do not define a community of practice; rather, it is defined by the interactions that take place between participants (Wenger, 1998).

What enables mutual engagement is a complex and often subtle process, Wenger states. Enabling mutual engagement can be anything from going to a specific place of work, such as the claims processors he studied do, to taking part in office gossip to bringing snacks for everyone to share—and many more. Furthermore, Wenger makes clear that “a community of practice is neither a haven of togetherness nor an island of intimacy insulated from social and political relations” (Wenger, 1998, p. 77). In fact, some communities of practice, such as dysfunctional groups or families, are defined by what many would see as destructive social relations or patterns of mutual engagement. The interactions themselves—not the quality or kind of interactions—are what create mutual engagement and a real community of practice, as opposed to simply an abstract concept of “community” that is notoriously hard to define.
6.2.1.1 Wikinews

It is perhaps a good thing for Wikinews that a community of practice is not defined by harmonious social relations, as there are many examples of written interactions between Wikinewsies in Watercooler discussions and in the Talk pages of stories that are combative, despite the site’s rhetoric about helping others and keeping things calm. It should be noted that there are also many examples of agreement and support as well, but the lengthy and often vitriolic disagreements have deterred many from continuing to participate in Wikinews.

Various conflicts are part and parcel of participating in Wikinews, just as any community of practice will have disagreements. However, the role that these disagreements played in terms of hampering production, output, and sustaining participation cannot be underestimated. Accusations among Wikinewsies of not adhering to the principles of openness and participation espoused in the wiki community, debates about the newsworthiness of story subjects, headlines, and even word choices, and an increasingly bureaucratic structure dominated by a few core members all contributed to the same cycle: Early enthusiastic participation by newcomers, followed by frequent and rapid defections.

There are of course other reasons for the defections and lack of production by most Wikinewsies. One of the most important reasons is simply the amount of work involved in creating news stories, especially ones that involve original reporting, and these production issues are explored in greater detail in the next chapter.
Even with inevitable disagreements, the level of mutual engagement among Wikinewsies can be seen in the lengthy written interactions with each other, as well as IRC chats discussing a range of topics, quite often sharing ideas and plans to improve Wikinews or to add features to it that would help make it more widely known or get more participation. Discussions around ideas, plans, and creating working procedures often seemed to dominate the time (and written output) of many of the most active Wikinewsies—indeed, frequent participation in such discussions rather than story output or edits on stories often embedded Wikinewsies within the community and made them relevant members, especially in the first few years.

6.2.1.2 Allvoices

The notion of community was trumpeted in many of Allvoices’ promotional materials and rhetoric on its site, starting with its foundational principle in being able to give voice globally to people who had none (Allvoices, n.d.a; PR Newswire, 2010d). Although Allvoices does have an office in San Francisco, it was not a space for contributors to gather but rather office space for management and staff. Like Wikinews, Allvoices’ contributors had no regular physical space to meet that would help spur mutual engagement, so the mechanisms to do so had to take place solely through online communication.

The management team of Allvoices created “built in” forms of mutual engagement—albeit in a limited sense—in how they encouraged and rewarded contributors to rate other contributors’ stories. In this format, there was no guarantee of
reciprocation, and no way simply through ratings to actually communicate with other participants.

The design of the site further encouraged mutual engagement through the user pages, which allowed a level of transparency among contributors that showed information such as how many followers they had, how many people they were following, the stories they have done and how many views those stories received, their rank in Allvoices, where they were from, when they joined, badges earned, reach, statistics about their stories, links, tags, and any biographical information they chose to include in an “about” tab.

All these functioned as ways to establish a sense of social presence in the Allvoices community, and encouraged mutual engagement in helping establish their community of practice. These practices are similar to what is seen in online learning communities, for example, where educators encourage establishing social presence online (Cui et al., 2013; Kumi, 2013).

Despite the much larger number of participants than Wikinews, Allvoices did not have the same levels of mutual engagement shown among Wikinewsies. For example, there were no obvious places online in which Allvoices contributors could have discussions and debates about other stories in the same way that Wikinews had Talk pages, nor did contributors interfere with the story production process of individual contributors. Rather, the mutual engagement tended to happen through the technological functions of ratings and showing support by promoting stories on social media.
6.2.2 Joint Enterprise

Negotiating a joint enterprise is the second component that helps create coherence in a community of practice, according to Wenger. There are three parts to this:

1) It is the result of a collective process of negotiation that reflects the full complexity of mutual engagement.

2) It is defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it. It is their negotiated response to their situation and thus belongs to them in a profound sense, in spite of all the forces and influences that are beyond their control.

3) It is not just a stated goal, but creates among participants relations of mutual accountability that become an integral part of the practice. (Wenger, 1998, pgs. 77-8)

The process of negotiating a joint enterprise is not a formal event or procedure, like one may typically think of sit-down negotiations in the business world. Instead, it is a much more fluid, dynamic, and in some ways “natural” process that people do in certain social situations but remain unaware of at the conscious level. The negotiation involves not only between participants, but between participants and the organizational setting or situation in which they are in, their positions within the larger field or even society, and a number of other environmental factors that likely are well beyond their control. All of these things play a role in the process of negotiating a joint enterprise and as part of their mutual engagement.

Members in a community of practice may have little control over outside forces and the effect of those forces on their tasks or interactions (their job tasks, for example),
and even if they do wish to radically change things within the larger picture they may not be able to do so (Wenger, 1998). Nevertheless, they are able to resist and subvert dominant forces in often creative ways that in turn help define the types of mutual engagement that creates a community of practice. These kinds of “internal negotiations” among participants, or a way of setting boundaries between their practices and larger societal units or practices, also creates a sense of mutual accountability among participants, Wenger states. This mutual accountability can be reified and take the form of written rules, policies, or goals, but he states that it is no less important to consider the role that unwritten norms may play as well in establishing and enforcing mutual accountability.

6.2.2.1 Wikinews

Wikinews, with its culture of collaboration, consensus, and democratic participation is an example *par excellence* of how a collective process of negotiation works in practice in determining a joint enterprise and how that joint enterprise evolves and changes as it is defined by the participants in the process of creating it. The ample written record in the various archives regarding technical, policy, editorial, design, and other issues, as well as debates on some individual story talk pages that at times were longer than the actual stories being discussed, all provide useful artifacts of how the process of mutual engagement in a joint enterprise works.

As part of the larger Wikimedia Foundation and as a sister project initiated shortly after the initial success seen with Wikipedia when Wikipedians were discussing new potential projects in which wiki-based models could be applied, Wikinews has always
been strongly influenced by the bigger negotiated enterprise that is the Wikimedia
Foundation (Wikimedia: Meta-Wiki, 2004). As noted in chapter 4, all of the earliest
Wikinewsies were also contributors to Wikipedia and continued to work on both projects
as they followed their interests.

Much was borrowed from Wikipedia’s norms and practices, including neutral
point of view (NPOV) as a foundational principle that was not negotiable. But as we will
see, NPOV was used in a variety of creative ways discursively to accomplish
organizational work even as it also presented weaknesses. The practices of mutual
engagement revolving around transparent discussions on Water cooler pages and
consensus-building through rational arguments was also adopted from the Wikipedia
community without question by the fledgling Wikinews.

However, as Wikinewsies started to actually create the approved Wikinews sister
project, questions and issues immediately arose that in some ways put Wikinews at odd
with Wikipedia’s practices. These mostly revolved around the unique aspects of news
stories, or how news stories were understood to be by the founding members of
Wikinews. One of the first and most obvious divergent paths was Wikipedia’s policy on
only including material that had been published elsewhere—obviously not an option for a
collaborative journalism project that hoped to attract original reporting from citizen
journalists. Another major divergence was the decision early on to treat news stories as
discrete, time-sensitive products that could not be edited later, like most Wikipedia
articles are. These discussions connect to the importance of pre-conceived notions of
news norms and what should be defined as news, which is discussed later in this chapter.
For now, it is enough to state how these discussions were examples of mutual engagement through negotiated joint enterprise.

Even though Wikinews owes its existence to the popularity of Wikipedia and the organizational and financial support of the Wikimedia Foundation, the relationship between the two has not always been harmonious. This shows how a joint enterprise can help define itself in opposition to a larger field or organization—in this case Wikipedia—even as it is constrained in some ways by that larger field, such as rules regarding NPOV or the technological limitations of the wiki software being used. Some Wikipedians fail to see the value in Wikinews and its form of collaborative journalism, especially in light of its comparatively small story output (Wikimedia: Meta-Wiki, 2016).

In addition, news events often sit very well as updates to existing Wikipedia articles, creating competition between Wikinews and its news production style and the greater number of news stories that appear more quickly on Wikipedia’s main page. Wikinews takes pains to differentiate its stories from Wikipedia articles, saying that Wikinews articles allow for original research and provide detailed descriptions of events, while Wikipedia articles provide condensed descriptions of events (Wikimedia, 2016b).

Wikinewsies have often felt undermined or ignored by the Wikimedia Foundation, especially when there is talk within the Foundation of cutting costs and shutting down less efficient or less popular sister projects (Wikimedia: Meta-Wiki, 2016). The threat of being shut down has played a part in the various discourses among Wikinewsies of increasing efficiency and productivity, as well as various proposals to increase publicity. As noted in chapter 4, lengthy technological and story production discussions revolved around how to make the necessary changes to stories that would allow Wikinews articles
to be scraped by Google News, thus greatly increasing visibility (and, by presumed
association, relevance) of Wikinews.

However, this has not been the only reason for the discussions around efficiency
and productivity, which pervade the archived discussions in all categories. Ideas for how
to improve aspects of the site often used an imagined audience as the rationale for why it
should be done, followed by frequent statements that it should be discussed by the
Wikinews community.

The call to discuss items or proposals would seem to be perfect examples of how
mutual engagement works in a negotiated joint enterprise like this, but ironically it could
work as a block to true participation and action, as noted clearly, if harshly, by David
Shankbone in discussions about a proposed design change by a participant:

Seriously, this Wiki moves so slow getting anything done. … Do you have a
problem yourself? No? Then don’t feel the need to speak on behalf of the “silent
masses” to make sure every voice gets heard. Really...just make your opinion
known, but a lot of you use the excuse of “discussion is needed” to drag your feet
and do nothing. Stop acting like a bunch of old women; we’re supposed to be part
of the fast-moving tech generation, trying new things and innovating, and we are
scared to do anything on this wiki (Wikinews, 2008b).

This example shows how important it is to firmly ground the aspects of mutual
engagement in actual practice, not simply discussions (although discussions can of course
also be a form of practice) of proposed practices in a negotiated joint enterprise.

Although the discussions did serve a purpose in terms of mutual engagement and helping
cohere (and define) active Wikinews participants, the time spent in discussions trying to
reach consensus compared to time spent actually working on projects to improve
workflow and other processes often hampered the very practices that were intended to
help efficiency and productivity. Furthermore, the voluminous written artifacts that were
created as regulations and procedures to be followed when consensus was reached—
products of the process of negotiated joint enterprise, became components of the shared
repertoire used by Wikinewsies and likewise played a role in hampering efficiency and
productivity, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Even if many Wikinewsies were not as vocal or straightforward as Shankbone in
criticizing the seemingly endless discussions and attempts at consensus even for
relatively simple decisions, Wikinewsies generally had an understanding of the
inefficiencies inherent in their discussions. At times some active participants took their
ideas about improving workflow processes, technical issues, and design ideas to Internet
Relay Chat (IRC), a synchronous (and unrecorded) “back channel” that some participants
used. However, since not everyone was frequently on IRC, decisions based on IRC
discussions often led to charges of conspiracies, back-room deals, and lack of
transparency that ran contrary to the spirit of the Wikimedia community (Wikinews,
2006c), creating its own discord even when the ideas themselves were perhaps not that
controversial. The IRC channel acted as a form of mutual engagement, especially among
a select few who had the time and energy to participate in detailed levels of discussion in
real-time. This practice in a way signaled who was “in” and who was “out” in terms of
substantial decision-making, highlighting the differences between ideals of democratic
and open participation and the actual communication practices that sometimes took place.

6.2.2.2 Allvoices

Despite the public relations stories from Allvoices about how it is based on citizen
participation, in fact participants had little or no say in fundamental management
decisions regarding how Allvoices was run. However, this does not mean that Allvoices participants did not also actively create a negotiated joint enterprise as they wrote and submitted stories within (and sometimes against) the framework created by Allvoices management. After all, Allvoices’s much-vaunted Automated Newsroom arguably could not exist without contributions from Allvoices writers. Similarly, certain editorial practices were encouraged, such as “claiming” a celebrity to cover, which were done entirely by people.

As discussed in chapter 5, even at the height of Allvoices’ popularity, when it had hundreds of active contributors and claimed nearly 3 million page views a month, there was an editorial team that played a disputed role in determining favorite contributors by promoting their stories on the homepage, which would virtually guarantee high numbers of page views (manhan2009, 2010; TEKJournalismUK, 2014). Not surprisingly, complaints surfaced that some members of the editorial team promoted their own stories or those of favored contributors over those of others.

Perhaps the biggest complaints among contributors were about its payment policies, which had always been a pay-per-click model but that increased its minimum threshold while essentially reducing the rates, thus making it harder for contributors to earn money on stories. Even when Allvoices was criticized for its payment policies by contributors and outside publications, it continued to tout the value of its collaborative journalism model as a way for writers to “build their brand” and “gain momentum” (Hoy, 2009; Kersey, 2014).

A sense of mutual accountability and a shared sense of community existed among Allvoices participants in so far as they saw it as one of many potential publication
platforms to write for, sharing the tribulations that freelance writers faced in the late 2000s and early 2010s as print publications shrank or closed and paid publishing opportunities shrank with them. In this sense, Allvoices was part of the larger media ecosystem that on the one hand seemed to exploit writers with extremely low pay rates even as it touted the opportunity for them to gain exposure and learn how to brand themselves in order to presumably get stories published by publications that paid more.

6.2.3 Shared Repertoire

The development of a shared repertoire is the third characteristic of practice as a source of community coherence, according to Wenger (Wenger, 1998). Through the joint pursuit of an enterprise, participants create resources for negotiating meaning in a variety of ways. These resources are not always directly related to the over-arching goal or purpose of the joint enterprise, even as the project or goal provides a sense of coherence to activities that otherwise would seem disparate or even at cross-purposes. For Wenger, shooting spitballs and taking a spelling test can both be considered within the same practice, as both activities are related to the overall context and enterprise of “school.”

The set of shared resources by a community that make up a shared repertoire include two basic characteristics: they reflect a history of mutual engagement and they remain inherently ambiguous (Wenger, 1998). These two characteristics cover both the past and future of a community of practice. Through their interactions of mutual engagement in a negotiated joint enterprise, members of a community of practice create various artifacts, routines, ways of doing things, stories, symbols, and concepts that become inherent and reified parts of that community of practice. These are resources that
members are able to draw from in their interactions to generate meaning, and it also serves as a way for new members to signal their participation and acceptance or identity within a community of practice. However, as Wenger states, these routines and ways of doing things, even the reified ones, are always able to be altered and changed as participants interact. In this way, the inherent ambiguity of these practices, especially ones that are not reified in written rules and regulations or other “concrete” ways, allows space for participants to continually create and adapt to new practices and new meaning-making. Ambiguity, according to Wenger, does not mean an absence or lack of meaning—rather, it is the condition of negotiability that then allows for the creation of new meaning (Wenger, 1998).

