

**Araştırma Makalesi**  
(Research Article)

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**Wikipedia As A Digital Commons: Collaborative Production And Free Accessing To Information/Knowledge**

Dijital Bir Müşterek Olarak Vikipedi: Ortak Üretim Ve Enformasyona/Bilgiye Ücretsiz Erişim

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study, in fact, analyses Wikipedia as an example case to understand the logic of digital commons and how users made use of it. Documents on the Wikipedia website and Wikimedia foundation website have been used to understand how Wikipedia works. Furthermore, the interviews have been done with Wikipedia users, and the research is supported by these data. Thematic analysis has been applied to my research to analyse collected data. In short, the importance of the digital commons based-projects for free access to information/knowledge is discussed by this study. The themes discussed in the finding chapter are free access to information/knowledge on the internet, popularity and reliability of Wikipedia, surveillance and advertisements, and contributions to Wikipedia. Users of Wikipedia strongly support free access to information on the internet. Wikipedia is a popular encyclopedia due to the fact that users claim that information/knowledge on Wikipedia is simple. However, users do not reach a consensus on the reliability of content on Wikipedia. Also, most users do not want to see advertisements on Wikipedia. Even though Wikipedia does not sell personal data of users to third parties, some users worry about surveillance on the internet. Most users do not play an active role in generating content on Wikipedia, but few users contribute the content and donate money to the Wikipedia Foundation.

**ÖZ**

Bu çalışmanın amacı, dijital müştereklerin mantığını ve kullanıcıların ondan nasıl yararlandığını anlayabilmek için Vikipedi'yi örnek vaka olarak analiz etmektir. Vikipedi'nin nasıl işlerlik kazandığını anlamak için kendi ve Vikipedi Vakfı'nın web sayfasında bulunan dökümanlar kullanılmıştır. Ayrıca, Vikipedi kullanıcıları ile mülakatlar yapılmış ve çalışma mülakatlardan elde edilen verilerle desteklenmiştir. Kısacası bu çalışmada, bilgiye özgürce için dijital müştereklere dayalı projelerin önemi tartışılmaktadır. Bulgular bölümünde tartışılan temalar şunlardır: İnternette enformasyona/bilgiye özgürce ulaşım, Vikipedi'nin popülerliği ve güvenilirliği, gözetleme ve reklamlar ve Vikipedi'ye katkılar. Vikipedi kullanıcıları kuvvetli bir şekilde internette bilgiye özgürce erişimi desteklemektedirler. Kullanıcılar Vikipedi'deki bilgilerin basit olmasından dolayı Vikipedi'nin popüler bir ansiklopedi olduğunu ileri sürmektedirler. Ancak kullanıcılar Vikipedi'nin içeriklerinin güvenilirliği hakkında fikir birliğine sahip değillerdir. Ayrıca çoğu kullanıcı Vikipedi'de reklam görmek istememektedir. Vikipedi kullanıcıların kişisel bilgilerini üçüncü şahıslara satmamasına rağmen bazı kullanıcılar internette gözetlenmekten endişe duymaktadır. Çoğu kullanıcı Vikipedi'deki içeriklerin oluşturulmasına katkı sağlamamakta, yalnızca çok az sayıda kullanıcı içeriklere katkı sağlamakta ve Vikipedi Vakfına para bağışı yapmaktadır.

\* This article is derived from a master's dissertation that I wrote at the University of Sussex in 2015. The title of the thesis was the same with the title of the article: "Wikipedia as a Commons: Collaborative Production and Free Accessing to Information/Knowledge". My supervisor was Dr. John Hondros.

## INTRODUCTION

The internet has been a significant communication tool in the emergence of digital commons. The advances of new technology have created the characteristics of the internet, which, in some aspects, have been different from that of means of traditional mass communication. The vertical communication process of traditional mass media, like the newspaper, radio and TV, have turned into horizontal organisation on the network platforms thanks to decentralisation of structure of the internet. Many-to-many communication processes enable users to be active on the internet while audiences are passive on traditional mass media. Therefore, Manuel Castells (2013) calls the internet *mass self-communication*. The internet users are no longer just receivers, they play a crucial role in producing the content of internet websites.

The characteristics of the internet pave the way for collaborative production. Internet users led important projects on the internet in collaboration with thousands of volunteers in the early years of the internet. In addition, the priorities of producers generally did not earn money from these projects. The producers tried to resurrect the idea of “commons” on the network platform. The meaning of commons stems from the latin word communis, which means that the resources are shared by all (Williams, 1983: 70-72).

The free software and open source movements have been basically founded on digital commons and free access to information. These movements have created alternative projects, which have been produced against privately-based software projects. Intellectual property rights have given rise to serious limitations for internet users to access information (Drahos and Braithwaite, 2002). Commercialisation indeed has had an important effect on the internet. Private companies, which are interested in a range of jobs from banking to advertisements, make use of the internet to increase their profits. Furthermore, private companies have the most popular websites on network platforms such as Google, Facebook, Amazon and Twitter, which are user-generated content. Also, Amazon and Ebay, use targeted advertisement-based content on users' personal information to sell their products effectively (Fuchs, 2012). Users' personal data is sold to advertising companies without permission, and users are not paid for their data. Put simply, users are exploited by privately-based websites (Fuchs, 2014).

