Lifting the Veil:
The Expression of Values in Online Communities

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ABSTRACT

Wikipedia's stated mission is to provide a free encyclopedia that people all over the world can use and contribute to. However, while Wikipedia is successful at providing *access* to free, high quality information to users around the globe, the degree to which Wikipedia has succeeded in facilitating *contribution* on a global scale is less well known. The mechanisms used to determine why and how content is included have, for the most part, taken place "off-stage" and in ways that are less visible to the casual Wikipedia user. In this study, we explore the relationship between the ideals on which Wikipedia was founded and the policies and practices of the close-knit community that has developed around the shared practice of building the encyclopedia. Through a case study of a polarized talk page debate we show that the editorial community of the English language Wikipedia has a distinct cultural character, which can be uncovered through an examination of the way community members use the social and technical mechanisms of the website and through an analysis of the rhetorical appeals made by editors engaged in heated talk page debates. Our analysis reveals an inherent tension among the values held by the majority of Wikipedians, the values articulated in Wikipedia's mission statement, and the values of the global community of readers that Wikipedia was created to serve.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Case. *In September 2005 the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published a set of satirical cartoons that depicted the Muslim prophet Muhammad, an act that is forbidden in many Islamic sects. Some of these cartoons explicitly associated Muhammad with Islamic terrorism, including one cartoon that depicted Muhammad with a bomb in his turban. This incident sparked riots and embassy burnings by Muslims in Denmark and elsewhere, and has continued to have violent consequences.*

The Wikipedia article created in late January 2006 to document these events, Jyllands-Posten Muhammad Cartoon Controversy, *soon sparked a controversy of its own. When editors involved in the article's initial creation decided to re-publish a large thumbnail version of the original cartoons at the top of the article many Wikipedia readers and editors (Muslims and non-Muslim)*

objected to this decision as unnecessarily inflammatory. Other editors countered that removing the images would violate both the letter and the spirit of Wikipedia's longstanding policy on censorship, which dictates that article content should only be taken down if its publication violates either the laws of Wikipedia's home state of Florida or one of the community's official *content policies. A heated and highly polarized editorial debate followed between editors in favor of keeping the cartoons in their current configuration, editors who advocated the complete removal of the cartoons from Wikipedia, and editors in favor of compromise solutions that would minimize the negative impact of the cartoons while still keeping them available to readers who wished to view them.*

Over the next three weeks as the debate raged thousands of comments by hundreds of editors were published on the talk page of Jyllands-Posten Muhammad Cartoon Controversy. *By the time the debate died down, the Wikipedia editors in favor of keeping the images at the top of the article had successfully defended and enforced their stance, claiming that a consensus decision had been reached. The issue was considered settled, and any proposal to revive the debate on the presence or position of the images on the page was rejected. Thereafter, any attempt to move or remove the image was quickly reverted as vandalism.*

Background and Overview. Wikipedia's phenomenal growth and popularity over the last decade demonstrates the stunning potential of distributed online collaboration for producing common goods. Wikipedia's pioneering implementation of Ward Cunningham's wiki-wiki (Hawaiian for "quick") collaborative authoring model has proven to be the tool par excellence for the collaborative creation of accurate, up-to-date encyclopedic knowledge. Two key factors in the English Wikipedia's success as both 1) *a readable product with a high degree of informational excellence* and 2) *a thriving online community* are the sophisticated social and technical mechanisms and the editorial community has created for its own support and self-governance and the website's strong ideological mission. However, little attention has been paid to how the policies and practices of this editorial community align with and express the ideological foundations of Wikipedia. Our research addresses this issue.

In this study we examine the relationship between Wikipedia's *stated organizational values* and its *values-in-practice* by comparing and contrasting the discursive strategies used by Wikipedia editors during a heated debate over the inclusion of a set of culturally controversial cartoons in a Wikipedia article—the *Jyllands-Posten Muhammad Cartoon Controversy*. We analyze the appeals made by the editors involved in this debate in order to undersand how community values are articulated and prioritized
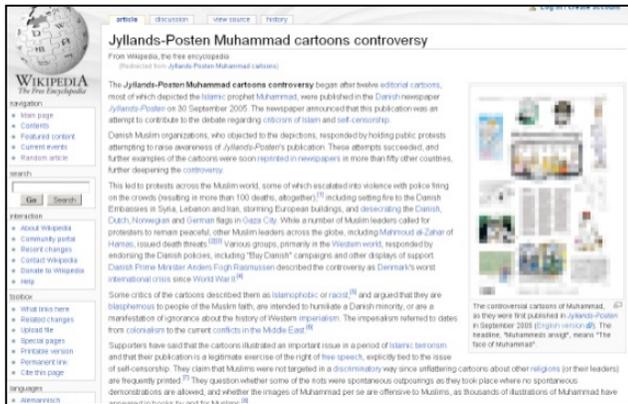
Figure 1: The Jyllands-Posten Muhammad Cartoon Controversy in March 2009.