In essence, a shared repertoire allows for a kind of shorthand-in-practice that makes mutual engagement between participants easier as they can draw from a common pool of shared understandings and history in their interactions with each other.

6.2.3.1 Wikinews

Wikinews provides many examples of the role that creating a shared repertoire has within a community of practice, as it could be argued that many participants spent more time and energy creating artifacts, rules and regulations, and various processes of story production rather than doing original reporting on stories. Here we will look at two examples of how shared repertoire was used among Wikinews participants, highlighting not only how reification worked in relation to participation, but how ambiguity worked as well. These two areas are the award system of barnstars and trophies that was created by
Wikinewsies to praise and recognize each other, and the process around getting news accreditation for Wikinewsies.

Despite what some Wikinewsies felt was a non-productive tendency toward bureaucratization in Wikinews (Wikimedia: Meta-Wiki, 2016; Wikinews, 2007h), the hierarchy that has been created remains relatively shallow and flexible, and is based on meritocratic principles and community consensus. This could not happen if Wikinewsies did not have a shared sense of community and were not able to recognize the contributions of other participants.

A sense of community developed in part from the shared repertoire and experiences of the earliest Wikinewsies as members of Wikipedia or other Wikimedia Foundation sister projects, and the assumed commitments to open-editing in a wiki format, consensus-building, and the value of NPOV. It also developed through the online interactions participants had with each other as they debated and developed policies and contributed to Wikinews in various ways. This sense of community and goodwill was further enhanced by a kind of semiotic shorthand in which Wikinewsies awarded barnstars or trophies to each other, praising them for different kinds of efforts on Wikinews. Figure 6.1 shows the barnstars and trophies that Wikinewsies award each other as symbols of appreciation.
FIGURE 6.1: WIKINEWS BARNSTARS AND TROPHIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Barnstar</strong>:</th>
<th><strong>Newbie Barnstar</strong>:</th>
<th><strong>Copyeditor’s Award</strong>:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To recognize particularly fine contributions to Wikinews, specifically in relation to the metaphor of barn raising as representing collaborative effort toward a common goal.</td>
<td>Newbie Barnstar awarded for extraordinary help to new wikijournalists.</td>
<td>Awarded to those who have spent significant amounts of time contributing to Wikinews articles not by writing, but instead by engaging in a critically important activity: copyediting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Original Reporting Barnstar</strong>:</th>
<th><strong>Wikinews Medal of Persistence</strong>:</th>
<th><strong>Exceptional Newcomer Award</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camera Barnstar awarded for extraordinary or tireless original reporting.</td>
<td>The Medal of Persistence is awarded to users who have dealt with a large amount of vandalism.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Contest Winner Trophy</strong>:</th>
<th><strong>Trophy</strong>:</th>
<th><strong>Award of Journalistic Magnificence</strong>:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trophy given to Contest winners.</td>
<td>To reward Wikinews contributors for hard work and due diligence.</td>
<td>Given to writers who complete a substantive body of work or series of articles, primarily focused on matters of national and/or political significance for any given nation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Contributor Award Trophy</strong>:</th>
<th><strong>User Bawolff made a special appreciation award.</strong></th>
<th><strong>The highest level is Star Reporter, for writing or substantially contributing to more than 2,500 articles.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awarded according to the number of articles written or worked on to a significant extent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wikinews borrowed the concept of using barnstars from Wikipedia, which symbolizes the shared work experience like a barn raising, which in turn had borrowed the practice from earlier wikis (Wikipedia, 2014a). Wikipedia has over 160 different types of barnstars that Wikipedians award each other, whereas Wikinewsies use far fewer. Wikipedians created a large number of Wikipedia barnstars in 2004 and early 2005, around the time that Wikinews was launched and into its first few months (Wikipedia, 2014a). The graphic of the barnstar award is placed on a user page, along with a caption such as the following: “I, (user name), hereby award (awardee username) the Wikinews trophy for…”, which personalizes the award and states a clear reason why he or she believes the awardee deserves it.

Although barnstars are still awarded, and some Wikinewsies put contributor award trophies on their user name spaces as they finish stories, generally barnstars are not used as much as they were in the first few years of Wikinews. On the one hand, the less frequent use of barnstars and other visible badges of appreciation can be seen as a result of the maturing community of participants, who do not need incentivizing measures like badges or barnstars to motivate them to participate, but on the other hand it can also be seen as a result of fewer numbers of regular participants to Wikinews compared to its earliest years.

The barnstars served dual purposes in terms of identity and ranking on Wikinews, just as they do with Wikipedia. One purpose was to help cohere the community by showing an appreciation of work that would otherwise go unnoticed, given that articles are not bylined and that most of the feedback one gets when writing or editing stories is critical or negative.
The second purpose is no less important, and that was to let users demonstrate to other users their levels of experience, a kind of rough ranking system similar to user ranks in online multiplayer role-playing games, only not nearly as precise. A series of barnstars and trophies would clearly indicate to someone going to a user page that the user is an experienced Wikinewsie or Wikipedian, giving a loose sense of meritocratic ranking without explicitly lording it over other users.

The other area in Wikinews that shows the complex dynamics around shared repertoire is the process around establishing news accreditation for Wikinewsies. This process shows the codification and the flexibility around reified artifacts that are emblematic to the components of shared repertoire that Wenger discusses.

From early February 2005, Ilya suggested developing a Wikinews reporter accreditation policy so that participants who were doing original reporting could receive official recognition and access as journalists at press events (Wikinews, 2012). A rudimentary policy was hammered out, and over the next two years various discussions arose around the implications of accreditation, especially regarding what to do about inactive Wikinewsies or who could otherwise abuse their press credentials.

Accreditation was given from early 2005, and eventually an official policy was adopted that would provide accreditation to participants who requested it and who met the following criteria: 1) being an established and published Wikinews contributor or member of another Wikimedia Foundation project, 2) having started or substantially contributed to several Wikinews articles or showing contributions to other Wikimedia Foundation projects, and 3) demonstrating a commitment to the principles of NPOV (Wikinews, 2011e).
Established journalists who could show a body of professional work could also be considered, assuming they met most of the above criteria. Accreditation is voted on by Wikinews members, and if approved is granted for two years. If Wikinewsies have not been active on Wikinews within the previous six months then their accreditation is revoked (Wikinews, 2011e). Wikinews listed 23 accredited contributors (21 male, 2 female) and 20 inactive accredited contributors as of August 2013, the most recent update of the page (Wikinews, 2013i).

The discussions and processes around creating and maintaining accreditation show in microcosm the importance of ambiguity in shared repertoires. What started as a seemingly clear-cut rule-making procedure quickly became more complex as participants raised various issues not originally thought of, which then in turn had to be addressed either through explicit rules or were left open (or not addressed).

The many questions that arose on everything from basic story production to design to procedures for editing followed a similar pattern as the accreditation discussions. The plethora of reified rules and procedures, although largely created through community participation and discussions, became so prolific and unwieldy that they became a barrier to entry for new potential participants, even despite efforts to simplify and provide easy “how to” advice to newcomers (Wikinews, 2013d).

With Wikinews, the dominant reified artifacts in the form of various policies and rules acted as tools from which participants debated issues (sometimes related, sometimes as proxies for larger disagreements on other issues regarding how Wikinews was being run). However, even as new rules led to new discussions and debates, the over-reification
of Wikinews can be seen as stultifying its openness and appeal to newcomers and dampening its ability to rapidly change.

### 6.2.3.2 Allvoices

Part of the shared repertoire of Allvoices began in part with the founding mission of the site, as stated by founder Amra Tareen when she stated “Allvoices is about fostering democracy; about giving power to the people; about their voices having the effect that makes a difference” (Technology & Business Journal, 2008). The global focus in part helped attract a more diverse group of contributors than Wikinews typically had, as well as many more contributors.

The overall user interface and design of Allvoices made it easy for newcomers to register on the site and to start creating stories, with step-by-step instructions along the way regarding story elements like title, photo captions, and things like that. There were also clear instructions for contributors on how to write good news stories, including tips and suggestions when Allvoices ran its American Pundit Contest in 2013. In this way, Allvoices provided clear reified artifacts on what was expected for content production on the site and in the contest, including a breakdown of how submitted materials for the contest would be judged. This included writing strength (30-35%), originality (25-30%), adherence to theme (15-30%), and popularity and SEO (15-20%), with further explanations under each category to explain exactly what the criteria meant (Allvoices, 2013b).

An especially interesting point from a shared repertoire perspective in this written artifact is how ambiguity is still built into the judging criteria itself. On the one hand,
specific weights are given to the different components of what stories Allvoices wants to see submitted, while on the other hand the weightings have variations of between 5% and 15%, making it unclear exactly how or why the judges would weigh some categories differently for different contributors. What is more, if the maximum percentage was used in each category, it would equal 115%, whereas if the minimum number was used it would be 85%. It is unclear how these percentage differences would be equated to arrive at equal measures for all the participants in the contest.

Following other Allvoices contributors was another demonstration of shared repertoire practices, one with considerably more ambiguity as it was never explicitly stated as a policy. The developing practices at that time, now largely standard today, of promoting stories on one’s social media networks, liking and forwarding stories, and making comments (and promoting comments on social media) were also examples of shared repertoire, although without the same kind of self-conscious meta-theorizing that Wikinewsies regularly participated in as they created and worked on Wikinews. For the most part, the technology and practices around producing stories was already taken care of by Allvoices; it was mostly a matter of contributors to take full advantage of those tools in order to get as many page views for their stories as possible.

Even with clear guidelines on how to write good news stories, there was a lot of variation in the types of stories on Allvoices. Although this too is related to the notion of shared repertoire, we will more fully explore this aspect in the next section on news norms and how participants’ in both Wikinews and Allvoices used real or imagined news norms to conduct a lot of organizational and sense-making work, as well as a device for
most participants in helping delineate the journalistic work they were doing as something inherently different than other kinds of writing or creative work.

6.3 The Role of News Norms

One of the most important examples of shared repertoire in the communities of practice of Wikinews and Allvoices is the role that news norms played, although in different ways. Participants shared a general understanding, or “common sense,” of what news is and is supposed to be, and how that differentiated these practices among participants from some other online activity, such as participating in a fan subculture or blogging.

Without a shared repertoire of news norms, it would have been impossible for the creators and participants in Wikinews and Allvoices to draw from journalistic organizational forms, content styles, work practices, and fundamental assumptions of what makes news. Sometimes news norms were introduced or championed by current or former professional journalists who participated in these sites to varying degrees, but for the most part participants did not have professional journalism experience and simply drew from their own understandings and impressions of what journalism should be. This is similar to how professional journalists use news values and certain production routines and processes in order to get work done (Gans, 1980).

6.3.1 Norms Used in Wikinews

The raison d’être of Wikinews hinges on a specific definition of news, the role of news within a larger media ecosystem, understanding news as a crucial type of
knowledge in democratic society, and certain conceptions of what free access to information by the public can accomplish. The Wikinews mission statement states that “Wikinews is founded on the idea to build a unique news environment to enrich the media landscape” (Wikinews, 2013c). It also states that “Wikinews promotes the idea of participatory journalism because of the belief that citizens know what is news like no others,” inviting people to contribute and share news (Wikinews, 2013c).

Furthermore, the Wikinews Manifesto states: “Wikinews is founded on the idea that we want to create something new, rather than destroy something old. It is founded on the belief that we can, together, build a great and unique resource which will enrich the media landscape.” It goes on to state that it promotes the idea of the citizen journalist, “Because we believe that everyone can make a useful contribution to painting the big picture of what is happening in the world around us” (Wikinews, 2004b).

Despite the rhetoric in creating a new and unique resource based on citizen journalist contributions, in fact the basic concepts of news Wikinews uses are largely based on a modern and Anglo-oriented definition of news. These include concepts like timeliness, coverage of relevant current events, and factual, focused stories that are objective and without authorial conjecture and opinion.

Wikinews clearly differentiates news articles from historical articles, encyclopedia entries, scientific articles, essays, press releases, advertisements, editorials, and source documents in several places in various pages about Wikinews policies and guidelines (Wikinews, 2013d, 2013g, 2013h), cautioning potential contributors not to submit these other document forms. Although no journalists would argue with some of
the document forms rejected by Wikinews, other forms such as essays, press releases, and editorials precluded story types that are typically seen in news outlets.

In late 2004 and early 2005 many discussions were held on whether to include opinion pieces, editorials, and reviews, and all were rejected as article types in Wikinews. In a poll (essentially an online voting forum) on January 20, 2005, user opinions were reluctantly allowed on user name (user profile) pages and in the article talk pages, although not encouraged. The poll, conducted on a wiki page, allowed users to vote and comment on their choices by putting their user names in one of the heading options that was created. The majority voted against including any kind of opinion in stories or allowing for opinion pieces, with many comments echoing the sentiment that if people want to write their opinions then they should start a blog (Wikinews, 2006a).

Another idea for including opinion pieces within the news story framework was suggested in April 2005 by Eloquence, citing discussions that had been taking place on Internet Relay Chat (IRC), the main place for real-time, sometimes “back-channel” discussions among Wikinewsies (Wikinews, 2006g). Eloquence suggested a Wikinews: Debates section in which people could gather and discuss and debate their views on topics, thus letting Wikinews present all sides through the views of the direct participants. The idea received a cautiously optimistic response, but was never developed (Wikinews, 2006h).

The aversion to including opinions of any kind, even perceived opinions, stems not only from the collaborative ethic of the wiki project, but from the neutral point of view policy from WMF that almost all Wikinewsies accepted without question and that has been a defining shared concept since Wikinews’s founding. NPOV is an excellent
example of how reification and participation work together, with a reified concept like NPOV being “enshrined” in a sense as a founding and non-negotiable principle yet not remaining static as participants often referred to and cited NPOV in their discussions and arguments with each other, calling on the concept to bolster their own points of view.

Wikinews states that NPOV is not really a point of view at all and that “writing neutrally” means that one is very careful to not imply that “any particular view at all is correct” (emphasis in original) (Wikinews, 2007b). The rationale for this policy is that by presenting only “facts and ideas” in a neutral, unbiased way, the readers will be able to decide for themselves on the truth of the matter and thus it will encourage intellectual independence among readers.

The assumption of a “fact” as an “incontrovertible truth” (Wikipedia, 2007), and that a central purpose of news is to simply report on facts and ideas without bias ignores a rich body of sociological and journalism studies research that shows how news and “news facts” are socially constructed by journalists (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Bennett, 1996; Bovée, 1999; Gans, 1980, 2003; Mindich, 1998; Schudson, 1995, 2003; Tuchman, 1972, 1973). The rather simplistic explanation on the Wikinews NPOV page that an opinion is “a piece of information about which there is some dispute,” as in saying that “The Beatles was the greatest band” (Wikinews, 2007b), does not adequately address the issue that many so-called facts in news stories are also disputed—which may have created a conflict that warranted news coverage in the first place—nor does it address the larger point regarding what differentiates some collections of facts as newsworthy and others as not.
Similarly, there is no conceptual framework within this epistemology from which to deal with “facts” of which the very definitions or terms are in dispute, such as the use of the word “terrorist.” The choice to use certain terms implies a bias, and from the creation of Wikinews the participants faced these kinds of issues repeatedly as they developed policies through discussions in the story talk pages (the tabs are now titled “collaboration”), the Water cooler section of Wikinews, and IRC, developing an evolving style guide from the discussions that were in turn based on the reified concept of NPOV.