However, the free software movement has created alternative products for free access to information/knowledge (Stallman, 2002). Also, these products are collaboratively created by contributors. The idea of commons has reappeared again on the internet. The products of private companies generally restrict users as their products are closed end and users cannot make any changes to the products. On the other hand, digital commons provides users with an opportunity to change any products. Therefore, the logic of digital commons can be an effective way on the internet to minimise commercialisation. If the internet is completely under the control of private companies, the freedom of the internet can be imperilled. Thus, peer-to-peer production done by users can play a crucial role to protect the freedom of the internet. The aim of this study, in fact, is to analyse Wikipedia as an example case to understand the logic of digital commons and how users made use of it.

## THE COMMONS ON THE INTERNET

The theoretical framework of this research is based on the works of Yonkai Benkler, Manuel Castells and Christian Fuchs. Commons-based peer production, developed by Benkler (2006) is the production model of Wikipedia. Castells' network theory shows how users create networks and commons on the internet (2013). Fuchs (2008) also claims that the characteristics of the internet enable users to create a platform where cooperative production is done.

The concept of the commons, in fact, is controversial and some concepts have a similar meaning to the commons, such as “common”, “common-wealth”, “public domain”, “public sphere”, “commonality” and “copy-left” (Berry, 2008: 79). These concepts are sometimes used with the same meaning as the commons, and sometimes not. They can have different meanings to some extent but this study will not focus on these differences. As I said before, the concept of commons means that resources are shared by all (Williams, 1983: 70-72). The term focuses on the benefit to society as a whole. Therefore, I will accept that the meanings of these concepts are similar because all terms are in general use for the interests of the public and society, and not for the private and individual.

The notion of the commons has not emerged in these means of mass communication due to their vertical organisation. The internet has developed many new characteristics as a means of mass communication. Christian Fuchs (2008: 139) claims that the internet has some characteristics, such as “interactivity, multimedia, hypertextuality, globalised communication, many-to-many communication, cooperative production, decontextualisation and derealisation”. Some of these characteristics have paved the way for the emergence of digital commons. Users become active subjects to create the content of the internet with the characteristic of interactivity. They are no longer just passive audiences. Multimedia as a characteristic of the internet allows users to combine text, images, video, sound and animation in one medium thanks to the digitalisation of data. Many-to-many communication process has demolished the vertical communication process, and the horizontal communication process has taken control of the network platform. Cooperative production is probably the most basic feature of the internet. The internet gives users important opportunities for cooperative working processes. People are able to create a social system to share information and digital content (Fuchs, 2008: 139). As I said before, Castells (2013: 55) calls the internet a mass self-communication to distinguish the internet from traditional means of mass communication. Castells also adds that the logic of network-making power depends on two fundamental mechanisms: (1) the ability to create networks and program/reprogram the networks with regard to the aims assigned to the network (2) the ability to connect and enable the collaboration of a variety of networks by sharing common purposes (Castells, 2013: .45).

The internet was established on non-proprietary protocols, for instance the TCP/IP, which were described as a commons for internet users. However, many technical applications and file formats, which were closed and proprietary, were protected by copyright licenses (Solum and Chung, 2003: 838). The software market was divided into two parts, proprietary and free software, in the mid-1980s, and free software provided important opportunities to form the commons on the Internet (Himanen, 2001).

Moreover, the free software movement provides important opportunities for the experiences of collaborative work. The non-hierarchical structure of the Internet is able to provide an efficient coordination mechanism to create a digital commons on the network platform. This new production model, called “commons based peer production” (see Benkler, 2006), enables significant accomplishments in the coordination of complex projects without formal hierarchical control, and team members are motivated by a series of non-pecuniary motives such as, the motivation of creating something new and bringing value to the community (Benkler, 2002: 62). In addition, collaboration on the Internet develops social relationships between individuals. Primavera De Filippi and Miguel Said Vieira write:

The worldwide scope of the Internet also provides the means for users to socialize and to contribute together to common projects regardless of their individual location. This encourages collaboration rather than competition and facilitates peer production-a process whereby interactions amongst peers are not performed on the basis of economic transactions, but rather on the basis of solidarity and social relationships (Filippi and Vieira, 2014: 115).

The rise of the Internet has renewed the meaning of this peer production as a new economic system based on sharing information and a range of collaborative efforts within a network platform. The Internet enables three favourable conditions to encourage the growth of gift-sharing attitudes. First, sharing information on the internet is at almost zero cost (Rifkin, 2014). Secondly, the gift-giving process has great flexibility regarding the size and timing of the donation. Thirdly, the effects of gift giving, with regard to added social value, can be distinguished easily without extra effort. Sharing information does not have to be based on the expectation of reciprocal rewards (Hofmohl, 2010: 246).

Furthermore, Kate Milberry and Steve Anderson (2009: 406) point out that the free software movement and the praxis of open knowledge production make a great contribution in the creation of a democratic digital commons. A commons based-communications system is vital to promote a participatory, collective and democratic dialogue for a radical civilisation change. The open nature of the Internet helps defend information flow freely. The free software movement, therefore, reclaims cyberspace as a digital commons as it provides an alternative perspective to organise social life online.