in editorial discussions on controversial topics, where achieving consensus or compromise solutions can prove difficult.

The study uncovers the conflicting priorities as different members of the Wikipedia online community struggled to reconcile disparate interpretations of Wikipedia's mission and core values. The findings show that even in a community that professes a shared mission and values, the community's social and technical architecture can exacerbate ideological polarizations and result in decisions that ignore or reject potential common ground. The study contributes to the our knowledge of online communities by demonstrating the value of examining a particular kind of communicative act, rhetorical appeals, and by surfacing the latent impact of social and technical structures on decision-making. The study contributes to our practical knowledge of online community design and management by highlighting how normally "off stage" technical and social infrastructures can have unintended consequences as *stated policy and values* become *expressed and realized* as stakeholders work through this infrastructure to make concrete decisions.

We find that in the talk pages debate, most editors relied heavily on three main types of appeal—appeals to precedent, relevance, and impact. However, editors on different sides of the debate used these appeals in different ways and prioritized them differently. Previous research on coordination, discourse, and decision-making in physical and virtual communities suggests that these differences can reflect fundamental value differences between editors and illuminate the true core values of the Wikipedia community. Our findings suggest that on Wikipedia, making the correct type of appeal is crucial both to persuading other editors to agree to a decision and to enforcing that decision. These findings contribute to an understanding of why, in the case of culturally controversial articles, the Wikipedia community appears to consistently prioritize freedom of information over multicultural inclusivity, in spite of Wikipedia's stated ideological commitment to equal access and global empowerment. This study also shows how social and technical regulatory mechanisms intended to facilitate fruitful collaboration and support collaborative decision-making can also be used to enforce dominant values and marginalize minority points of view, and demonstrates a potential relationship between rhetorical appeals, community values and successful participation in online communities.

2. WIKIPEDIA AS AN IDEOLOGICAL ORGANIZATION

Context and history. Since its inception in 2001, Wikipedia has spun off 262 language editions containing 12 million articles. The English language Wikipedia is the top news and information destination on the web[1] and boasts a level of accuracy, coverage [8] and tone [5] comparable to that of traditional encyclopedias. Researchers have found that obvious misinformation is generally quickly corrected [22] and article content generally reflects neutrality and a balanced perspective—despite the fact that, with a few exceptions, any reader is free to edit any article at any time.

In addition to its wild success, the "Wikipedia Experiment"[2] is a compelling subject for research in two additional respects: the sophisticated social self-regulatory mechanisms that have been developed by the Wikipedia community (a dedicated and motivated base of volunteer contributors who are constantly at work refining, maintaining and expanding the encyclopedia), and the centrality of Wikipedia's ideological foundation to that community's identity.

The Wikimedia Foundation, Wikipedia's non-profit parent company, places a strong public emphasis on these ideological roots in its mission statement:

> *"[our mission is] to empower and engage people around the world to collect and develop educational content…and to disseminate it effectively and globally."[3]*

Wikipedia's founder, Jimmy "Jimbo" Wales, has stated Wikipedia's mission in even more explicitly humanitarian terms:

> *"Wikipedia as a readable product is not for us. It's for them. It's for that girl in Africa who can save the lives of hundreds of thousands of people around her, but only if she's empowered with the knowledge to do so."[4]*

Surveys of Wikipedia editors show that they too place great importance on the role of ideological considerations on their decision to contribute. In a 2007 survey [16] Wikipedians rated Values ("I feel it is important to help others") and Ideology ("I think information should be free") as among their primary motivators for editing the encyclopedia, above the social and educational benefits of participation.[5] A 2006 survey [14] of the motivations of student contributors to Wikipedia at an American university found similar results, with nearly 50% of respondents listing "educate humanity/raise awareness" as their primary motivation, followed by to "feel like I'm making a difference."