A typical example of the struggles in this process comes from a June 7, 2006 article headlined “Terrorists seize 50 in Iraq,” which was synthesized from two June 5, 2006 articles, one from Fox News (“Iraq Gunmen Raid Bus Stations, Kidnap 50”) and ABC News (“Gunmen Dressed as Police Abduct at Least 50 Travelers and Employees at Iraq Bus Stations”) (Wikinews, 2009l). A debate started on the article’s talk page primarily between users Ealturner, Borofkin, and Jason Safoutin, with some occasional comments from a couple other users that questioned whether “gunmen” should be used or if “terrorist” would be better. The majority of the written debate started at nearly midnight UTC (Coordinated Universal Time, the time stamp Wikipedia and Wikinews use) on June 7 and last nearly four hours, until almost 4 a.m. UTC June 8, picking up again from 1 p.m. UTC on June 8 and continuing sporadically until nearly 10 p.m. (Wikinews, 2006b).

During the course of the written debate, which ended up being nearly 5,300 words long for the 132-word article, Wikinews policies were cited to bolster arguments for and against using the term terrorist, and dictionary definitions of terrorist and terrorism were cited and discussed, as well as the use of the term by mainstream news organizations. In
addition, as was usual in such debates about terms, NPOV was used as a point of reference (and contention) regarding whether the term met NPOV requirements or not (Wikinews, 2006b). The issue also shows how participants in a community of practice use artifacts (reification) as flexible and changing tools as part of their practice of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire.

The issue regarding the use of the word “terrorist” in news articles arose again later in the summer and early fall, when a poll was finally taken along with further discussions on whether the term should be used or not in Wikinews stories. Similar to the earlier debates, Wikinewsies cited a variety of circumstances and actions in which one side in a conflict may call an opposing group terrorists while another may call them freedom fighters or even soldiers, with one member, PVJ, who identified himself as Indian, using examples of Muslim and Hindu violence in India (Wikinews, 2006j). One member quoted BBC’s editorial policy at length regarding its caution in using the term, especially without attribution. Although an outright ban on the word was voted down, consensus and subsequent policy decisions said that the term was to be avoided unless it was attributed (Wikinews, 2006j). This example shows how reified concepts are used even as influences from the larger joint enterprise (in this case respected professional news organizations such as the BBC) are drawn from to support an ongoing negotiated joint enterprise among participants.

The role and effect of NPOV continued to be debated in Wikinews, however, with some members seeing the policy as hampering Wikinews’s ability to cover a range of stories and to gain readers. A long-time and active contributor, Edbrown05, restarted the discussion in early August 2007 with a topic in the Watercooler section titled “Wikinews
is gonna die unless it cuts out this NPOV nonsense!” (Wikinews, 2008a). In the written discussion, he stated that “news ain’t neutral” and that is simply not how people read the news (Wikinews, 2008a). Countering his point were a couple participants who obliquely referred to the founding mission of Wikinews in trying to create something new and unique that was not being supplied by the mainstream media. Once again, we can see reified concepts, in this case as written artifacts, being used as tools to negotiate actual practices within a negotiated enterprise of mutual engagement.

6.3.2 Norms Used in Allvoices

Although Allvoices had clear guidelines on how to write good news stories, it had a much more flexible and open policy about contributions than Wikinews did. Instead, Allvoices used some community policing to flag offensive or inappropriate content, but also relied on the mechanics of social media publishing and ranking systems to bury poor content and to elevate good stories. This was helped by human editors who placed some stories on the home page, but the simple rating system for stories, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, was used to give readers a sense of how trustworthy a particular story may be. For example, press releases or stories that were obviously published for self-serving reasons by companies got low trust rankings, thereby flagging them to readers. Nevertheless, if it looked and smelled like news, like good press releases are supposed to, then it tended to remain on the site.

The editorial team at Allvoices, and the vast majority of contributors, operated from an educated layperson’s definitions of news. This is perhaps self-evident, as most stories were synthesized from mainstream news stories about international events,
celebrity news, sporting events, or other general news topics. Contributors generally followed basic news story structures and forms, writing ledes, using the inverted pyramid style, trying to get quotes if they did do original reporting, covering both sides of a topic, and so on. In the case of Maryann Tobin’s story on the animal abuse at the Florida horse ranch mentioned in chapter 5 (Tobin, 2012b), she also did original research that led to more evidence against the ranch owner and eventually led to local mainstream media coverage of the topic.

Allvoices allowed opinion pieces and blog posts on its site, although it strongly encouraged contributors to clearly mark their pieces as such. At times contributors wrote articles that followed news story formats, but then added a subheading toward the end called “Opinion” or “Analysis” and wrote in a more opinionated or personal tone within the same story.

Some contributors departed radically from news story formats but still had their stories on the site. One such contributor, mhatter99, was often shown in the top slideshow that showed popular contributors yet the vast majority of his contributions were simply tanka and haiku poetry. Despite this idiosyncratic way of writing—the tanka and haiku were about news events, but simply his own poetry—he was not publicly sanctioned by the Allvoices community and continued to post them until the site changed in August 2014.

Mhatter99’s poems were an exception on the site in flaunting news norms. The vast majority of contributions emulated the main forms of news stories, and for the most part contributors seemed fine with the variations that did exist. This was likely in part because of the huge amount of content being generated everyday by contributors and
combined with mainstream news sources on the site, making it easy for low-quality material to essentially get “buried” deep within the site. Another reason was that many contributors, despite the public rhetoric of helping the public by providing information, saw Allvoices as a vehicle for revenue streams for stories or as a stepping stone to getting published elsewhere and were less concerned with what their Allvoices colleagues were writing.

6.3.3 Comparisons and Contrasts in News Norms Used in Wikinews and Allvoices
In both Wikinews and Allvoices, we clearly see the processes of reification and participation that communities of practice use in negotiating meaning through the components of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire regarding news norms and the role that such norms played. Participants in both collaborative journalism organizations used these components in their discussions with each other—especially in the case of Wikinews—but also with “management,” or those above them in the hierarchy. In the case of Wikinews, this was the coterie of admins and bureaucrats who had gained their higher positions through participation in Wikinews, and in the in the case of Allvoices it was with the editorial team and management in general as policies were changed.

For Wikinews, a shared repertoire is based partly on the larger negotiated joint enterprise of Wikipedia’s NPOV policy and partly on a generalized understanding of what news is and what it should be in terms of being unbiased and factual. These assumptions helped participants create an extensive reified collection of written artifacts and policies that were frequently referred to even as they were negotiated and debated—
sometimes at the expense of producing actual news stories. Even as most participants agreed in large part with the mission of providing unbiased and NPOV-based news, many nevertheless recognized the weaknesses and debated the problems and impossibility of such a project that could fulfill its stated mission. Concepts around news norms became a kind of straitjacket that created a more confined definition of news than even what appears in mainstream publications, with their mixes of feature articles, opinion pieces, and reviews.

Allvoices, although sharing a general vision of what constituted “news,” allowed for its participants to post a much broader range of stories—even including poems, in some cases—and was more lax on its policing of stories that did not conform to traditional news standards. Part of this was because of the sheer number of contributions it received from participants, but part of it was a conscious policy to be more open and allow pieces that included opinion, for example.

Many Allvoices contributors adhered to a general understanding of news norms in writing their stories. This was helped in part by the reified documents that were meant to help newcomers with news article style and constructs, but part of it was also helped by the drive of many participants to also publish articles elsewhere in the mainstream media, thus giving them incentives to create articles that could be used in portfolios or writing samples when querying other publications. With Allvoices’ contributors, the shared repertoire that made them in part a community of practice was more diffuse and more outward-looking in the sense of using news norms to advance their career agendas than what was typically seen in Wikinews, although there were of course cases in which
Wikinewsies used stories they had worked on for Wikinews as ways to get published elsewhere.

In both organizations, news norms played a major role in helping get story production work done, just as it does in traditional newsrooms. News norms created a kind of contextual space within the community of practice that allowed for participants to discuss and debate deviations from assumed news norms that connected to the sites’ larger missions and identities as collaborative journalism sites, as opposed to some other kind of site, or simply blogs.

One of the biggest differences between Wikinews and Allvoices, however, was the role that curation played in promoting stories that met the requirements of news norms and that therefore ostensibly got more page views. Wikinews was relatively late in trying to better promote stories on social media, while Allvoices launched with these curatorial dynamics in mind, which in part could help explain its rapid rise in popularity (and subsequent transformation after being purchased by a digital marketing firm). Curation plays an important role in meaning-making within a community of practice such as a collaborative journalism organization, and also serves several important functions within and outside of the community of practice, which will now be explored.

6.4 Curation

The role of curation has become increasingly prominent among social media pundits, consultants, and scholars in social media the past few years. Curation has been the subject or a key topic in a variety of business books such as Steven Rosenbaum’s *Curation Nation* (2011), Eibhlin MacIntosh’s *The Content Curation Handbook* (2012),
Colin Wright’s *Curation is Creation* (2014), and Tim Durant’s *Content Crunch: Why Curation is the Future of Your Website* (2014). It has also been examined as one of five fundamental ways that our media habits are changing in the social media landscape (Clark & Aufderheide, 2009), and has been studied academically (Lam, 2012).

With the increased attention toward curation also comes a blurring of its meaning, resulting in definitional confusion as the term is used in different ways by different people. With physical artifacts, such as pieces of art, books, or historical objects, curation had a very specific meaning for librarians, archivists, and museum curators, who saw their jobs partly as archivists and preservationists for future generations but also as professionals who curated the content by choosing what to show the public in exhibits or shows in order to create certain narratives related to the source material.

Digital information raised new challenges for librarians, archivists and museum curators as they wrestled with the often overwhelming tasks of simply preserving and archiving digital data (Beagrie, 2006). Because of the changing nature of digital information and digital technologies, simply preserving and archiving data would not necessarily keep it accessible to future generations. At the same time, the explosion of information based on that archived information allowed for a rapid expansion of the more “public facing” aspects of library or museum work, what was called data curation, and that included research, creation, and publishing (Beagrie, 2006).

In 2001, the term “digital curation” was introduced at a conference of archivists, curators, and preservationists in order to better clarify work processes and the importance of archiving, preservation, and curation in digital environments, especially in scientific environments (Beagrie, 2006). However, it took a few years before a definition of “digital
curation” could be agreed upon, with the Digital Curation Centre deciding on the following definition: “Digital curation involves maintaining, preserving and adding value to digital research data throughout its lifecycle” (DCC, n.d.).

For archivists, preservationists, and scientific researchers digital curation still has the dual and complementary meanings of preserving, maintaining, and adding value to digital research data. However, for the public and much of the business press, the emphasis on curation has shifted from the preservation and maintenance functions to the value-add and creative functions. This shift in understanding of curation has to some extent moved the professional and lay definitions apart.

In the traditional definition of curation, curators have special or unique access to raw source materials that the public does not have access to and they are responsible for preserving, categorizing, and archiving those materials into some schema that helps contextualize the materials so they are accessible to future researchers or the public, such as in exhibits. In this function, the curator essentially acts as an informational gatekeeper, providing access to some but not all of the materials that have been curated. Generally, the public would not have the same access to the raw information that the curator does, and if they did they presumably would not be able to determine which of those materials are more or less relevant as they lack the subject matter expertise that the curator has.

Digital curation still has the traditional curatorial function, as mentioned above, but the shift to abundant digital information accessible to the public has helped change an important dynamic with curation. Mitchell Kapor, founder of Lotus Development Corporation and co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, is credited as saying, “Getting information off the Internet is like taking a drink from a fire hydrant.” Curators
in a digital media environment, at least one that is accessible by the public, focus less on preserving and maintaining information as opposed to acting as guides or information creators to help people find relevant information. In short, curators help lessen the flow of the Internet fire hydrant to a manageable and drinkable stream of water while still letting users get as wet as they may want.

The shift in emphasis, at least from the public perspective, from archiving and preservation to that of adding value by guiding people to relevant content leads some to make claims like “curation equals creation” (Wright, 2014). It is true that curating existing digital content can be an act of creation, but it does not necessarily mean that it always is. Adding links of related articles to an online article is creating something new, although not nearly at the same level of creative effort that it takes to write the original article. To conflate “curation” with “creation” is to blur the definitions of both terms to near meaninglessness.

Nevertheless, the changing dynamics and role of curation from a public perspective has been important enough for some to call for a “Curator’s Code,” an ethical code for curation that is “a suggested system for honoring the creative and intellectual labor of information discovery by making attribution consistent and codified, celebrating authors and creators, and also respecting those who discover and amplify their work” (Popova, n.d.). In 2012, Maria Popova, creator of the popular blog Brainpickings, suggested the Curator’s Code in order to encourage some sort of standardized attribution system for showing curated links that would continue to encourage people to explore and discover material based on links they trusted (Popova, 2012).
Popova suggested two different Unicode symbols that could be used to
differentiate two basic types of curation. One symbol indicated “via”, or the discovery of
a direct link to another site, while the other symbol, known as HT, was a “hat tip”
indicated an indirect discovery, lead, or story. The Curator’s Code clearly separates
creation from curation, while allowing for the great potential of links to take online users
down the “rabbit hole of the Internet” (Popova, n.d.). In an “Attribution 101” section of
the Curator’s Code site, a top headline says “Creators come first” as the section explains
that linking to an interesting site or piece of content should not obscure the creator of that
content. The role of attribution when curating content, according to Popova, stems partly
from showing simple respect to the people who created the content in the first place.

However, Popova’s suggestions for a code of ethics for curation and a
standardized system of attribution in order to respect creators of content and follow how
information flows on the Web was met with heated debate in the online community.
Some people were strongly in favor of encouraging a culture of sharing and collaboration
and recognizing creators of content and the role of curators in helping spread the content,
while others questioned the need for a general rule that had to be followed (Garber, 2012;
Gladstone, 2012). The Curator’s Code has not been widely adopted, although the debates
that arose from its proposal showed that the idea of curation had become important
enough to warrant a wide discussion of ethical responsibilities and needs to clarify norms
of behavior on the Web around the practice of curation, at least as understood by the
general public.

Traditional curators also have a code of ethics, but its focus is much more on the
archiving and preserving components of curation, referring mostly to ethically working
with materials and preserving and classifying them for future generations (American Association of Museums Curators Committee, 2009). The American Association of Museums Curators code was very much focused on professional ethics and spoke to a specialized audience of professionals, whereas the proposed Curator’s Code spoke to the general public, a public that itself has the capability—some could argue the responsibility—of curating content for other members of the public.