There are two most popular samples of the commons on the Internet: Linux and Wikipedia. The former one is considered to be the most effective open source project. Linux is an operating system, which has been transformed from a small student project into one of the cheapest and most modern softwares. This software project is organised without formal structure and corporate hierarchy. Furthermore, users have the rights to modify, develop and share the software thanks to the General Public License (GPL), which allows users to do it (Stallman, 2002).<sup>1</sup> The latter one is a kind of online encyclopaedia, which is one of the most popular websites in the world. Information and knowledge on Wikipedia are collaboratively produced by anonymous volunteers. Also, accessing information through Wikipedia is completely free of charge.

### **WIKIPEDIA AS AN EXAMPLE CASE**

Wikipedia is one of the most popular digital commons samples, which is the thirteenth most visited web platform in the world (Alexa Top 500 Global Sites, 2021). Also, Wikipedia is just one non-profit organisation within the top 20 websites in the world. Others are commercial web sites.

Wikipedia is an online free content encyclopedia project helping create a world in which everyone can freely share in the sum of all knowledge. It is supported by the Wikimedia Foundation and based on a model of freely editable content. [...] Wikipedia is written collaboratively by largely anonymous volunteers who write without pay. Anyone with Internet access can write and make changes to Wikipedia articles, except in limited cases where editing is restricted to prevent disruption or vandalism. (About, 2021).

Furthermore, Wikipedia is a crucial knowledge/information source with millions of articles in hundreds of languages. It also has millions of visitors and hundreds of contributors. (About, 2021). Wikipedia is not a classic printed encyclopaedia. The content of Wikipedia is collaboratively determined, and the data can be updated by users. It is based on some fundamental characteristics. Wikipedia describes these as the *Five Pillars*.

Wikipedia is an encyclopaedia

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<sup>1</sup> The aim of the license basically protects internet users' rights. "The license agreements of most software companies try to keep users at the mercy of those companies. By contrast, our General Public License is intended to guarantee your freedom to share and change free software – to make sure the software is free for all its users" (GNU General Public License, version 1, 1989).

Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view  
 Wikipedia is free content that anyone can use, edit, and distribute  
 Wikipedia's editors should treat each other with respect and civility  
 Wikipedia has no firm rules: Wikipedia has policies and guidelines, but they are not carved in stone; their content and interpretation can evolve over time (Five Pillars, 2021).

The Wikimedia community selects at least 9 authorised trustees, who must have a wide range of talents, experience and capabilities that will meet the needs of the foundation, but it does not have any members. The decision-making process of the Wikimedia Foundation is through voting, which is used for all matters, such as the election of trustees and officers. Votes are usually submitted by “mail, electronic mail, facsimile transmission, chat software, video conferencing, wiki software, or other similar verifiable means” (Wikimedia Foundation Bylaws, 2020).

Similarly, the main logic of Wikipedia is based on consensus. If conflicts appear among users, they are usually resolved by discussion and collaboration, which is considered as a participatory democracy. The debates and discussions are conducted on the Community Portal of Wikipedia. Polling is only used in order to facilitate building consensus. “When polls are used, they should ordinarily be considered a means to help in determining consensus, but do not let them become your only determining factor” (Polling Is Not a Substitute for Discussion, 2021). However, polls cannot be used for article development. The content of articles is determined by active users who contribute the content of articles on Wikipedia.

The programs and servers used for accessing Wikipedia can be seen as the commons ruled by the Wikimedia Foundation. The cost of servers and the salaries of 200 employees are paid by the Wikipedia Foundation thanks to donations. Jimmy Wales, who is the founder of Wikipedia, makes a statement on the Wikimedia Foundation Website about donating to the foundation. He writes:

When we made Wikipedia a non-profit, people told us we'd regret it. But if Wikipedia were to become commercial, it would be a great loss to the world.

Wikipedia is a place to learn, not a place for advertising. The heart and soul of Wikipedia is a community of people working to bring you unlimited access to reliable, neutral information.

We know that most people will ignore this message. But if Wikipedia is useful to you, please consider making a donation of £5, £20, £50 or whatever you can to protect and sustain Wikipedia (Wales, 2021).

Another point is that the verifiability of an article on Wikipedia is somewhat arguable. In particular, Wikipedia is seen as an unreliable source by academics or researchers. However, Wikipedians claim that:

Its content is determined by previously published information rather than the beliefs or experiences of its editors' [...] All material in Wikipedia mainspace, including everything in articles, lists and captions, must be verifiable. All quotations, and any material whose verifiability has been challenged or is likely to be challenged, must include an inline citation that directly supports the material (Verifiability, 2021).

Furthermore, Wikipedians point out that the articles on Wikipedia do not take sides. They write: “All encyclopedic content on Wikipedia must be written from a neutral point of view (NPOV), which means representing fairly, proportionately, and, as far as possible, without bias...” (Neutral Point of View, 2021).