The software platform on which Wikipedia is built also reflects and supports its ideological roots. Mediawiki, the open source wiki software platform developed by the Wikimedia Foundation and used on all the foundation's projects, is designed to ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to participate as both consumers and productive contributors by imposing few technical barriers to participation. Wikipedia embraces this egalitarian wiki

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[1] http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1595184,00.html

[2] "Whither Wikipedia" by L. Sanger, http://blog.citizendium.org/?p=559
[2] "Whither Wikipedia" by L. Sanger, http://blog.citizendium.org/?p=559

[3] http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Mission_statement (collected in January 2010). *All **bold** emphasis in this paper is added by the author.*

[4] J. Wales to Wikipedia-l mailing list (23 October 2005)

[5] The number 1 motivator was *fun.*

philosophy: most pages on the site are freely editable by default, unless they have been locked for specific purposes (and, usually, for a limited duration) by one of Wikipedia's adminstrators, volunteer community members who have been entrusted with special technical abilities. Wikipedia relies largely on social regulatory mechanisms in order to maintain article quality and community stability: many eyes to spot errors, many voices to ensure completeness, fairness and balance. Users who wish to contribute are supported by a sophisticated community infrastructure that exist *behind* the article pages. Wikipedians facilitate communication and collaboration on such a massive scale through mechanisms such as article talk pages (open forums for discussing issues related to article content) as well as user-run support forums, mediation and arbitration committees, coordination spaces for special interest and project groups, and a bevy of collaboratively-created policy pages that document rules and best practices for article content and user conduct.

Because this community of volunteer editors is the driving force behind Wikipedia, the degree to which the community's policies and practices reflect Wikipedia's ideals—such as freedom of information, equal access and global empowerment—merits close examination. More than other websites or online communities, Wikipedia's values—what content is added and excluded, how that information is presented, how disputes are resolved, and how collaboration and access are fostered—generally are handled on a case-by-case basis by individuals or small groups working together. Our research concerns how groups of editors employ the day-to-day communicative practices and regulatory mechanisms designed to facilitate opportunities for contribution and consumption of Wikipedia's information resources by people around the world. We examine how closely the values developed and practiced by the close-knit group of regular editors who write and maintain the encyclopedia align with the ideals of the founder and the Foundation, and with their own self-professed motivations for contributing.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Values and organizational identity. Scholars of organizational communication have long examined the relationship between the way members of particular organizations or communities of practice reflexively exhibit and shape organizational norms and values through discourse. One way the members of an organization can become more alike and aligned along shared values is through identification with the organization. Previous research [11] has shown that a high degree of organizational identification can have positive impacts on Wikipedia collaboration, such as shifting editors' work towards project goals and an increase in "good citizenship behaviors" such as vandal fighting. Self-identity is a powerful motivator which influences "how and what one values, thinks, feels and does in all social domains, including organizations" [1]. Tompkins and Cheney [21], studying how organizational control is enacted in decision-making scenarios, found that the decision-making process of members who identify strongly with an organization is rationally bounded to a range of choices that affirm their own organizational identification. Alvesson and Wilmott [2], interpreting a series of previous studies on organizational control, note that organizations with a strong sense of identity form closely-knit communities that prioritizes certain types of discourse—from vocabulary to speech style, to acceptable topics of conversation and methods of argumentation. Successful participation in such organizations requires the effective use of discursive strategies that reflect the values and norms of this discourse community and that identify the speaker as a member and legitimize their opinions.

Appeals and Hierarchies. Discourse communities express the priority, legitimacy of particular goals, choices or courses of actions by making reference to shared values. From a rhetorical perspective, an individual's ability to successfully align themselves with these broadly acknowledged organizational values—by using shared vocabulary or by appealing to shared ideals—is a key factor in their ability to convince others to adopt their beliefs or follow their recommendation. These *rhetorical appeals* are provide a valuable linguistic cue to organizational values because they often take regularized and recognizable forms, allowing them to be more easily identified, counted and linked to particular socio-cultural and organizational values than other types of communicative acts.

Studying the relative frequency of appeals within a discourse community and the contexts in which those appeals are employed can yield additional insights. Rhetorical theorists Chaim Perelman and Lucie Obrechts-Tytecha [18] use the terms *values hierarchies* to describe the phenomenon of audience members who hold a common set of values but who may prioritize those values differently in certain contexts. Successful persuasion requires the speaker to select arguments that not only appeal to values within audience's value set, but to select those arguments that best address the values the audience members view as most salient to the current circumstances. Values hierarchies have been used by American legal scholars [15] as an explanatory framework for the influence of social values on judicial decision-making, such as in cases where different jurists or judges have come to dramatically different legal decisions.