6.4.1 Curation in Journalism

Although not traditionally defined as curation, certain journalism practices share several relevant characteristics of curation in both the archiving and preserving sense and in the sense of selectively choosing content for the public. On the one hand, at least since the late 1940s, journalists have romanticized their role as “writing the first rough draft of history”—a phrase wrongly attributed as originating with former *Washington Post* President and Publisher Philip Graham in a 1963 speech (Shafer, 2010). The notion of essentially archiving and preserving the past for future generations through news stories resonates strongly with the phrase “writing the first rough draft of history” even as it recognizes the limitations journalism faces regarding accuracy and thoroughness because of deadlines and other factors. It puts journalistic work as the source of information for future scholars, giving them a pre-eminent place in the reconstruction of important historical events, even as it partially absolves journalists of responsibility for inaccuracies or other mistakes.

Related to the notion of writing a first rough draft of history, the more public-facing aspect of curation also plays a large role in journalism. Much as a museum curator
chooses certain objects for a museum exhibition in order to draw attention to the story he wants to tell, the agenda-setting function of journalism directs the attention of the public to certain stories deemed newsworthy, while ignoring others. This puts journalism within a cultural role of sense-making for the public, another long-held position by journalists (Bardoel, 1996). Journalism scholars have long looked at gatekeeping theory, or the role of gatekeeping in journalism, which explains how journalists and organizations use a combination of journalistic norms, personal preferences, various media channels, and a sense of what is relevant for their particular audiences in order to select what stories appear in the news (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The curatorial function of gatekeeping works much the same way as traditional museum curators in that editors have access to a range of information, such as wire service news stories and stories submitted by a publication’s reporters, and selects among these to package and present “the news”. The material that the gatekeeper did not select was not made available to the public—in the pre-digital world it was simply impractical to do so—much as a museum’s archives and objects not on display were warehoused and not available for public consumption.

The Internet, which provides the public with much more access to large amounts of information than ever before, would seem to threaten the traditional gatekeeping role in journalism. However, this is not the case as journalists have altered their gatekeeping processes in order to maintain a separation between various forms of user-generated content (UGC) and their own stories (Harrison, 2010). In fact, gatekeeping processes not only continue through media and source channels, much as they always have, but the processes can also be seen through audience channels (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006). In
other words, according to gatekeeping theory, audiences act as secondary gatekeepers for some news items when they forward articles they like to friends or family (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Singer, 2014). As Shoemaker and Voss note, this process is not new as people have long clipped or photocopied articles and sent to others, but the ease by which this can now be done with email or social media helps make the practice far more widespread. Furthermore, network effects can take place through repeated forwarding throughout social networks, increasing the audience size dramatically in a short time (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

Another important gatekeeping factor arises in the digital environment in that many online news sites include a list alongside articles of “most emailed” or “most viewed” stories from their publications. This serves multiple functions: it shows readers (and advertisers) what others have found most interesting, thereby enhancing the audience channel in gatekeeping; and it serves as rough measures at least for some journalistic gatekeepers as to what future articles may be deemed more newsworthy and therefore attract larger audiences, which affects news judgment (Vu, 2014). The ability to track audience activities on a site, including forwarding links to articles, has given editors and marketers unprecedented levels of information as to audience interests.

Emailing or forwarding articles to others, “audience gatekeeping” or “secondary gatekeeping” in gatekeeping theory (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Singer, 2014), is essentially the act of curating in the public-facing sense of the word. However, rather than accessing privileged content that others do not have access to, the audience-as-curator is finding or suggesting content based on personal relevance or what they presume would be relevant to other audience members (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). This
kind of curation, unlike traditional curation, does not preclude others who receive the curated content from getting more or different information on the topic.

Gatekeeping theory shows that gatekeeping—essentially an act of curation—now works on multiple channels and in different directions, going from traditional media and source channels such as public relations or government and also upward from audiences sharing their own news as sources and forwarding media content (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Rather than threatening journalism’s traditional role in the gatekeeping (curation) process, the online environment actually enhances the importance of curation for journalism (Sternberg, 2011). Journalists, by training, professional codes and norms, and their place within the overall media ecosystem straddling sources of news, media channels, and audiences are ideally suited to be trusted curators for the public, playing a role in not only writing the “rough first draft of history,” but encouraging audiences to take guided explorations deeper into stories that are relevant to them. How well mainstream journalists have done that is a matter open for debate and outside the topic of this research, but what we do want to focus on here is the role of curation within collaborative journalism and especially with Wikinews and Allvoices.

6.4.2 Curation in Collaborative Journalism

If curation plays such an important role in the future of journalism in the online environment (Sternberg, 2011), then it is worth exploring how curation affects collaborative journalism, where the producer and audience boundaries are deliberately blurred and where participants have adopted various news norms and journalistic practices in social production. Several questions arise as to how collaborative
journalism’s characteristics may make curation more or less important than it is in mainstream journalism, and why that is so.

As with blogs, many social media sites, and various gatewatching sites, most collaborative journalism sites do not create original stories but rather publish and comment on stories that have been done by someone else, such as by professional journalists. In other words, the primary role of gatewatching and other social media sites is to curate content that has originated from elsewhere on the Web or social media—thus Bruns’s term “gatewatching” rather than “gatekeeping” to show this curatorial dynamic (Bruns, 2005).

Wikinews and Allvoices, although they both strongly encourage original material, follow the general pattern of a relatively small amount of original news content compared to the vast amount of already published material—though edited, synthesized, or with added commentary—that is posted by contributors. In this way, the public-facing aspect of curation takes on far more importance for collaborative journalism sites as they are currently used than the archival or preservation component of curation. Based on the meager output of original stories, collaborative journalism participants do not seem to take the same pride in writing the “first rough draft of history” that plays such a role in professional journalists’ self-image. Rather, their focus essentially primarily becomes more on curating content that they find interesting and that they hope others will find equally as interesting.

Curation is an excellent example of the process of reification, as Wenger uses the term. Remember that according to Wenger (Wenger, 1998), participation and reification are actually dualities, influencing each other. Curation, especially its “upward” form as it
is practiced by the public (or collaborative journalists), shows how participants can take reified artifacts (news articles), participate with others in synthesizing or creating something new within a collaborative journalism organization, and then publish that new artifact with the hope of generating further participation among the reading public. The ebb and flow of participation and reification can be seen to a greater extent in the various discussions and debates within Wikinews, but also in the use of social media likes and forwarding in Allvoices, which acts as a kind of shorthand for approval or disapproval with functions like reputation rankings and such.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, news norms (or idealized perceptions of news norms) play a fundamental role in not only the production practices and expectations of collaborative journalists, but in the boundary work and ways that their communities of practice create and negotiate meaning. News norms intersect curation mostly in the type of content that is curated and in the greater sense of a public mission that collaborative journalists have in contrast to someone who mostly forwards things like humorous cat videos, for example. For collaborative journalists, there is a belief that what they are posting, regardless of whether it is original content or from another source, has some informational or use value beyond simply entertainment—in short, that it is newsworthy.

Within this overall conception of newsworthiness, however, we can see a great variety of how curation plays a role in the actual communities of practice in Wikinews and Allvoices.
6.4.3 Curation in Wikinews

Given the low number of stories produced by Wikinews, and subsequent huge holes in subject areas covered, it may seem that curation plays little role in Wikinews’ production practices. However, this is not the case. Curation can be seen in two ways in Wikinews; first, in ways that ironically hearken back to the traditional gatekeeping model, and second in the ways that NPOV was used as a curatorial device to determine what types of stories were acceptable and which were not.

The paucity of stories in Wikinews on any given day makes it easy to see at a glance what stories have appeared on Wikinews within the past several days and what stories are in development. Because of the small number of contributors for most of its history, and the fact that contributors pursue what stories and topics interest them, the types of stories varied widely over any time period, ranging from rewrites of mainstream, big news events to hyper-local stories to coverage of both major and minor sporting events. These factors made it very hard to connect subject areas into anything like a comprehensive or curated whole, which mitigated the ability of Wikinews to be useful or relevant in the public-facing aspect of curation.

Another factor that limited the number of stories published by Wikinews was the community’s refusal to simply take wire service stories from organizations such as Voice of America and post them on the site. This practice was raised and discussed within the first few years after the site was launched, but it was decided to not follow that path in the way that the Serbian Wikinews chose to do (Wikinews, 2009h). Some Wikinewsies, such as Pi zero, created bots to gather news from other sources and include links or articles, but articles taken entirely from press releases mostly did not appear on the site because of the emphasis on human editing and writing (or rewriting) of stories, and if press releases
that had been submitted had not been rewritten to better conform to Wikinews policy then they were automatically deleted from the site (Wikinews, 2009b).

Wikinews articles themselves had curational components to them, such as the article sources listed at the bottom of each article, which were typically two or three linked articles from mainstream news sources. Some articles have a feature box on the right side of the screen that has other related articles from Wikinews by geography of the story. For example, for an article about a robbery in Texas, then the feature box would include a map of the U.S. with Texas highlighted in green and links to several articles about Texas that had appeared in Wikinews, ranging from political news to Ebola coverage. However, curated content like this was greatly limited by the spotty coverage of topics in Wikinews for the reasons stated above, and the geographic focus often seemed unimportant when considering a particular story topic.

Ironically for a collaborative journalism site that has ideals of shaking up traditional journalism, the major role for curation with Wikinews occurred in very much the traditional gatekeeping role. The only difference was that rather than professional editors acting as gatekeepers, the bureaucrats or editors in the Wikinews community essentially took on that role. They had numerous ways to act as traditional editorial gatekeepers, such as delays (not always intentional) in looking at articles, requesting edits and re-edits to stories, and debating aspects of articles—all of which tended to delay or stop publication of articles if contributors did not respond or continued to argue. The over-reliance on synthesizing news stories from other sources, which many see as a weakness with Wikinews, was also brought up by one Wikinewsie who claimed to be a long-time news editor as something that most newspapers do as well, as they typically
write only 10-20% of original content and take the rest from wire services (Wikinews, 2006f).

Curation in the story development process was tightly connected to the community’s sense of news norms and NPOV, thus it is perhaps no surprise that curation would take on the form of traditional gatekeeping despite the rhetoric within Wikinews of being participatory and including audience contributions. NPOV was often cited by the admins and bureaucrats—a de facto editorial board—as reasons that certain stories did not pass muster and remained in development, or were contested and eventually deleted from the site. In this way, the reified concept of NPOV acted as a curatorial device to accept or reject stories, thus creating a standard, albeit an oft-contested standard, that allowed those higher in the Wikinews hierarchy to say which stories got published and which did not. Ironically, this power dynamic very much emulates the traditional editorial power dynamic found in professional news organizations, where editors can still very much play the traditional gatekeeping role.

6.4.4 Curation in Allvoices

Curation in Allvoices was tied closely to curational forms seen in other social media sites such as likes and ratings, and one could argue that the Automated Newsroom—a technology that essentially automated curation—was Allvoices’ most valuable financial asset for digital marketing services. The use of technological solutions for curation follows a larger trend seen in social media, which is shifting from reliance on human editing to technology-based editing and algorithms (Greenberg, 2010; Morozov, 2014). This trend is exacerbated by the ability to deliver audiences to advertisers through
tracking their visits with curated content, creating a powerful economic incentive in the online environment.

However, Allvoices’ policies for its contributors regarding promoting their and other contributors’ content threatened to warp some of the underlying aspects of curation that make it so powerful, such as its ability to build trust among users. Contributors gained page views and income because they were best at promoting their stories through social media networks to the right audiences, who were predominantly in the U.S., not because they wrote the most insightful or interesting stories. In this respect, the process of curation was manipulated as a tool to deliver desirable, targeted audiences to advertisers even as management discourse trumpeted quality contributions and various contests to demonstrate how writers could make living wages from the model. This kind of use of “strategic curation,” similar to fake or paid reviews in sites like Yelp or Amazon, raises ethical questions about the role of curation and manipulation of the curatorial dynamics in social media that supposedly build trust and that will be addressed in chapter 7.

Another form of curation took place in that contributors could “stake claim” to, or monitor, a famous person, creating a page about that person that included curated content. This kind of curated page, if kept up by the contributor, was compensated but not at the same rate as story contributions, and can be seen as another way to attract specific types of audiences that could be delivered to advertisers. The monitor program also raises issues around ethical curation, as it could easily provide unbalanced coverage of a celebrity. For example, if a person chose to monitor a celebrity they particularly liked, then their natural tendency would be to curate articles about the celebrity that were positive rather than negative. Conversely, a contributor could choose to monitor a
celebrity they particularly disliked and thus could include mostly negative articles in the curated page about the celebrity.

In post-August 2014 Allvoices, when they switched from a collaborative journalism model to a traditional editorial model, the same technological components and selling points regarding curation continued to exist—in fact those aspects became more important as they were seen as the primary value of the company. However, as would be expected in a switch to a traditional editorial structure, an additional level of gatekeeping took place in different forms. One of these was the sudden cancellation and deletion of all material up to the August 2014 redesign, and the other was the exclusive and secretive nature of how the editorial team chose contributors, much like a traditional magazine would, which was discussed in chapter 5. Stories also were vetted and edited by the editorial team before appearing on the site, much like a traditional news organization.

A form of gatekeeping and curation also occurred in how management emphasized certain types of content that would appeal most to digital advertisers, which can be seen in some forms even before August 2014. A special section was touted on the site that included coverage of a Mac technology conference, which became a precursor to the types of content marketing we increasingly see today by a number of sites, including the latest Allvoices iteration.

6.4.5 Comparisons and Contrasts in Curation in Wikinews and Allvoices

Although there are similarities in curatorial dynamics between Wikinews and Allvoices, especially regarding the type of public-facing curation taking place today in social media, there are some important differences as well.
Curation in Wikinews was and continues to be more driven by human editors and contributors than in Allvoices, with much of the writing and story production of synthesized stories done by human contributors. Furthermore, Wikinews stories include article links to source articles but usually not to other publications or stories that are mentioned in articles, creating a fairly “enclosed” information system that looks primarily at other Wikinews stories on a similar topic or in the same geographic region with reference links to original articles an article is sourced from.

Curation in Wikinews was more focused on news norms that had been discussed, debated, and decided among the Wikinews community, with NPOV being a key reified concept that established clear boundaries as to how stories could be written and even to an extent, although less obvious to many participants, what topics could be written about. Between the constrictions that NPOV placed on types of stories, and decisions made among some early Wikinewsies that continue to be enforced by current admins and participants, certain story types such as reviews were not allowed. These policies ironically created the situation in which Wikinews, despite its promoted open policy of “news you can write,” actually had more restrictions on potential contributors than many traditional publications. In addition, editorial policies developed that still established a kind of gatekeeping editorial hierarchy that conflicts with the collaborative mission of Wikinews.

Allvoices, at least in its pre-August 2014 version, made it easier for potential contributors to write for the site through a combination of ease-of-use and relatively loosely enforced policies as to what types of stories were considered news. Curation within the Allvoices community relied more heavily on technology than Wikinews, with
easy ways to rate and promote stories on social media. Its patented Automated Newsroom, which helped curate contributor stories with relevant mainstream news stories, promised to take human editors entirely out of the equation as algorithms created relevant matches for stories. This, along with the promise of targeted content for advertisers, made Allvoices a valuable media property and led to its purchase and later transformation as a content marketing site.

The type of curation involving algorithms combined with human-created ratings is frequently seen among online publication sites today, although it does not come without its own set of potential issues.