Wikipedians, who are mainly high skilled individuals, work voluntarily and without payment for Wikipedia projects. As is well known, the capitalist system, which is the dominant system in the world, is generally based on economic profit and workers work for companies to

make a living. Therefore, a salary is indispensable for workers to sustain their existence. Ironically, Wikipedia volunteers work for Wikipedia without any payment.

The privacy policy of Wikipedia differs from that of private corporations. Wikipedia does not sell the data of users to advertising companies. The data is used to develop Wikipedia.

We do not sell or rent your Personal Information, nor do we give it to others to sell you anything. We use it to figure out how to make the Wikimedia Sites more engaging and accessible, to see which ideas work, and to make learning and contributing more fun. Put simply: we use this information to make the Wikimedia Sites better for you. (Privacy Policy, 2021).

Wikipedia records the IP addresses of its users, but users can register with Wikipedia without using their personal information. Also, users can use Wikipedia to read articles and edit knowledge, except under certain circumstances, without registration (Privacy Policy, 2021).

### **THE METHOD OF THE STUDY**

E-mail interviews with Wikipedia users were chosen as a method for collecting the primary data for the research. Well-founded knowledge about conversational reality can be obtained by a qualitative interview. Therefore, research interviewing is described as a knowledge-producing activity (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 3).

I prepared an interview schedule with a guide, which for the email interview included an outline of topics to be covered. In this study, a draft with the interview questions was worked out. The email interview form was made up of twelve questions. Most of the questions were “what” open questions, couched in simple terms. However, the researcher made use of multiple questions to obtain relevant answers as the researcher could not prompt the interviewees in the email interview form. Therefore, some multiple-choice questions, which always had an open “other” option, were used alongside open-ended questions, which were not too open. Before real interviews, a pilot study was done in order to make sure the questions were clear enough for interviewees.

I did thirteen interviews with Wikipedia users at the University of Sussex to examine how they benefit from Wikipedia. This research was part of my master dissertation I wrote in 2015 in the UK. I chose samples on campus since I had limited time and money. The interviewees were selected by snowball sampling technique since users mostly did not have details about how Wikipedia worked. To examine Wikipedia thoroughly, I required interviewees, who knew the logic of digital commons and open source based-digital encyclopaedia, to gather the necessary data. Thanks to snowball sampling technique, I found interviewees, who provided me with rich data to analyse digital commons. The interview form was sent to nineteen Wikipedia users by email. Only thirteen Wikipedia users answered the questions on the interview form. All interviewees consisted of young adults between 25 and 35 years old.

According to Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann (2009), the number of interviewees should be in the region of five to twenty-five. Also, Raymond Kent (2007) asserts that a small sample can be around ten. Thus, it can be assumed that a sample of thirteen interviewees for this article is sufficient for the researcher to obtain the answers to the research question within the set limit of time for this research.

The interviewees included academics, civil servants, and postgraduate students. Seven interviewees were male. The number of female interviewees was five. Two participants were simply regular contributors to Wikipedia, and eleven participants were passive users. Participants were anonymised as their real names could not be used in this study (Interview

with A,B,C D, E, F, G,H, I, J, K, L, M), and the aim of the research was clearly explained to them.

The data deriving from transcription of interviews was analysed by thematic analysis technique. Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun (2017: 297) state that “thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data”. Thematic analysis allows researchers to categorise primary sources under themes, which includes rich data to analyse. In this research, I collected primary sources from interviews, and I used the data coming from transcriptions in the findings. Thematic analysis was an effective method to categorise transcriptions and to do in-depth analysis about Wikipedia. Thanks to thematic analysis, I benefited from interviewees’ opinions as much as possible in the section of findings. The data was categorised according to themes, and the literature review helped me when I coded the data. Some of the data were not coded because they were not relevant to the research. I organised the data in four conceptual categories: Free Access to Information/Knowledge on the Internet, Popularity and Reliability of Wikipedia, Surveillance and Advertisements, Contributions to Wikipedia. Furthermore, coding data of the interviewees was compared, and the differences and similarities in the data were analysed.

## **THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

My research findings gathered by interviews as stated below are ordered thematically by different issues, such as free access to information/knowledge on the Internet, reliability and the popularity of Wikipedia, surveillance and advertisements on Wikipedia, and contributions to Wikipedia. This chapter will conclude with some suggestions for the future of the Internet and digital commons.

### **Free Access to Information/Knowledge on the Internet**

Most participants state that accessing information on the Internet should be completely free. There are reasons why participants support the free access to information/ knowledge on the internet. The interviewee G asserts that “I think not only the internet, but also libraries need to be completely free for all citizens to build a better world which overcomes ignorance as far as possible” (Interview with G). He thinks that free access to information/knowledge on the internet is a crucial tool to overcome “ignorance”. The interviewee I says:

We live in an information era and that means that accessing information is vital for all of us. On the other side, the internet is the most important tool to access information easily. It is my opinion that accessing the sources without any payment is quite important for all people especially academics to improve new ideas and make contributions. Some people, however, argue that this has some bad effects such as involution, but it is obvious that accessing information without payment is the fair way in the 21st century for all people (Interview with I).

Most participants think that information/knowledge is common property, and it has universal value. Therefore, they point out that people should have access to information/knowledge for free. They write:

It is what information needs to be nowadays; free and easily accessible. Without any subscriptions or payment even any identification. It should be transparent and free (Interview with F).

