Media Studies 255

New Technologies

February 12, 2019

Chosen Topic: WIKIS

**Wiki What?**

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“The simplest online database that could possibly work.”

-Ward Cunningham

Wiki what? Yes, you heard it. It’s called wiki. A wiki, to simply put, is a digital software that handles complex problems with simple solutions. Wikis have massive databases compromised of open and collaborative information, both created and edited by its users in both content and structure. This is the key difference between other websites—wikis have collaborative editing by the users. In other words, if you read it you can edit it.

If you were a curious person like me, you might of amusingly thought, “What an interesting name!” The name “wiki” comes from the Hawaiian word for “quick”. Wikis had their start in history from the person who spoke the quote above—Ward Cunningham. Ward got the idea of the word “wiki” when he heard a counter employee at Honolulu International Airport to take the “Wiki Wiki Shuttle.” Cunningham gave the name “WikiWikiWeb” to the knowledge base for his company’s website at c2.com which was powered by a wiki software.

*The idea of a “Wiki” may seem odd at first, but dive in, explore its links and it will soon seem familiar. “Wiki” is a composition system ; it’s a discussion medium; it’s a repository; it’s a mail system; it’s a tool for collaboration. We don’t know quite what it is, but we do know it’s a fun way to communicate asynchronously across the network. -*Ward Cunningham

What are wikis for? Even Ward did not really have a clear idea what it could be for but had a purpose for it to be way to communicate and collaborate in a new and different way. Wikis can provide many benefits. Some of the benefits and uses that wiki provides are the following: composing, discussing, hyperlinking, collaborating, and communicating. At the core, wikis are composition systems. They are designed to make it as easy as possible to write on webpages. In the time of Ward Cunningham, most people had to write webpages by hand in HTML. Ward wanted a tool to help people write pages quickly and HTML was not enough. So he made a basic text formatting system. Therefore, quick and easy composition has become a cornerstone of a wiki design. Wikis are also great for collaborating! Today, because of high advanced technology, communications have become instantaneous and global at the same time. This made wikis even more effective to discuss, collaborate, and communicate. Another benefit wikis provide is the act of hyperlinking. Hyperlinking itself is nothing new, however, it is how wiki uses it that makes wiki special. Adding hyperlinks within wikis are designed to be fast and easy like everything else mentioned before. One thing special in addition to hyperlinks is that one is able to link something that does not yet exist. For example, you can create a link to a page about a certain subject even if the page does not exist yet. Through these two linkings within wiki, they can help facilitate growth within the wiki.

Some wikis that we all know are the following: Wikipedia, Wikileaks, and WikiHow. Everyone knows Wikipedia. Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia that has an open source for people to access, contribute, and freely edit. It involves from different formats and languages to local and global collaboration. Wikipedia is the most popular wiki and helped publicized and popularized wikis to the online world. Most students, maybe even college students, use Wikipedia to get information, although it is not the preferred way for academic purposes.

Wikileaks is another wiki platform that contains news from all sorts of sources, including highly classified ones such as government information. As its name implies, wikileaks leaks secret information and classified media from anonymous sources. Wikileaks play a somewhat important role in the Internet. It is because the general public should know information that should rightfully be known to the public, especially when certain information could possibly affect our lives and the lives of others greatly.

Another everyday use of wikis is when one needs to know *how* to do something like cooking. WikiHow is a wiki platform that lists in simple steps of how to do things from multiple sources, even lists of know-hows from individual experiences of all levels of culture and age. A mom of four children, for example, can make a list of steps of how to manage children and be a good mom. Another one could be a working middle-aged man creating five simple steps of how to fix a flat tire of a car. The ideas could go on endlessly.

Wikis are a documentation dream. In this digital world, you can make documents easily. However, it is still an exhaustive work taking a whole lot of Word docs to document everything. With wiki, one can reference a document while in a meeting and do not need to have a computer right in front. There would be no need to worry of accidentally erasing documents and would have a constant and free basis of open and updated editing.

Wikis are used everyday in this world of an abundance of information. When one needs to find references, general definitions, or even a profile about a certain subject or topic, one can easily access information through wikis such as Wikipedia.

Wikis are great tools. Probably one of the best when it comes to open collaboration and documenting information. It is designed to be user-friendly and quick. The effectiveness of wikis are limitless. Countless of information can be documented in and out by different people from different sources to different audiences of all types. I would not be surprised if the governments uses a wiki-based system for their own purposes, including military for highly classified information within such as enemy intel and strategies.

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