One problem with the type of curation as practiced in Allvoices and elsewhere is the ease of which true curatorial value can be subverted by heavily promoting certain stories or by strategically placing them on the front page—a practice that can have a huge effect on the number of page views for a site like Allvoices, which received tens of millions of page views a month. As contributors attempt to heavily promote their own work in order to get paid, there is little regard for the true value of the content that is being written, thus weighting the spread of stories according to the strength of one’s social media network rather than writing ability or acumen. Practices like these threaten to blur the boundaries between curation and promotion, and undermine the audience trust that curation otherwise promises for online users who are trying to navigate an ocean of information online from a variety of sources.

Another problem is the invisibility to the public of how the algorithms determine relevant content and combine and package that content together. Without knowing how such rules are created and actually work, it makes it easy for the public to become victim
to a “filter bubble” in which they do not even realize they are getting personalized content and missing other types of content that may be more useful or more interesting to them.

The weaknesses and concerns of curatorial models in Wikinews and Allvoices show how the CoP framework, with its look at how communities of practice use mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire in processes of participation and reification, is a good model from which to examine modern forms of curation and how they compare to past forms of curation and gatekeeping in journalism.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

It is an interesting coincidence that Wikinews and Allvoices, both with underlying rationales to shake up traditional journalism, began in some respects with earthquakes. With Wikinews, the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami occurred barely a month after Wikinews had officially launched, and for the early Wikinewsies it raised many important questions about the project and how news should and could be covered in a wiki format, especially in comparison to its larger sister project, Wikipedia. Many choices made then, and the questions raised, greatly influenced the state of Wikinews today. For Allvoices, the idea of its creation came from founder Amra Tamreen’s visit to her native Pakistan after the 2005 Kashmir earthquake that killed 80,000 and left over 3.5 million Pakistanis homeless, where she realized the need for more expansive, global coverage from citizens of topics that the mainstream media was not adequately reporting on.

Even though both collaborative journalism organizations hoped to jolt the established journalism world with a new, more democratic model of citizen-based journalism, both have fallen short of that promise, although for very different reasons. Wikinews has never gained the kind of mass participation that Wikipedia and some other sister Wikimedia Foundation projects have had. Its bureaucracy, perpetual personality conflicts, and cumbersome story production process tends to discourage new participants
and undermines long-term participation from all but the most devoted Wikinewsies. Allvoices, with its social media-oriented design, ease of use, and early attempts to provide contributors with income and benefits typically enjoyed by professional journalists, eventually succumbed to the logic of capital with a focus as a digital marketing agency targeted to the healthcare industry. In its original iteration it forced contributors to get large numbers of page views on social media in order to get paid, a compensation model followed by sites like Odyssey and Her Campus. The value of the automated tracking of impressions eventually subsumed and then eradicated the democratic ideals and collaborative practices that Allvoices had been founded on, changing the site so as to be unrecognizable compared to its founding practices and principles.

Both organizations have suffered from small cliques of people essentially running things as they want, thus undermining the participatory and collaborative principles that the organizations were founded on. It is important to examine in more detail the various issues that played roles in hampering these collaborative journalism organizations from reaching their goals, whether it is in terms of numbers of participants, the range of types of quality news content, or maintaining a business that would be sustainable over the long term while maintaining its collaborative and participatory principles.

By looking at these factors, this study hopes to provide guidance on whether collaborative journalism is a viable and sustainable form of journalism, or a pipe dream of journalism practice. If collaborative journalism is destined to fail, then attempting to answer why when other social production communities (SPCs) such as in the free and open source movement (F/OSS) have worked successfully could provide valuable
insights into today’s news media ecosystem today and journalism practices in particular and what makes them different than other types of cultural production SPCs that have been successful. What can be learned from the experiences of Wikinews and Allvoices that may inform others who are interested in pushing the boundaries of modern journalism and using the collaborative dynamics of online SPCs?

This chapter will first concisely look at how the study’s research questions have been answered, primarily focusing on the role of professional news norms with Wikinews and Allvoices, and analyzing the role curation played with each and what it may mean for other collaborative journalism sites. From this foundation, I go into more detail on issues that collaborative journalism faces from the production, organizational, and business perspectives, using Wikinews and Allvoices as the primary cases and including other examples where relevant. Finally, the chapter concludes with suggestions for further research that can be done in this area to advance our understanding of SPCs, online collaboration, and the future of collaborative journalism within the field of journalism.

7.2 The Role of Professional Norms and Curation in Collaborative Journalism

When looking at the issues around collaborative journalism through the lenses of Wikinews and Allvoices, each with their own kinds of problems, it is easy to be pessimistic about the future of collaborative journalism. The problems discussed throughout this study, and later in this chapter, cannot be discounted or brushed off as anomalies specific to these particular organizations, for they represent much larger conceptual, organizational, and economic issues that any collaborative journalism site
will face. However, just because collaborative journalism has not seemed to succeed with Wikinews and Allvoices does not mean that it cannot succeed.

It is worth restating the research questions of this study that were highlighted in chapter 1. The first research question, which consisted of two sub-questions, basically asked how the norms, values, and ideals of professional journalism have played a role in the creation and practices of Wikinews and Allvoices, how these norms were used within the communities of practice, and whether these norms helped or hindered the organizations. The second research question examined the role of curation, looking at these two organizations as differing, but typical, examples of curation in collaborative journalism in particular and online journalism in general. Based on the research done in this study, it is possible to come to some general conclusions that could provide useful information to researchers and other SPCs, especially ones based on unique cultural production forms such as journalism.

7.2.1 Professional Norms: Helping and Hindering

Professional journalism norms, values, and ideals clearly played important roles in the creation of both Wikinews and Allvoices, especially around founders’ ideas regarding journalism’s larger role within a democratic society and the ideals of having an informed and active citizenry. Furthermore, professional norms and values could be seen in the attempts by participants in both organizations to create clear guidelines for newcomers and contributors not familiar with the unique story forms, ethical issues, and working practices in journalism. Although some of these norms and values were proposed or explained by current or former professional journalists who participated in
these projects, neither organization was founded or run by professional journalists, making them different than other types of journalism projects such as Texas Tribune or ProPublica, which have staffs almost entirely of professional journalists.

It is no surprise that professional journalism norms and values played a role in either of these organizations, given that they were founded and touted as citizen journalism sites. From a sociological perspective, the norms and values served as important symbolic boundary markers for the contributors. In the case of Allvoices, the site was seen as one more outlet for citizen journalists to publish stories and potentially earn income from their journalistic writing. For Wikinews, the neutral point of view (NPOV) principle overlapped nicely with participants’ assumptions of what news should be and how news articles should be produced within the wiki format. Furthermore, the unique news story format itself became an important differentiator for Wikinewsies within the larger Wikimedia Foundation (WMF) community of practice. This could sometimes be problematic within the larger community, not only because new types of production issues were raised and certain practices were allowed that were not normally allowed within WMF (e.g. original stories as opposed to Wikipedia’s policy of only using material that has been published elsewhere), but because the story format chosen by early participants ultimately played an important role in hampering the productivity of story development and participation.

Particularly for Wikinews, reification, combined with a complex technical production process and the relatively heavy initial workload needed to report and write stories helped create an overly bureaucratic organizational structure that hampered greater participation in the organization. Participants were able to use reified concepts as
rhetorical tools to argue points about stories that kept disputed stories from being published, further weakening the value of Wikinews as a valuable and timely news source. The culture of consensus and discussion also led to difficulties in rapid decisions being made even for relatively tangential matters, and extensive discussions, though good examples of participation, also detracted from the work that could have been done with story production or other editorial matters. In this sense, Wikinews provides a cautionary tale of what happens if a collaborative journalism organization adopts professional journalism norms too stringently and reifies the norms in expansive rules of conduct, essentially crystallizing them and leaving little room for change through later participation and discussions.

However, professional journalism norms and practices do have their places if an organization intends to make claims that it is a news organization that provides needed information to citizens. In addition, when one looks at what is expected in an active, engaged and politically-savvy citizenry, it looks a lot like the skills that journalists have. Skills like critically examining documents, knowing where to find source documents and expert sources, questioning authority, critical faculties in examining data and information, and a range of knowledge about a variety of topics are all considered attributes of good journalism. These attributes would serve equally well to citizens who care about their government and others in power. It would seem that teaching such skills to citizens would go a long way toward helping make them the kinds of active and engaged citizens that journalists have long claimed it wants to produce, but have never exactly articulated how this would be simply from reading or viewing news stories.
A challenge for collaborative journalism is utilizing the best elements of journalistic norms and practices without blindly following or adopting practices or norms that hinder the most efficient creation of a collaborative journalism SPC. As we see in this study, collaborative journalists are easily able to create their own cages without any hegemonic power directing them, to the ultimate detriment of viable collaborative journalism that could otherwise try to challenge the status quo.

7.2.2 Curation and Collaborative Journalism

With so much information available online, curation of content becomes an increasingly important way to help the public get the information they want and need, as well as building trust in content creators and media properties as brands (Sternberg, 2011). If news norms help provide boundary definitions for creating journalistic content as truthful and credible accounts of important events, then curation becomes the outward-facing component of that trust, the way to guide the larger audience to get the information they want and to participate in the kinds of conversations they need.

Many of the pieces are already in place technologically and through current social media practices to put collaborative journalism squarely at the forefront of extensive and trusted curation. However, there are also strong economic incentives to warp today’s nascent curatorial practices for economic gain. For example, the problem with fake reviews undermining trust and online business models has become so bad that Amazon has threatened to sue its own merchants if they are caught writing fake reviews in touting their own products (Mogg, 2016). The rise of misinformation in today’s media
environment has also put journalism in a crisis, as competing sources of information vie for the user’s attention (Pickard, 2020).

Such a fundamental undermining of the public’s trust in online content could destroy the valuable role that curation plays in helping the public find relevant and credible information efficiently. The fate of how content is curated on the Web, how transparent, responsive and participatory the curatorial process is, and the credibility of the information itself underlie the current debates over the heart and soul of the Internet and whether it will live up to its promise as an open and interactive communication system for citizens or will primarily be a tool of corporations and advertisers to better market to consumers.

As we have seen in this study, there are two main ways content can be curated; through human editors and through algorithms. Wikinews primarily followed the human method, which in part was the reason it largely reverted to a traditional editorial model in which editors acted as gatekeepers for content that was created by writers—an especially ironic outcome given the founding principles of collaboration and democratized participation of Wikinews. The inefficiencies and weaknesses in human-focused story synthesis are apparent in Wikinews, exacerbated by the small number of contributors that led to meager story output, huge gaps in news coverage, delayed publication of stories, and the predominance of stories summarized from mainstream news coverage compared to the number of stories with original reporting. The meager numbers of contributors and technological limitations in Wikinews did not even allow it to utilize some of the human-oriented dynamics typically seen in gatewatching sites like Reddit or Slashdot, in which
large numbers of users vote stories up or down, thus giving a sense of curated community value to stories.

Allvoices followed the algorithmic curatorial model, combined with elements of human-oriented curation in the sense of providing ratings or being able to report problematic articles. Although clearly more efficient and cheaper than relying on human editors, Allvoices’ motives for the algorithmic route must be critically examined, especially given its purchase by digital marketing services company Datran Media and subsequent change in editorial structure to ultimately a digital advertising firm. It is here that we see some of the dangers of the algorithm as a primary driver of curation—on the one hand, its algorithms and automation provide high value to companies by being able to better target likely audiences for advertisers, but on the other hand it tends to reinforce traditional power dynamics around media producers and the audiences they are selling to advertisers (Beer, 2009; van Dalen, 2012). It is doubly insidious in that this algorithmic curatorial model relies on content that has been created by people, adding value to that content for advertisers but largely not passing that added value down the chain to the original contributors. Furthermore, the public does not have a say in how the algorithm ranks or rates stories, giving them less power in determining what they may see in the first place or giving them personalized content that is curated according to their advertising profile rather than other, more civic-minded criteria.

Collaborative journalism, partly through strength in numbers of “crowd wisdom,” holds the promise to provide valuable curatorial content to the larger public, but only if the process of curation is not influenced by the financial interests of advertisers or website operators. If curation could be financially rewarded in some measure, much like
Allvoices tried to do when contributors could “claim” pages of famous people, it could provide incentives for collaborative journalists to contribute valuable information in the form of curated packages of content to the larger public. Curation can play a valuable role in the mix of news stories, but it should not be done at the expense of original reporting or only rehash or repackage mainstream news articles; there must be perceived added value to the curated content. A robust curatorial system that relies on a combination of technology and human editors could help distribute original stories done by collaborative journalism sites to a broader public, thus helping break down some of the perceptual barriers that currently exist between “amateur” or “citizen” journalism and “professional” journalism.

### 7.3 Field Theory and Collaborative Journalism

Collaborative journalism, like other forms of journalism “at the edges” of mainstream or professional journalism, faces several challenges from a field theory perspective. One such challenge is the structural tensions within the journalistic field itself, in which journalists tend to divide along two poles, a “generalist” pole and a “specialist” pole (Marchetti, 2005). The specialist pole within journalism simply means that journalists tend to specialize in a particular area, or beat, although the term as Marchetti uses it also includes a higher degree of specialization, such as a journalist with a background in law, medicine, or a scientific field, for example, who is reporting within their area of expertise. On one hand, the fact that most collaborative journalists are not working full-time as paid, professional journalists would hamper their ability to specialize in certain areas, thus relegating them to the field of the generalist pole, of
which there is ample competition among existing professional journalists. On the other hand, the specialist pole may create opportunities for subject-area experts to participate in journalistic production and practice in ways that were perhaps not available to them in a more traditional, hierarchical news organization. The opportunity to share their specialized knowledge to a wider public audience may be appealing to some specialists who wish to participate in collaborative journalism, but it also raises the question of how to best entice such people so they do not get disheartened by the bickering or delays seen in Wikinews that hamper story publication, or do not feel discouraged by perhaps a lack of views on their stories that detracts from their ability to earn any income on their work, as in the case with Allvoices.

Another challenge collaborative journalism organizations face within the field of journalism and its interactions in other fields, such as entertainment, politics, business, and sports, is the issue of access to these other fields in order to adequately report and produce stories about them. As Marchetti (2005) notes, especially in the area of television journalism access to fields such as entertainment and sports figures is often accompanied by financial and legal agreements that strictly control access and distribution rights. These kinds of agreements preclude independent or cash-strapped organizations for getting the same kind of access as much larger news organizations, thus hampering their ability to provide the kinds of sports and entertainment information that is often the most popular content among the public.

Related to the question of distribution is one of access. Even within mainstream journalism, smaller news organizations are often at a disadvantage compared to their more well-known, prestigious, and larger media counterparts who are typically granted
more ready access to sports stars, celebrities, and even business executives. This inequity in granting access by other fields would be exacerbated by largely unknown collaborative journalism sites, especially if these sites are not recognized by others as “true” news organizations that are not staffed by professional journalists.

Journalism as a field is already typically weak in the field of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1993), and this weakness would likewise be exacerbated by the unorthodox or experimental business models being tried among collaborative journalism sites. When combined with the disadvantages in symbolic capital mentioned above that brand-name journalism organizations have, this presents a doubly hard barrier to overcome in order to function among competing fields of symbolic, economic, and political power.