Information/knowledge has universal value, and everyone should access it at any time. I am in favour of the free access to information (Interview with H).

I think information is the common property of humanity and the internet is the best way of accessing information, even if it has restrictions (Interview with J).

Certain interviewees support Wikipedia as a digital commons project as they think that information should be free and the common property of humanity. Furthermore, the interviewee

M says private websites, which make money from commodification of information/knowledge, do not care about the priorities of users.

I would like not to use the web site of a profitable organization because I believe that the priority of these kinds of organizations is to make money, which means that they do not care about my priorities. But non-profitable organizations generally establish their strategies and policies on ethical and universal values (Interview with M).

The interviewee M has a strong opinion that commodification of information does not serve common interests in society. Internet users, in general, are glad of access to information/knowledge without any payment via digital commons based-websites. Sharing information/knowledge on the Internet is nearly zero cost and the artefacts on digital commons based-websites can be easily copied by the internet users for free of charge. Hereby, the flow of information on the internet becomes fast as millions of the internet users participate in collaborative production processes and they distribute the information/knowledge to every corner of the globe thanks to the digital network platforms. Moreover, the digital commons based-websites do not commodify information/knowledge. Although users do not pay any money to some private based- websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to share information/knowledge, the data produced by users is commodified by private based-websites that accumulate serious capital.

Two participants approach with suspicion the free access to information/knowledge. The free refers in this context to accessing information on the Internet without any payment. One participant, the interviewee C, claims that in some cases, users must pay to access to information/ knowledge:

I like doing so, but I recognize that collecting and providing information takes effort, and in many cases that effort must be paid for in one way or another. I am willing to do so in some cases, I subscribe to the digital archives of several newspapers for an annual fee (Interview with C).

Also, another participant, the interviewee D, draws attention to a point about the unhealthy relationship between the open source movement and commercialisation.

The knowledge/information is public domain and it can freely be distributed. The meaning of free does not always refer to getting something without any payment. Actually, although the open source movement was based on software in early years, it spread from software to hardware, to patent the books. Also, it can be given a lot of samples of software such as Linux. In addition to these, the corporations on the internet can also reach freely knowledge/information like all users. For example, there was a report which showed how Amazon has saved millions of dollars by developing kindle device development thanks to know-how databank. On the one side, we support the open source movement to access freely knowledge, on the other side, the open source movement can serve the private companies, such as Google, gmail, chrome and android, to commercialize the internet. To sum up, this is a paradoxical situation and we have to approach this situation suspiciously. Information/knowledge should be common property and everybody ought to reach this resource freely (Interview with D).

In this quotation, the interviewee D gives an important detail regarding how voluntary labour can be turned into capital if private companies benefit from digital commons-based projects. The idea of commons plays a key role in the production and distribution of information on the internet, but it is important to note that free access to information leads to a new economical model in which private social network companies make a profit from users' activities and private information. The relationship between technology companies and digital commons projects can be problematic if digital commons projects are exploited by technology companies to make a profit.

## Popularity and Reliability of Wikipedia

Wikipedia is generally used “every day” or “a few times a week” by interviewees. They explain a range of reasons why Wikipedia is a popular website. Most interviewees claim that accessing information/knowledge on Wikipedia is “easy” and it has “correct” information:

It has a lot of easily-accessed and generally correct information (Interview with B).

It is very comprehensive, relatively easy to use, and often quite accurate” (Interview with C).

...accessing Wikipedia is easy and it is a relatively correct knowledge/information source... (Interview with E).

...it is the easiest way of accessing information (Interview with H).

...many users can quickly and effectively access to information (Interview with M)

Furthermore, an interviewee points out that “...Its information/knowledge is quite simple. People easily access superficial information” (Interview with K). However, another participant asserts that superficial information/knowledge supplied by Wikipedia has a detrimental effect on new generations. He writes:

Wikipedia is an invaluable source for ‘all-knowing’ people because it is a website that presents knowledge summarily in all areas. It is not surprising that Wikipedia is within the top 10 websites in the world because it is a common culture among the new generations that use the internet almost every day. Prensky calls them as ‘digital natives’ because they generally tend to obtain general, superficial knowledge to comment on a matter instead of researching something in depth (Interview with G).

Moreover, participants state that the structure of Wikipedia allows users to contribute the content.

Wikipedia is a collective ownership, namely there are not any managers or CEOs. Its system is based on open source software, so people can contribute the content of Wikipedia (Interview with D).

... [Wikipedia] is to be open source and free. Everyone presents their knowledge/information on Wikipedia and all parts of society can access it freely. Therefore, Wikipedia is the popular encyclopaedia in our times (Interview with L).

As I said earlier, Wikipedia is one of the most popular websites in the world. The interviewees claim that Wikipedia is popular as it is a clear, simple and free encyclopaedia. The information/knowledge on Wikipedia is useful for internet users because they use this information/knowledge in daily life to overcome simple problems. Also, Wikipedia consists of summary information/knowledge, and users are not confused because of its simple content: though superficial information/knowledge on Wikipedia can sometimes give rise to detrimental effects on users. They often discuss the problems superficially and this can prevent having in-depth information/knowledge.