There are two potential areas in which this study indicates that perhaps some aspects of field theory are not as rigid as predicted or where collaborative journalism may gain a foothold. One such component is the general demographic characteristics that many journalists share (Bourdieu, 1993; Marchetti, 2005). Although this study did not delve into the demographic characteristics of the participants in a structured or organized way, as has been mentioned earlier from anecdotal experience most participants shared some sense of values around the importance of news in informing the public and journalism itself being a form of public service. In Wikinews at least, the limited face-to-face interactions I had with Wikinewsies was that they tended to be Western, white and male—a characteristic shared (and lamented) by many on Wikipedia. Although Allvoices did seem to have more diversity in terms of participants, thanks largely due to much higher numbers of them, the predominant assumptions and modes of production still
emulated a largely Anglo-Saxon definition of news and news production even for non-Western participants.

This leads to the second factor that indicates that perhaps in online collaborative journalism communities that traditional notions of the journalism field may be more fluid than earlier research using field theory indicates. Marchetti (2005) discusses the role of mechanisms of professional socialization, citing such instances as whether or not journalists go to newsrooms or have experienced journalism mentors to help socialize them into the norms and practices of journalism as a profession. One thing this study shows is that the long shadow of professional socialization does not end at being physically present, but rather the real or imagined professional news norms play a role through the discourse of the participants. Yes, professional journalists may be listened to more than others, such as in the early days of Wikinews, but by and large participants in both Wikinews and Allvoices shared some general common-sense notion of what “news” is and how it should be produced. When these views were challenged, either explicitly through submitting content like poetry or via the Talk pages in Wikinews when debating aspects of a story, they were often vehemently defended. In the case of Wikinews, participants often referred to their growing list of policies and procedures to defend the work. These instances show how the socialization of professional journalism extends beyond the physical appearances or places where journalism is practiced, and can be extremely important in terms of socializing participants toward professional journalism practices, whether they be real or imagined.

By the same token a potential danger also lies in the openness that collaborative journalists have regarding adopting professional news norms, especially if they are
granted access to sites of journalistic practice beyond the newsroom, such as being given accreditation and space to work in large-scale organizations such as NGOs or governmental offices. As Marchetti notes, these too are places in which socializing of professional journalism takes place, not only from fellow professional journalists working in those spaces but also from the organizations themselves. For example, it would not be difficult for organizations to tout press conferences or other “pseudo-events,” to use Boorstin’s term (Boorstin, 1992) to entice inexperienced collaborative journalists to cover stories that may actually act as distractions from other subjects that could be more relevant but that the organization does not want covered. Similarly, if collaborative journalists did have the time and inclination to be able to spend time in news spaces such as these—which of course is not guaranteed given that most participants in collaborative journalism sites are not doing the work full-time—they could also easily fall into the trap of further emulating ongoing journalistic practices, such as simply reporting on news conferences, that many of their professional peers also do. Ultimately, this could make collaborative journalism content little more than a pale comparison, or at best a carbon copy, of the type of work that is produced by professionals, and thus add little value in terms of original content or better engaging audiences in relevant news.

In short, the challenges that collaborative journalism faces from a perspective of field theory outweigh the promises. The promises include, as mentioned above, the fact that it seems online discourse and communities of practice online can have just as much effect regarding socializing participants as the more traditional routes of being in a newsroom or learning from a journalist mentor. This offers possibilities of new and
innovative ways to conceptualize journalism and journalistic practices, but it also could potentially mean that traditional practices and news norms have greater influence even within an online, heterarchical news production environment that claims it wants to revitalize the journalism field. Furthermore, the challenges collaborative journalism faces not only within the journalistic field— which could be exacerbated if it does become more widely used as existing news organizations see competition for their audiences and business models—but also in regards to external fields that it covers appear to be rather steep. The opportunities for existing organizations within their various fields to respond to any perceived threat from a rising collaborative journalism organization seem to be simply too great for collaborative journalism to have any kind of serious ripple or warping effect within the fields of power.

7.4 Collaborative Journalism: Issues Ahead

Based on the findings in this study, the potential for creating a thriving, vibrant and sustainable collaborative journalism model does not look particularly promising. Both organizations were founded on democratic, participatory principles with the goal of including people in the news production and distribution process who had traditionally been excluded. Both seemed to be riding the wave of digital and social media tools that promised to alter media-producer and audience dynamics within journalism in ways that could potentially revolutionize news organizations. In short, both organizations seemed to make real the promise of a more democratic, interactive media environment that would help usher in a new era of citizen engagement in the public sphere, a vision touted by some from the earliest days of the Web up to the present (Bennett, 2003; Dertouzos, 1997;
However, as this study shows, the path to this promising future is not so easy, nor as sure as the optimists would like us to believe. A growing chorus of academic and professional voices have recognized and been critical of several trends that threaten the early promise of the Internet and its effect on journalism (Brandel, 2016; Hermida, 2012; J. Kim, 2012; McChesney, 2013; Morozov, 2014; Petersen, 2008). Wikinews and Allvoices, to varying degrees, are examples of some of the issues critics have noted, but this study has attempted to put these larger socio-economic and technological forces within a context of how the organizations produced news and functioned as communities of practice. This study, while focusing on the micro practices within the communities of practice, also connects these practices to the larger meso-level and macro-level forces at work that have also affected the daily working and production practices of these two collaborative journalism sites, and that would no doubt affect others.

The issues that collaborative journalism organizations face can be divided into three main categories: production issues, organizational issues, and business issues. Each of these will be further explored here.

7.4.1 Production Issues

The unique nature of news as a story form and its production are the foundations of what defines collaborative journalism organizations compared to other types of social production or cultural production. Without first examining what a news story is and how news stories are typically produced, it is impossible to adequately understand the larger-
level issues that revolve around the organizations themselves and the business aspects of collaborative journalism. But before looking at the news production process, we first have to critically examine the definition of a news story and how that definition affects how news stories are produced. Furthermore, we need to examine how the definition of news and the subsequent form that a news article takes, as typically done today, may undermine the ability of collaborative journalists in a social production workflow. Without fully appreciating these dynamics, and rethinking how news can be produced and even the very definition of news and how that may change it seems that almost any collaborative journalism enterprise will be doomed to failure.

On the one hand, the decision early on by Wikinews to create news articles as discrete units of content that would not be updated or altered fluidly in the way that Wikipedia articles are, in addition to an overly strict definition of what constitutes “news,” severely constricted the abilities of contributors in fundamentally redefining—or even reimagining—how news could be produced. On the other hand, Allvoices’ more open contributions policy, allowing everything from press releases to poetry, so expanded the definition of “news” that it could have threatened the credibility of Allvoices if it was not for the site’s automated and human-oriented curation of content that tended to bury nonconformist articles deep within the site or that gave them lower credibility ratings than other articles.

At any rate, it is important to remember that the vast majority of content in both organizations were rewritten articles that had come from stories first written by mainstream news organizations and that therefore followed standard news norms and
story formats. This underlies yet another reality regarding news production for collaborative journalism organizations that will be addressed below.

In this section, the nature and definition of news and what it means for social production will be examined, which helps explain the preponderance of synthesized, rewritten articles that had originated with mainstream news sources. The role news norms played in hindering new conceptualizations of news, primarily in Wikinews, will also be explored, as will the careful balancing act that will be needed to rethink the nature of news while at the same time keeping its important qualities as a unique type of cultural product.

### 7.4.1.1 The Nature of News

As discussed in chapter 2, an inherent characteristic of news is its timeliness, yet this very quality puts certain demands on the form that make it harder to produce within a collaborative, non-hierarchical framework than in other types of social production communities (SPCs), such as with software production. The issue of timeliness for news stories raises two main difficulties for collaborative journalists; how to efficiently coordinate people on a range of tasks of varying degrees of difficulty when there are tight deadlines, and the time-dependent nature of most news stories. The former point will be covered in the section on organizational issues, while the latter point will be focused on here.

Unlike other forms of cultural production, such as encyclopedia articles, news has its highest value as a commodity when it is newest, and its value as information quickly decreases over time. However, the most time-, resource- and labor-intensive components
in producing news come in the early stages of news production, such as news gathering and reporting. These early components of the news production process are what Benkler (2006) would call large-grained and not very modular, meaning that they require a substantial amount of effort, and generally cannot be easily broken into modular components for several people to handle asynchronously. Although there are exceptions for some types of stories, in general having multiple people trying to gather interviews for the same story, without a coordinator or managing the workflow, would likely lead to gaps in information gathering and/or needless redundancies when the same person is possibly contacted by multiple people asking the same questions.

The relative lack of modularity for most news stories as they are currently done, and large granularity of the news gathering and production process, are generally not conducive to a collaborative social production process. There are of course exceptions, and some of the key challenges for the future of collaborative journalism lie in figuring out ways to better distribute the workload of these earliest, intensive and expensive stages of news production while coordinating functions and information quality in ways that do not hamper or add to the workload in later stages, such as editing and fact-checking, which are generally smaller-grained and more modular and therefore more easily incorporated into a collaborative social production workflow.

The news story production process in a collaborative journalism environment comes as a surprise to some participants. Pi-zero, an active Wikinewsie for the past several years, sums it up best when he discusses his own process of discovery regarding Wikinews article production, with implications for story production, participation, and timeliness:
My mistaken expectation of Wikinews that there would be lots of people working on any given article was probably subliminally encouraged by the ubiquity of the “collaboration” tab here. My revised expectation now is that one person will usually have to write the whole article, and probably also fix any problems that are flagged out during review — and if the article doesn't succeed within a short period of time it drops off the edge of the Earth and ceases to exist, with no evidence that it ever existed, and certainly no opportunity to watch as problems with it are gradually fixed over time thereafter. (Wikinews, 2011b)

By defining one major attribute of news as, essentially, disposable it exacerbates the issue of news as a type of information product that has high value for only a limited time. It means that most of the effort occurs in the initial stages of news production (reporting, researching, writing), and is often done by one person, even as the capacity of the social production community to build on this early effort is severely constrained because of the temporal restraints that limit the value of news. In addition, in Wikinews the opportunity to recoup value in work done previously by the community is limited primarily to links to older, related articles because the articles are locked from further editing after a few days.

After more than 16 years, the anemic participation and output for Wikinews can be attributed to some extent to how Wikinewsies have emulated certain assumptions and definitions of news and the form news should take. Wikinews has so far not been able to develop a model that allows for contributions that consist of modules of small granularity, which would encourage more participation within a limited time frame. By expecting news articles to be as complete as possible early in the production stage, Wikinews is asking for a relatively large amount of independent work from participants early in the process, who then often see their work sharply criticized, heavily edited, or debated, thus
losing their relevance as news the longer they remain held up by the process and are not published as finished pieces.

The problem of large-grained modules early in the news gathering and news writing process was avoided by Wikinews and Allvoices contributors primarily rewriting and synthesizing mainstream news articles, which requires less time and effort than original reporting. However, by primarily relying on synthesis articles, it threatens to conflate collaborative journalism sites from social news sites that simply repost mainstream news with added comments from other participants. If collaborative journalism hopes to become more than just an inefficient version of social news sites, it has to include a much higher proportion of original reporting in its news coverage.

Two ways to overcome the problem of being primarily a synthesizer of other news sources and to create a greater number of original news stories is to expand the definition of news and expand on what form news stories may have. Such reimagining of both the definition of news and the news story form would lead to changes in the news production process, some of which could be radically different than what we see today. One early example is how crowdsourcing has been experimented with. Although there have been successful examples of crowdsourced stories, such as with the Diebold voting machines (Benkler, 2006), and experiments in crowdsourcing news with Assignment Zero (Howe, 2007; Junnarkar, 2007), major questions remain on how viable crowdsourced journalism is beyond the types of raw video feeds that the public can supply when they are witnessing a newsworthy event.

Crowdsourcing news in a collaborative journalism framework may work better for stories that are not breaking news—or if they are breaking news then a strong
integration component to the news production process, along with enough people to check and cross-check facts and incoming information, as well as putting the content into a viewable/readable form for the audience, is necessary. This aspect of organizing the collaborative work will be discussed in more detail below; here we will focus on the types of news that may be more conducive to collaborative journalism.

Some news stories, by their nature, will have timeliness as a major component, but perhaps timeliness is not as important for collaborative journalism as it has traditionally been for mainstream journalism. After all, with ubiquitous mobile phones it seems the public increasingly gets raw footage directly through various social media channels they belong to.

It seems that by largely relinquishing the role that timeliness plays in news to either mainstream news organizations who have the resources to send reporters to breaking news events, or to rely on citizen coverage of breaking news events, collaborative journalists could mitigate at least one part of the labor- and time-intensive aspects of newsgathering and focus more on components that are more modular and smaller grained, thus allowing collaborative journalists to better use their resources for story production in other ways. These could include activities such as research, fact-checking, confirming the veracity of eye-witness accounts and on-the-ground reporting, and shaping the information into a coherent whole.

But in order to do this, it is necessary to be willing to not only reconceptualize the nature of news and how it is produced, but to reconsider what news stories may look like as well. For example, thinking of news articles as discrete chunks of information that cannot be altered or changed over time, such as Wikinews does in following the
traditional news story format, is to miss some of the changes and experiments being done by media organizations such as The Guardian or the New York Times in their live coverage of things like sporting events or political meetings, where stories are live-blogged and frequently updated by a reporter or a number of reporters.

Collaborative journalism may not be best suited for covering many types of breaking news events, and perhaps could do a better job at stories that are less time-dependent and that have strong research components to them in which a large number of people could contribute work and their expertise.

However, a danger with expanding the concepts and definitions of news is that news stories could become indistinguishable from other types of content, such as blog posts or opinion pieces, making it even harder for audiences to separate factual reporting from unsupported opinion. It seems that in part the definition of news is tied to the form itself, at least in the English-speaking world, and this has to be taken into consideration when looking at how to expand on news story forms or production methods. The danger is expanding the definition of “news” so much that it becomes a nearly meaningless term, encompassing everything from timely-themed haiku or tanka poems to some other forms that do not include any element of timeliness to them. Therefore, one has to be careful in pulling apart or stretching the definition of news and how it is done in order to still keep “news” as a unique, identifiable, and valuable form of cultural production. In this regard, keeping some notion of news norms is necessary.
7.4.1.2 News Norms and Collaborative Journalism

As this study has shown, collaborative journalism organizations have borrowed consciously and unconsciously from professional news norms and standards. These norms have provided the communities of practice with a shared repertoire and helped create boundaries for participants that lets them differentiate what they are doing from other forms of cultural production. However, as discussed in the previous section, even as news norms do valuable organizational work for participants, they can also act as straitjackets that hamper participants’ abilities to reconceptualize and reinvent news forms and news stories.

For Wikinews, the NPOV policy as a structuring and structured concept has enabled and constrained the community. It has enabled the community by providing a structuring framework from which to partially judge the value of contributions as “newsworthy,” even as it has constrained the community from exploring ways to take full advantage of its open-editing model and collaborative culture in considering how “news” may be conceptualized differently. The epistemological assumptions around neutrality and unbiased reporting have shown to be especially problematic in that NPOV can be used in a number of ways that have the effect of either creating bland prose in articles or killing them outright as disputes regarding NPOV drag on over several days and the articles are no longer timely.

The assumption that readers are willing to do the intellectual work of weighing sides from multiple perspectives in a rational public debate is a worthy ideal, but in emphasizing an ill-defined notion of “facts” Wikinews ultimately strips many stories of their larger context for readers, as well as limiting how many different views get represented. Wikinews shows that a commitment to neutrality and eliminating bias too
easily devolves into a rationale for not tackling some of the most complex and controversial issues of the day, issues in which basic terms themselves are contested by different sides.

Further, Wikinewsies’ underestimation of the need for and in some cases continued hostility for a place in which readers can express and share opinions is oddly incongruous for a collaborative journalism site that trumpets on its home page “Wikinews is written by people like you.” This is especially ironic when practically all mainstream online news sites now include discussions or comments sections with stories, and sites like the New York Times have started to demonstrate simple curatorial dynamics with comments, both by New York Times staff and by votes from other users. The belated attempt to allow opinion pages in Wikinews could be considered an acknowledgement of the fact that simply offering unbiased, neutral “facts” is not enough to engage citizens in news and that the audience today expects to be able to talk back. It could also be seen as an unintended consequence of how the bureaucratic structure developed at Wikinews created separations between media producers and the audience, despite the group’s founding principles.

Continuing relevant news norms among collaborative journalism organizations are necessary. In fact, part of the phrase “collaborative journalism” acknowledges that in the collaboration process between citizens and professional journalists, or amateurs and professionals, an exchange of meaning takes place in which both sides learn from the other. Non-journalists learn relevant journalistic principles and news norms that give their stories the level of veracity and truthfulness that is needed to make a trusted information
product, and journalists learn how to expand the ways that stories are found, developed, and produced.

When looking at Wikinews and Allvoices, it appears that right now the scales are tilted more toward professional journalism’s norms being picked up in whole or in large part by collaborative journalism sites, without much questioning on what aspects may be good to keep and which may be worth revising or discarding. If collaborative journalism sites want to actually create new forms of journalism and break down the barriers between media producers and audiences, then participants in these sites will have to be willing to take risks and experiment with new forms of newsgathering, storytelling, and production online. In order not to devolve into something that the public does not recognize as news, or that does not see news value in, they will also have to recognize the roles that news norms play in establishing boundary work for what they are doing and how some news norms have helped establish ideas of credibility and trust among readers, and keep those norms to enhance their own work.

Furthermore, news norms may be part of what attracts some participants to want to contribute to news in the first place. People may come to collaborative journalism sites for a number of reasons, ranging from their unhappiness with mainstream news coverage of certain issues to an appreciation of the role that journalism should play in democracy to a desire to get more citizens involved in creating and shaping the news. As a news site, it gives participants a kind of ready-made set of operating principles and understandable rules of behavior that make easing their way into a community of practice easier. The trick, from this perspective, is to not let the norms become a prison and to understand the dual role norms play in terms of participation and reification in a community of practice.
### 7.4.2 Organizational Issues

The production issues around reconceptualizing what news is and being willing to change or influence news norms to fit the new formats and story types is only part of the struggle, although a fundamental aspect of it. Of equal concern are the meso-level organizational issues that revolve around working with virtual communities in organizations that espouse collaborative, democratic, and participatory practices that we have not had many organizational models to emulate.

This section focuses on the human and organizational aspects of running a collaborative journalism SPC. This is of course intertwined with the production issues and business issues, but has been separated here for better clarity in the analysis of relevant issues. For collaborative journalism organizations, there are two main issues to consider: first, how to train new participants in writing news (thus as mentioned previously, first the need to seriously re-evaluate and reconceptualize news and news story formats as that of course would affect production) and some of the basics of news norms, such as fairness, balance, interviewing people, and so on. Closely related to attracting contributors is the issue of how to keep people involved in the organization, which leads to the second point, that of how best to organize and run a SPC in a way that most efficiently accomplishes its mission while remaining true to its collaborative principles that allow for social production, making sure the organization does not morph into a traditional hierarchical organization or firm.
7.4.2.1 Training and Keeping Contributors

Whatever an accepted form or definition of news may look like, it will be necessary to teach potential contributors the basics of that kind of journalism and how to produce news stories while not closing the door on potential new or evolving forms. Based on seeing many efforts in Wikinews, despite the public’s familiarity with news writing stories in a news format can be surprisingly difficult for newcomers. Other elements of the news gathering and reporting process can prove equally difficult for novices, if not more so. Interviewing techniques—and even how to get interviews or knowing who to interview—can be challenging without some sort of guidance, as can understanding what quotes are relevant, which are truthful, and how to get prepared for interviews. Furthermore, many people feel uncomfortable approaching strangers for interviews and thus may be reluctant to do interviews. Understanding the unique legal issues and ethical responsibilities around journalism are also areas that are not commonly known to most members of the public, and have to be learned.

Both Wikinews and Allvoices created written instructional materials for newcomers, providing basic information on how to write news stories, what qualifies as news, and advice on things like interviewing and quoting sources. Both also used contests as ways to attract contributors and to essentially establish norms of what would be considered outstanding content. The contests ran by both organizations did not see the kind of spike in contributors that was hoped for, although for different reasons. For Wikinews, the numbers of contributors was so small that even a gain of half a dozen or so would seem large by comparison, and for Allvoices the contests were held in such a way as to inspire existing contributors to write more original material than with the goal of attracting newcomers. At any rate, the contests did not see long-term gains in new
contributors, nor in the case of Allvoices did it have a long-term impact on changing the type of content that was mostly submitted.

Allvoices contributors did not have any formal training in news writing, and as discussed in chapter 5 the user interface of the story writing platform made it relatively easy to create and publish stories. Instead of relying on training and editorial functions beforehand, Allvoices relied on human and automated curation after publication, where ostensibly poor-quality work would get rated down by other users and by algorithms and thus not appear prominently on section pages.

Wikinews, on the other hand, used its policies and experienced editors and admins to police new stories and suggest edits or revisions. Stories that did not meet the criteria that had evolved over the years at Wikinews, either because of not following NPOV guidelines or other issues that labeled a story not ready to publish, were sent back for corrections. The story production process, despite its collaborative origins, became much more like a traditional production process like Pi-zero outlines earlier in this chapter in which one person more or less produced a story on his own and then was responsible for making the revisions necessary after an editor had commented on it.

Although reification of NPOV and the types of stories that could be produced for Wikinews did not necessarily hamper negotiations of meaning in practice for Wikinewsies, another aspect of reification did tend to play a role in the generally short-lived participation among many people who came to Wikinews. This form of reification took place as a result of the community’s development of workflow practices and its attempts to codify and make them transparent to all participants. The plethora and ever-growing written policies and guidelines created to help make the workflow process easier
and more user-friendly to newcomers essentially had the opposite effect, in part because as Wikinewsies tried to document and reify every aspect of their practice new forms of practice continually arose, altering other aspects of the fluid practices and meaning-making that took place between contributors old and new. This process, combined with issues like the viability of NPOV and other matters that Wikinewsies would periodically revive in debates, and the same issues that would be asked or challenged by newcomers, gave the process of reification of rules of behavior and processes a kind of quixotic, whack-a-mole quality that diverted participants’ energies that could have otherwise been spent in creating or editing actual stories. Although a handful of Wikinewsies have stayed more or less active in Wikinews for several years now, the high turnover means that there is little organizational memory even with a large body of online material that has been formalized either as policies or that can be seen in archives of past discussions.

Especially with the Wikinews example, it shows a danger within SPCs of reification at the expense of participation, forgetting that they are two sides of the same coin. The overload of rules and procedures, both written and unwritten, combined with a clunky production interface and the administrative hierarchy that developed, crystallized what should have been a dynamic, collaborative community. It leads to questions of how best to organize and run SPCs that allow for needed work to get done, especially in the realm of cultural production, without destroying its collaborative principles and roots.

7.4.2.2 Organizing the Collaborative

In chapter 2 it was shown how collaborative journalism can be compared to other SPCs, especially the F/OSS movement, and how they shared certain key similarities
regarding principles and products. If Wikinews and Allvoices could largely be considered failures of collaborative journalism, then the question arises of why that is and how could other SPCs within the F/OSS movement succeed. Is there something that collaborative journalism organizations could learn from other SPCs that could help them succeed, or is there something different about the nature of journalism that makes it difficult or impossible to operate in the same way as something like software development?

This section will mostly focus on how Wikinews operated, as it functioned more like an SPC than Allvoices, which even before its August 2014 transformation did not have the same kinds of collaborative internal dynamics typically found in SPCs in the F/OSS movement or like that seen in Wikinews. Rather, it functioned more as a collaborative platform for contributors to promote and rank theirs and others’ stories, with little direct or sustained input on how the organization should run.

As has been mentioned elsewhere in this study, it can be said fairly that Wikinewsies often seemed to spend more time writing to and arguing with each other than writing actual news stories, and those that did write stories could quickly become disillusioned as their efforts were sometimes harshly criticized by others who did not actually contribute to a story or fix what he saw was wrong with it. Or when attempts to fix things did occur, the initial writer could revert or argue with edits, thus leading to sometimes bitter debates and even formal arbitration when disagreements could not be settled. All these debates tended to dissuade people from staying long at Wikinews, and for those who did stay the debates detracted from time and effort that could have otherwise been spent contributing stories.
The consensus-driven organizational culture of Wikinews also hampered rapid and decisive actions, as it seemed that some in the community could always disagree with some aspect of any given proposal. In truth, consensus was rarely reached, and because of its online nature and established practice inherited from Wikipedia major proposals tended to involve majority rule through voting by the community (albeit with the opportunity for members to explain why they were voting the way they chose), which is not the same as reaching consensus.

Collaborative journalism organizations can learn from successful F/OSS projects regarding how they are managed. One clear element of these successful organizations is achieving a critical mass of participants, something that Wikinews has never achieved. Although there has not been research on just how many people exactly are needed to achieve the kind of sustainable critical mass for a successful SPC, it is clear Wikinews never reached that number.

It also has to be remembered that many SPCs have high failure rates. Sites like sourceforge.net, a collection of open-source projects available for downloading, are filled with small-scale and half-finished projects that never gained enough participants to make the software viable. Just as in the F/OSS community, it is important to keep in mind that just because there are some failures in either software development or in collaborative journalism that it means all will fail; a robust and vibrant SPC involved in a variety or network of collaborative journalism projects could be more viable than expecting one or a handful of sites to become dominant.

Nevertheless, much can be learned by systematically and critically examining both successes and failures of SPCs, especially those that resemble the cultural
production components found among collaborative journalism sites. The idealism seen in Wikinews, of a non-hierarchical and open, participatory community of practice may be too quixotic for the hard-nosed world of news production. Like other SPCs, some form of hierarchy likely needs to exist—if for no other reason than performing the necessary integration function seen in CBPP—but care should be taken to not let the organization get too bureaucratic or become dominated by a few individuals at the expense of the larger community. Similarly, the mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire needs to be reflexively examined by participants in order not to become too bureaucratic or bogged down by too many reified rules that create barriers to new entrants and that constrict the ability of new and old participants to adapt and change with the times.

7.4.3 Business Issues

Like production and organizational issues in collaborative journalism, there are two main areas to consider for creating a sustainable business model. The businesses themselves must of course be able to earn enough money in order to continue to operate, but they must also be able to support—or help support—contributors in some way who want to earn a living as collaborative journalists. Too often when media experts discuss sustainable business models they only examine issues from the point of view of the business, largely ignoring the potential for exploitation of digital labor that is a growing trend in a number of online cultural production sites, such as Odyssey and Her Campus, two online journalism sites that targeted college students. In these sites, like how Allvoices incentivized contributors, payment depended on how many views stories
received, which forces contributors to spend a substantial amount of time promoting their stories on social media in order to attract viewers, as well as incentivizing participants to write stories that will attract more views—which lends itself to celebrity-oriented coverage and away from in-depth, “boring” coverage of relevant events that could either be local in nature or more complex or less “sexy.”

7.4.3.1 Developing Sustainable Organizations

Any type of organization comes with some costs in its development and management, even when those costs may be relatively low with online SPCs. Website maintenance, getting a domain name, and charges associated with Web traffic can all be ongoing costs for a collaborative journalism site, not to mention any personnel costs for administrative staff or other employees or costs associated with marketing or promotion. Creating a sustainable organization from a financial standpoint is an essential element for collaborative journalism, and is arguably at the crux of the issue regarding whether collaborative journalism sites can survive in the new media ecosystem, especially when so many news organizations are struggling and sites both old and new are shutting down.

Sites that had initially shown promise have been purchased and altered by their new owners, as is the case with Allvoices, or have been purchased, changed, and then shut down completely, as is the case with Examiner.com, which had started out as NowPublic before being bought by Examiner.com in 2009 (Cox, 2016; Stelter, 2009). Other citizen media and investigative journalism sites have also not fared well in recent years, including UK-based investigative journalism site Exaro, which closed suddenly in July 2016 (Jackson, 2016).
These examples highlight how difficult it is for any media organizations to be successful financially in the social media world, let alone small or independent organizations. A survey conducted in March and April 2016 of 93 online independent publishers of 103 publications showed that 57% reported revenues of $100,000 or less, including 39% with revenues of $50,000 or less (McLellan, 2016). Almost all the publications sold advertising, with 51% saying they offered sponsored content, or native advertising, up from 20% in 2014. Advertising was the primary source of revenue for 84% of the sites, and nearly 100% for the profit sites. Among nonprofit sites, almost half said that foundation grants accounted for 50% or more of their revenues, with the rest saying they primarily depended on sponsorships or large donations (McLellan, 2016).

Currently other revenue streams such as business services, events, syndication, subscriptions, and merchandise sales account for only a fraction of revenues among these online sites.

If collaborative journalism sites wish to avoid some of the same problems that have arisen with mainstream media sites that rely on display advertising or sponsored content, then they will have to figure out ways to expand some of the current minor revenue streams to make them more viable, or create new revenue models that will not leave them as vulnerable as many nonprofits that depend primarily on foundation grants or large donations.

Regardless of the business model or models that turn out to be successful, part of the cost calculations will have to include paying contributors enough to make writing for sites a viable option from a career standpoint. So far, except for a handful of sites that are mostly funded by non-profit foundations, this has been problematic. Nevertheless, any
definition of a “sustainable business model” has to take into account the viability of being able to pay employees (contributors) living wages and should not, from an ethical standpoint if nothing else, be allowed to squeeze profits by depressing monies paid to contributors or simply relying on ephemeral promises of “buzz” or “brand recognition”—or the general good will of volunteers—in order to get the content that such sites need.

7.4.3.2 Avoiding Exploitation

Collaborative journalism sites are not the only media organizations that should be concerned about exploiting digital labor. Mainstream news organizations such as CNN co-opt some citizen-journalism efforts by including video footage or reporting from citizens in their iReport web site, founded in 2006 (CNN, 2007). ABC, FoxNews, and MSNBC have all since created similar initiatives. The apparent willingness of mainstream news organizations to use citizen journalists as unpaid sources for raw footage or reporting does not wholly stem from a conversion to public journalism principles, however.