The interviewee L claims that Wikipedia is popular because of its structure based on open source (Interview with L). Thousands of volunteers contribute to the content of Wikipedia, and they provide a broad range of information/knowledge from biology, chemistry, maths to sociology, philosophy and psychology. The structure of Wikipedia gives rise to interactivity between active users and Wikipedia serves the internet users with thousands of different languages thanks to Wikipedians who can speak different languages.

The reliability of Wikipedia is one of the most arguable issues. Interviewees have given three different answers: “reliable”, “unreliable” and “double-check the content of Wikipedia”. Wikipedia is seen as a reliable source by two participants. The interviewee D points out that

When I have used Wikipedia I have never faced any problems about the content of it so far. In particular, when I research something concerning scientific topics, Wikipedia objectively presents an opposing view as well. So I think the content of Wikipedia is reliable (Interview with D).

Wikipedia is an open source media, so it can be seen as an unreliable source, but I think that the team of this website and some moderators check all uploaded information. So far, I have not encountered any false information. If I had a chance to give a point from 1 to 5, in order to show its reliability, it would be 5 (Interview with I).

Four participants see Wikipedia as an unreliable source. The interviewee H claims that the content of Wikipedia is “inconsistent”. He writes:

I do not think it is a reliable source. Information/knowledge is able to have inconsistent explanations within the different range of language (Interview with H).

User-generated content cannot be correct. One-sided data on Wikipedia is due to the format of the website (Interview with K).

The interviewee G states that user-generated content “cannot be reliable”. The structure of Wikipedia is based on an open source, which means that users can contribute to the content of Wikipedia. Although volunteer editors check information/knowledge on Wikipedia, they cannot edit all information/knowledge because there are more than 6.350.000 articles (About, 2021). There are completely different ideas about the reliability of content on Wikipedia, but some interviewees assert that information/knowledge on Wikipedia can be used if it is double-checked (Interview with C, F, J). Nonetheless, Wikipedia does not accept that its content is unreliable. They write: “Its content is determined by previously published information rather than the beliefs or experiences of its editors [...] All material in Wikipedia mainspace, including everything in articles, lists and captions, must be verifiable” (Neutral Point of View, 2021). Moreover, the editors of Wikipedia assert that the content of Wikipedia is not affected by any ideology and biases. (Privacy Policy, 2021). Although Wikipedians claim that content on Wikipedia is reliable and not affected by any biases, information/knowledge on Wikipedia is not accepted as a reliable source by the academics and the researchers. Students do not cite knowledge on Wikipedia to write their term papers or dissertations. Therefore, Wikipedia cannot be an effective alternative source in the academic field. If Wikipedia is accepted as a reliable source by researchers and students, it can be more popular and the idea of digital commons and open source can be more powerful.

### **Surveillance and Advertisements**

Surveillance is a common method used by technology companies in the digital field to mine personal information of users for commercialization and control. Wikipedia users give us important details to understand how users feel when they visit or contribute to Wikipedia as a digital commons. Some interviewees feel safe when they visit Wikipedia although they know that their data is recorded.

I am aware that all my contributions are on record forever. As I do not intend to contribute anything I would be ashamed of, I don't see that as a problem (Interview with B)

I am aware that anyone can see my history of contributions. But I don't feel "watched" in a paranoid sense. I choose to edit under my legal name (Interview with C).

I do not think that I am being watched by Wikipedia. Wikipedia is probably one of the most secured websites... but if you use google chrome, nobody can be sure that your personal data is stored. (Interview with E).

However, most participants point out that not just Wikipedia, but all internet networks also are unsafe. The interviewee D states:

I do not think that any internet networks and any computers connected to these networks are safe. Namely this is not just a matter about Wikipedia. When I search for illegal things, I can be worried. However, I do not think that I am watched especially when I use Wikipedia (Interview with D).

The interviewee K asserts that Wikipedia users are watched by governments.

We are talking about Wikipedia which is one of the most visited websites in the world. Surely, governments are closely interested in what millions of people look for and examine for. They get some results by looking at topics people care about, in order to steer their policies and they try to appeal to people's perceptions by revising their interference methods. I think this kind of well-known site is watched by governments (Interview with K).

Surveillance is probably the most serious problem on the Internet. The privacy policies of privately-based websites generally serve the economic interests of their corporations. Private websites can gather user-generated content or personal data of users thanks to their privacy policies. The user-generated content is sold to advertising companies, and private websites make serious money by means of this business. Also, users are not paid any money. Effectively, users are exploited by privately-based websites. (Fuchs, 2014). Nevertheless, the privacy policy of Wikipedia is different from that of privately-based websites. Users do not face any targeted advertisements after they visit or contribute to Wikipedia. The personal information of users of Wikipedia is not sold to any advertising companies. "We do not sell or rent your non-public information, nor do we give it to others to sell you anything" (Privacy Policy, 2021).