All news organizations, print and television, have seen declines in audiences and advertising revenues in recent years, and many have cut back staff and further reduced their news coverage. In 2007, a Santa Rosa, California TV station fired most of its news staff because of budgetary constraints and planned to use local citizens to produce its news stories (Garofoli, 2007). Using citizen-journalists volunteers is seen as one way to fill the news hole, save costs, and get good PR by claiming to engage citizens. However, citizens largely get sidelined in this model as they are used as unpaid and uncredited reporters who must adhere to professional standards of journalism—standards that are set
by the very news organizations that are unable to fulfill their traditional roles because of budget cuts (Usher, 2011).

In the 2016 survey of independent online publishers, 92% of the sites reported that professional journalists are part of the mix of editorial staff, with just over a quarter saying that professional journalists are exclusively used (McLellan, 2016). Just over 40% use a mix of professional journalists and community members, and 10% use students in some combination with regular staff. About one-third of the sites relied on volunteers, 12% exclusively so, and 44% said they have full-time paid staff producing content, usually in combination with freelancers, part-time staff, or volunteers (McLellan, 2016).

Allvoices was one of the early adopters of a potentially exploitative business model that is increasingly seen today, one that promises payment for contributors but that often demands an exorbitant amount of work on contributors’ parts to promote their stories on social media because pay rates are determined by how many page views stories receive. As social media continues to threaten traditional online news sites (Bell, 2016; Viner, 2016), these tensions will only be exacerbated, increasing the pressure on online publishers to have contributors do much of the marketing and distribution work in order to attract advertisers. These practices raise questions about “power through the algorithm” and the changing dynamics of power, digital labor, and audience surveillance within participatory Web culture and how participation may be unfairly monetized to benefit site owners rather than participants (Beer, 2009).
7.5 Contributions to Theoretical Frameworks

As discussed in Chapter 2, this study used primarily three theoretical frameworks in which to situate and contextualize the research; that of collective action theory (including social production communities), concepts used in the notion of communities of practice, and field theory. The first two were used as primary focuses in order to examine the micro practices in production by Wikinews and Allvoices, while field theory helped bridge the gap between those practices and the larger implications of where collaborative journalism may situate itself within the larger field of journalism.

One of the main contributions this study makes regarding communities of practice stems from the examination of Wikinews and its over-reification, as exemplified in its excessive bureaucratization and rule-making that often seemed to take far more time by participants than actually producing stories. Further, these reified processes served not only to actually sometimes deter new participants, but were often used—as communities of practice concepts have shown—as potential weapons to establish or maintain power over other participants. In the case of Wikinews, the news norms—and questioning of some participants of those norms—were not shared strongly enough to overcome the reified structures that had been created from the founding of Wikinews and in the rush of excitement of many of Wikipedia’s earliest participants as they re-imagined ways that social production of knowledge could be done in alternative modes beyond an encyclopedia format.

Regarding social production communities within collective action theory, this study helped reaffirm that many of the components identified in successful social production projects could not be applied efficiently within a traditional news production framework. Furthermore, this study shows that perhaps the problems lie even more
fundamentally when trying to write news stories as a social production community in that the very notions of what a news story is, let alone how it is produced, may be the culprit. In other words, when news stories are produced as discrete units of information, which quickly lose their value over time, the up-front costs in terms of labor, time, and coordination do not adequately justify the subsequent loss of value that occurs relatively soon after the story is published. Nor does it work efficiently without some kind of hierarchical system of writers or reporters and editors in place who can work together in a timely manner, something Wikinews rarely achieved. Even so, the reversion to a hierarchical editing process in some ways combined the worst aspects of social production communities with the worst aspects of traditional news production workflows, in which reporters often do not have any input in the copy editing process and may not see what edits were done on their stories until a story is published. In the case of Wikinews, editors would take the (relatively) easy task of editing or asking questions about a story, but expect the writer or reporter to do the work of following up and fixing the issues pointed out, something they generally had little incentive to do, especially if they did not agree with the edits or suggestions. Thus, stories would languish in a kind of draft purgatory and either become the focal points of heated debates about off-topic issues or workflow processes, or sit there unattended until they were no longer timely.

Besides the issues around defining (or redefining) news and news story production, the organizational components around creating efficient and functional collaborative SPCs for the specific type of cultural production that is news, and the business aspects faced in a challenging economic climate for media companies, and especially journalism organizations, there is another issue “outside” of all these that collaborative journalism
also must recognize. This is how collaborative journalism may compete or co-exist within the larger journalistic field, using Bourdieu’s concepts within field theory (Benson & Neveu, 2005).

In some ways, the struggles collaborative journalism faces will be intertwined with its struggles within the larger journalistic field, as some of the questions it wrestles with such as redefining types of news or news production will challenge established entities in the journalism field. Even without direct challenges to traditional journalism and with its adoptions of various professional news norms, as we have seen in this study, collaborative journalism will face resistance from established players within the field of journalism. Within professional journalism itself there are differences in power, prestige, and income between newspaper journalists, broadcast journalists, and radio journalists that help define and establish cultural authority (Meltzer, 2009). There is no reason to assume that collaborative journalism, as a newcomer in the field that may consciously or unconsciously challenge established practices and authority, would not be similarly ranked or dismissed as a “lesser” form of journalism in an attempt by established parties to maintain or heighten their own positions.

Collaborative journalism, by its nature, may face harder struggles in establishing a respected position within the field for a number of reasons. First, without “star power” from specific, well-known journalists in the way that television journalism or some of the more well-known newspapers have, it will be hard for collaborative journalists to get the economic and symbolic power enjoyed by established news organizations.

Second, without champions of collaborative journalistic practices, such as from a well-known established journalist acting as an evangelist, it will be hard to convince
other journalism organizations to change their production practices, let alone radically change how they conceive of news.

Third, the relative weakness collaborative journalism organizations have from an economic capital perspective—weak even in comparison to the relatively weak economic status already seen in professional journalism—means that economic forces are unlikely to be a lever to help move collaborative journalism as an important player in the field. Related to the point regarding the role of capital, we see from the example of Allvoices how easy it is for economic factors to simply subsume collaborative journalism practices so the organization functions much like other online media organizations, even to the point of dropping its journalistic mission.

Fourth, without widespread reach and large audiences, the fragmented nature of today’s online audiences means that the potential symbolic capital of collaborative journalism will also be constrained. Finally, even if cracks in the field did occur thanks to changes initiated by collaborative journalism practices and sites, it would be easy for established media organizations to adopt successful practices (assuming they are economically viable) into their own organizations, thus blunting what would otherwise be seen as a vanguard of change from collaborative journalism. We are already seeing some of this dynamic with the rise of projects that call themselves collaborative journalism but that are done primarily between established journalism organizations, such as how the Panama Papers case is often cited as a successful example of collaborative journalism (Fitzgibbon & Hudson, 2021; S. R. Kim, 2016). I would argue that these kinds of projects, although obviously extremely valuable, are more accurately called cooperative journalism in that the participant organizations and journalists are all working from the
same fundamental principles regarding what journalism is and how news stories are produced.

7.6 Limitations of Study

In looking at two collaborative journalism projects that are, essentially, failed projects (even if one continues), it could be argued that comparing a failed project and a successful project may have produced better comparisons. Further, looking at Allvoices and Wikinews may at times feel like an apples and oranges comparison because of the big differences in their basic business models. In many ways, Wikinews is ironically the more radical of the two organizations, at least in its commitment to following social production community principles within the Wikipedia universe. It is ironic in part because despite the radical nature of the concept of socially producing news, the participants actually do so in a very traditional news production process.

Allvoices, on the other hand, seemed radical when it launched, with its powerful algorithm and the ways that it tried to incentivize participants through cash contests and other awards and tried to establish a robust community of journalists, but it has turned out to be a model that other online-only news organizations have tried in which they exploit the digital labor of writers to provide content from which advertising can be shown. The writers do have a chance to make money, but only in so far as they can successfully promote their articles on social media and get some predetermined number of minimum views before being able to receive any income at all.

One limitation of the study is the relatively short life that Allvoices had, and the short time I was on as a contributor on the original site. It would have been far better from a
research perspective if the site hadn’t radically changed its mission partway through this study, which made it a very different site than its original mission. Even though I was able to study enough of it before the change to get useful data and make valid comparisons with Wikinews, ideally I could have explored even more and dove deeper into the workings of the site and how its participants negotiated its changes and policies in the same way that I was able to do with Wikinews, especially if I had been accepted as a contributor after the site redesign and new owners in order to offer a comparison of how workflows may have changed after the new site launched.

Another potential limitation is of course only looking at two sites. There may be vagaries with each that relate to when, where and how they were founded, the participants both in the early stages and who is ongoing, and other factors that make these two sites possibly unique in terms of the potential for collaboration. I tried to address such unique characteristics that may make my findings less generalizable, but it is entirely possible that some characteristics were missed or not taken into account.

Of course, without a successful example of collaborative journalism that did apply the principles and practices discussed in this chapter, it is impossible to say how well it may work, or even if it could work or not. There very well may be a whole new set of workflow issues that arise if actually tried that could prove to be worth studying in and of themselves.

The online nature of both sites may also be another limitation, although in recent years a growing number of online-only news sites have arisen, just as an increasing number of traditional news organizations have abandoned traditional offices and gone online, especially during and after the COVID pandemic. A study comparing the
workflow and community of practice concepts between an online site and one where people do see each other in an office, or perhaps a hybrid format, would likely yield valuable insights in how people negotiate their communities of practice.

7.7 Areas for Future Research

It is hoped that this study provides some groundwork for further research into collaborative production in general and collaborative journalism in particular, and provides some insights into the problems and promises of collaborative journalism. This look at two types of collaborative sites can easily be built on by similarly studying other collaborative journalism sites and various forms of collaborative journalism.

Our knowledge of collaborative production and collaborative journalism would be greatly increased by comparative studies across languages and cultures, not only English-language, U.S.-based sites such as Wikinews and Allvoices that rely primarily on Anglo-Saxon notions of news and news forms. As mentioned earlier, some of the findings in this study show that the specific forms and ideas of what defines a news article hamper the ability of news to be fully integrated into a collaborative production framework in the same way that other forms of cultural production, such as encyclopedia articles or open source software development, have been. In other cultures that have different or more expansive definitions of news and news forms there may be a greater possibility to better incorporate collaborative production practices into developing online news forms.

Examining other language versions of Wikinews, such as the French Wikinews, or comparing some other of the most popular language versions and how their members work together could provide valuable insights into collaborative production across
cultures and perhaps highlight weaknesses or strengths in such production and interactions among the English-language Wikinewsies. Looking at foreign-language Wikinews sites could also show efficiencies of production, where fewer people and smaller numbers of admins have produced more stories comparatively speaking than what has been seen in English Wikinews. This too could highlight where certain types of group interactions and components of communities of practice help or hinder the workflow and productivity of online collaborative groups.

Gender dynamics within collaborative journalism organizations is another area ripe for further research. The mainstream media has persistently under-represented women and minorities, and the F/OSS movement and technology sector have likewise had poor histories in representing those groups. Rather than follow these dismal patterns, research of collaborative journalism organizations could actually inform other SPCs on how to best work in collaborative environments that more closely resemble the gender breakdown in the real world. Exploring how patterns of discourse among women working together differ from primarily male working environments may provide insights into how to negotiate differences in more productive ways than the vitriol and bitterness commonly seen in Wikinews, for example.

Research on the effect that the pay-per-click business model is having on freelance contributors, both from the perspective of freelancers and from the quality of the content that is being produced, would be fruitful to help determine larger trends regarding journalism online. This research could connect to related areas of research about digital labor and the powerful influence capital has had on the Internet.
More research in general on online communities and SPCs would also help scholars and practitioners better understand and negotiate the various power dynamics and unique issues that arise in these types of projects. Better understandings of how people collaborate, why they collaborate and cooperate, and how to keep people motivated and productive without market incentives or traditional hierarchical structures can help create collaborative organizational structures that may not only undermine existing organizational structures, but radically change some of our assumptions about human nature and the best ways to create an ethical economy. The jury is still out among scholars on which way this may go, with some taking a more positive view in saying that a post-capitalist theory of value will develop (Arvidsson, 2009), while others have a more stark or negative view and worry that the logic of capitalism combined with today’s surveillance technologies will dominate (Beer, 2009; Morozov, 2014).

Pursuing questions on how collaborative journalism may help bridge the gap between citizens and journalists, and how it may help create the kind of active citizenry that journalism has long claimed as its mission, could yield valuable information on whether participation in journalistic activities or other forms of cultural production also leads to people becoming more political active, or if people who participate in collaborative journalism are already predisposed toward civic participation within the networked public sphere and have simply chosen journalism as their form by which to participate. These larger questions of the participatory activities within the networked public sphere also touch on the issues of social power and its manifestations through emerging technologies that bring power “up close” and invisible rather than from a traditional hegemonic dynamic (Lash, 2007).
Collaborative journalism as a type of SPC could become a powerful nexus to explore issues of social production, collaboration, and media power within a larger professional and societal context. Unlike software development, doing journalism is more accessible to greater numbers of people and as argued earlier can actually be an excellent way to re-activate and energize the public, giving them critical and other skills that, even if not always used, can make them more engaged and critical citizens in the networked public sphere.
Bibliography


Allvoices Team. (2014a, August 8). *Changes to Allvoices.* Email

Allvoices Team. (2014b, August 20). *The new Allvoices has launched.* Email


http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/19/business/media/sony-attack-is-unraveling-relationships-in-hollywood.html?module=Search&mabReward=relibias%3As%2C%7B%22%3A%22RI%3A14%22%2C%22%3A%22RI%3A8%22%7D


https://www.crunchbase.com/organization/littlecast#/entity


Dan100. (2007, July 1). Comment for “Questions for Wikinewsians.”
http://snurb.info/index.php?q=node/279#comment

http://www.dcc.ac.uk/digital-curation/what-digital-curation


Gillmor, D. (2004). We the media: Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people. O’Reilly.

http://www.onthemedia.org/2012/mar/23/curators-code/


http://www.alternet.org/story/35924/


Hummel, R., Kirchhoff, S., & Prandner, D. (2012). We used to be queens and now we are slaves. *Journalism Practice, 6*(5–6), 722–731.


Kersey, E. (2014, August 13). *Allvoices reinvention does not include fair pay or play.* TEKJournalismUK. http://www.tekjournalismuk.com/freelance-writing-online/allvoices-reinvention-does-not-include-fair-pay-or-play


Lowrey, W., & Anderson, W. (2005). The journalist behind the curtain: Participatory functions on the Internet and their impact on perceptions of the work of
http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue3/lowrey.html


http://reviews.wikinut.com/My-money-experience-with-Allvoices/283ufsmq/


McChesney, R. W., & Pickard, V. (Eds.). (2011). *Will the last reporter please turn out the lights: The collapse of journalism and what can be done to fix it.* The New Press.


http://towknight.org/2016/05/micheles_list_2016_survey_results/


Reuters. (2007a, July 8). Wikipedia remains go-to site for online news. http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20070708/wr_nm/media_wikipedia_dc_1;_ylt=Aj0KA32bhIhdSP0Tf7nYgiQE1vAI