Further to this, individuals can make use of Wikipedia without registration. However, the interviewees assert that any Web 2.0 sites are watched by internet corporations and governments. All participants are aware of surveillance on the Internet but some of them do not care about the surveillance, while others are anxious about it. However, although surveillance is a general problem on the Internet, Wikipedia is safer than privately-based websites because Wikipedia does not sell the personal data or user-generated content to third parties. It has respect for users' privacy.

Interviewees generally do not feel safe when they face targeted advertisements on the internet. The interviewee A says "I do not feel good because it makes me think I am being watched". The interviewee M claims that "the websites we use are watched. Also, marketing and sales techniques are applied towards our interests" (Interview with K). One participant uses some applications to prevent targeted advertisements. The interviewee M asserts

It disturbs me and makes me feel unsafe. Thus, I always try to keep it in my mind when searching or using some website. In addition, I am using some applications which help to hide your searches or your IP numbers from any surveillance (Interview with M).

Most interviewees support Wikipedia's not having advertisements on its website although there is an interviewee arguing that ads should be on Wikipedia.

I can easily focus on texts because nothing distracts me (Interview with K).

I am very glad there are no adverts. I might not contribute if there were adverts (Interview with B).

Advertisements could compromise Wikipedia's impartiality, and would cease to contribute if they were ever added (Interview with C).

I do not mind about advertisements (Interview with J).

I would like not to use the web site of profitable organisation because I believe that the priority of these kind of organisations is to make money, which means that they do not care my priorities' (Interview with E)

Wikipedia should make use of advertisements to overcome financial difficulties’  
(Interview with F).

Commercialisation of the Internet restricts users’ actions in many cases. Users have to operate within the determined boundaries determined by privately-based websites or software. They cannot change or modify anything. Furthermore, users are exploited by owners of privately-based websites. Even though these websites earn lots of money with regard to the labour of users, they do not remunerate users. In particular, social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are based on user-generated content, and they generally sell this content to advertising companies without the permission of users. Individuals’ personal data is used by advertising companies in order to raise sales through targeted advertisements, and by governments to monitor activists.

Wikipedia does not use any advertisements on its website because of being a non-profit organisation. The interviewees are generally glad of Wikipedia’s not having any advertisements. Also, the interviewee C points out an important matter about the relationship between advertisements and impartiality. The websites using advertisements are generally dependent on income supplied by private companies and they are not able to share any information against the interests of the companies. This can damage the impartiality of Wikipedia. The interviewee B asserts “I am very glad there are no adverts [on Wikipedia]. I might not contribute if there were adverts” (Interview with B). Economic independence is the most powerful characteristic of Wikipedia. The Wikimedia Foundation creates a free encyclopaedia based on the digital commons-based website, and the logic of Wikipedia is different from privately-based websites because Wikimedia is a non-profit foundation. Therefore, the Wikimedia foundation does not need the revenue of advertisements, and so it does not develop an unhealthy relationship with commercial and advertising companies. In short, the content of Wikipedia is not determined by the interests of private companies because it has an independent funding policy. Furthermore, Internet users usually feel bad when they face targeted advertisements because personal data of users is collected by private companies without permission.

### **Contributions to Wikipedia**

Most interviewees are passive users of Wikipedia. The interviewees A, D, E, F, G, I, J, K, L and M use Wikipedia to access information/knowledge. Only two interviewees B and C are active users, both to upload and to access information/knowledge. Just one participant has joined the community portal to discuss and collaborate with other Wikipedians. The interviewee B says “I have certainly contributed to several of the pages it leads to”. The interviewee C has not joined the community portal to collaborate. He states that “I collaborate on many article and process pages, and post often on the help desk and sometimes on the reference desk” (Interview with C).

The interviewees have given some answers as to why users make contributions to Wikipedia without receiving a salary. Two interviewees, who are active users, say “I do so from a desire to help, and a feeling of accomplishment” (Interview with C). “It is relatively easy for us to contribute to an excellent project” (Interview with B). The other interviewees who are passive users also make some comments about this issue. The interviewee E states “there are two important reasons: collective consciousness and self-satisfaction. I am sure when some users uploaded or edited knowledge on Wikipedia, they feel themselves important, like a lord” (Interview with E).

The interviewee H claims that contributions to Wikipedia are about personality. “I believe that some of them feel obliged to inform other people and some see it as an avocation.

It is about their personality. They create a sub-identity for themselves” (Interview with H). The interviewee L explains why users make contribution to Wikipedia by work ethics:

It can be explained with the changes of work ethics. I think the basic power of Wikipedia is based on information/knowledge uploaded by users for free. They do not expect any economic interests for this job. This type of project shows the opportunities of sharing information on the internet. We can say that these projects are based upon [the] free software movement (Interview with L).

Wikipedians contribute to the content of Wikipedia without receiving a salary because of contributing to an excellent project, collective consciousness and self-satisfaction, creating a sub-identity and work ethics. Although the structure of the Internet enables users to contribute to the digital commons based project, most users do not participate in cooperative production. More than 120.000 active contributors can be a crucial number for a digital project as any private-based corporations on the Internet do not have such a substantial number of staff. However, active users participating in collaborative production are in the minority. 1.7 billion unique users visit Wikipedia monthly (About, 2021). In the interview, 10 interviewees are active contributors (Interview with A, D, E, F, G, I, J, K, L, M) while only 2 interviewees contribute to the content of Wikipedia (Interview with B, C). Passive users of Wikipedia have similarities with audiences on traditional media because both passive users and audiences are just receivers.

Milberry and Anderson (2009: 406) claim that a commons based-communication system is important for a radical civilisation change by promoting a participatory, collective and democratic dialogue. On the other hand, only a small minority takes part in a participatory, collective and democratic dialogue on commons based-communication systems. The majority of users stay away from collaborative production for digital commons. In the interview, only one interviewee used a community portal on Wikipedia, which conducts debate and discussion.

Most interviewees have never donated to Wikipedia. Just two active users have donated to Wikipedia with “less than once a year” (Interview with B) and “once a year” (Interview with C). The income of Wikipedia is based on donations. It is a non-profit organisation, and thus, it does not sell any products or services. The Wikimedia foundation collected “\$124,131,047 raised from over 8.7 million donations” during the 2019-2020 fiscal year (Fundraising/2019-2020 Report, 2021). This amount of donations is quite impressive for a non-profit organisation. However, less than 1 % percent of the visitors make a donation to the Wikimedia foundation. In fact, this percentage is quite low, and if the foundation can raise the number of donors, it will have greater funding, and the Wikipedia foundation can run more effective digital commons based-projects. Just two interviewees have donated to the Wikimedia Foundation once a year (Interview with B and C), and these interviewees have been active users. No passive users have ever donated to the Wikimedia Foundation. There can be said that active contributors have a greater tendency to donate money. If the contributors of Wikipedia feel a part of digital commons based-projects, they also make donations for the projects.

## **CONCLUSION**

The invention of the Internet is an important development in human history in terms of communication processes. On the one hand, the Internet is a means of mass communication. On the other hand, it is not a traditional mass communication tool. The characteristics of the Internet are different from the newspapers, the radio and TV. The decentralised structure of the Internet has paved the way for many-to-many communication processes, and the vertical communication processes of traditional mass communication tools have been turned into horizontal communication processes on the Internet. Internet users play a key role in producing the content of the Internet thanks to the many-to-many communication process. Users are active

producers on the Internet, while audiences are merely passive receivers of traditional mass communication tools. The interactivity between users on the Internet makes collaborative production easier. Peer-to-peer production indicates crucial contributions for the development of the internet.

Free software and open-source movements support free access to information/knowledge on the internet, and the products of these movements are created by hackers or users. The main logic of movements is based on collaborative production, and the source code of their products is open. Hence, users can use and modify the products created by free software and open-source movements. The logic is completely different from the logic of proprietary companies that do not let users modify their products. However, digital commons produced by collaborative production may afford users opportunities to build a participatory, free and transparent platform.

Wikipedia is one of the most popular digital-commons based websites in the world: in the top 15 websites, which is ruled by Wikimedia - a non-profit foundation. It has tens of thousands of active users, and they contribute to, or edit, the content of Wikipedia. Moreover, hundreds of millions of users visit Wikipedia within a single month because the information/knowledge on Wikipedia is completely free for all users. There is no subscription fee and Internet users do not have to register for access to information/knowledge on Wikipedia.

Wikipedia provides its users with crucial access to information and knowledge. Digital commons-based websites can be used by individuals against the commodification of information/knowledge. Interviewees generally see Wikipedia as an effective encyclopaedia to access information/knowledge. It has an enormous data capacity and users can make use of the content of Wikipedia for free. Furthermore, although Wikipedia has tens of thousands of volunteer editors and active users, the number of passive users and visitors reach hundreds of millions within a month. That is to say, active users are in the minority, and they are usually well-educated white-collar workers and students. And this is a little problematic because the majority of people in the world belong to working or lower classes, and only a small, elite group produce and control the content of Wikipedia. To overcome this disparity, users belonging to lower classes should participate in producing the content of Wikipedia. The participatory democracy on the Internet only becomes meaningful with the input of active users who belong to working and lower classes. Otherwise, producing the content of the Internet is nothing more than the activity of the elite group.

The reliability of the content of Wikipedia is very arguable between interviewees. Most of them claim that the content of Wikipedia should be double checked because information/knowledge on Wikipedia can be wrong due to its structure based on open source. Even though they do not trust the content of Wikipedia, they usually make use of it a few times a week because they often use Wikipedia for accessing superficial information/knowledge and do not use it for academic purposes. If Wikipedia handles the problem about reliability in the academic field, it can be more popular and useful.

Collaborative production is one of the most important characteristics of the Internet. Its users create alternative websites thanks to network-making power. Digital commons-based projects are created by this power. Many contributors participate in the production of these projects. For example, Wikipedia has tens of thousands of volunteer contributors, and Wikipedia does not make money from the labour of volunteer contributors. It does not share the personal data of users with third parties, and does not prevent information/knowledge being commodified. However, all projects based on commons-based peer production do not have the same attitudes on commercialisation. Open source is already a business model in which developers make money from open source projects. Furthermore, peer-to-peer production

allows humans to be users active on the internet, and not just passive receivers, like the audiences of traditional mass communication tools, but it is important to note that the number of active users in peer production is still low.

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