We find that values hierarchies provide a useful way to represent value conflicts between individuals and sub-groups within a larger organization who are unable to reach consensus or compromise decisions despite shared values and overall agreement on the issues under discussion.

4. METHOD

In our analysis we use this values hierarchy framework to map the differences between editors on different sides of the *Jyllands-Posten* debate. We analyze the content of a large sample of talk page posts. We utilize a computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) approach [10] in order to capture communicative features of individual posts in the debate at two different levels: the *stance* expressed by the post author (at the post level) and the *types of appeals* the author uses to argue their case (at the sentence or utterance level), with multiple appeals possible in any given post. Our analysis of a single case study allows us to glean a rich and nuanced understanding of the values-in-practice in a large scale debate concerning a controversial content question: *should the Jyllands-Posten cartoons be included in this article?* This question, in turn, reflects the broader question of Wikipeda's organizational values and priorities: *should Wikipedia censor certain culturally controversial content in order to meet the information needs of some of its users?*

Similar case study approaches have been used productively by other researchers studying conflict, coordination, discourse, and decision-making on Wikipedia. Slattery [19] and Swarts [20] analyzed edit histories of the Wikipedia article *Clean Coal Technology* from the perspective of Activity Theory and Actor-

Network Theory in order to understand how sociotechnical considerations mediated collaborative fact-building and meaning-making among editors; Hansen [9] used a case study of three controversial articles—*ethanol fuel, Armenian Genocide* and *Intellectual Property*—to examine the potential for Habermasian "emancipatory discourse" on Wikipedia; Pentzold and Seidenglanz [17] employed a critical discourse analysis approach to analyze how power was enacted in editorial discussions on the talk pages attached to a controversial article, *Conspiracy Theory,* from an Foucauldian perspective; other researchers [7][13] have likewise singled out single cases as subjects for both qualitative and quantitative analyses of Wikipedia.

Sampling Method. We extracted our sample from a January 2008 data dump[6] of the English language Wikipedia. The posts we selected for analysis consisted of all discussion posts made to the talk page of the article *Jyllands-Posten Muhammad Cartoon Controversy* from the article's creation on January 28th, 2006 until February, 25th 2006—the time period in which the talk page exhibited the highest level of posting activity and the debate over the presence and placement of the cartoons was at its most intense, a total of 6094 posts. This dataset contained the text of all talk page posts, as well as relevant metadata such as the time of the post and the post author's status (registered user, unregistered user, administrator). From this population we extracted and coded a random sample of 314 discussion threads containing 2785 individual posts (46.23% of total). Our sample contained posts by 187 unregistered editors, 334 registered editors and 62 administrators.

Coding Method. We developed a codebook of 10 discrete appeal types (**Table 1**) based on a preliminary examination the *Jyllands-Posten* debate and other article talk pages. We also drew from the coding schemes developed by previous researchers for annotating Wikipedia talk pages [23][3] and from classifications of rhetorical appeals described by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca in *The New Rhetoric* [18] —particularly their appeals to *model* (the basis of our *Precedent* appeal), *cause/effect* (our *Impact* appeal) and *abstract values*. Annotators coded each post in the sample for the author's stance on the cartoon debate (whether they advocated retention, removal, or compromise) and the types of appeals made in the post. Two annotators independently coded the entire sample, while a third coder reviewed their codes and noted discrepancies. The coding process was iterative, with annotators meeting at regular intervals throughout the coding process to discuss discrepancies, refine category definitions and resolve disagreements. The final coded sample of 584 posts and 902 appeals represents all posts and appeals that were identified and mutually agreed upon.

5. FINDINGS

We identified 902 distinct appeals in our sample. Overall, the most common types of appeals made (which together comprise 56% of total appeals) were to the potential *impact* of the cartoons, citations of *precedents* for retaining or removing them, and their *relevance* in the context of the article. (**Figure 2**)

The analysis also shows stark divides in the stance that authors took in the debate. (**Figure 3**) Of the 584 posts which contained appeals, 55% expressed support for the proposal to retain the Muhammad cartoons, uncensored, in a prominent position at the
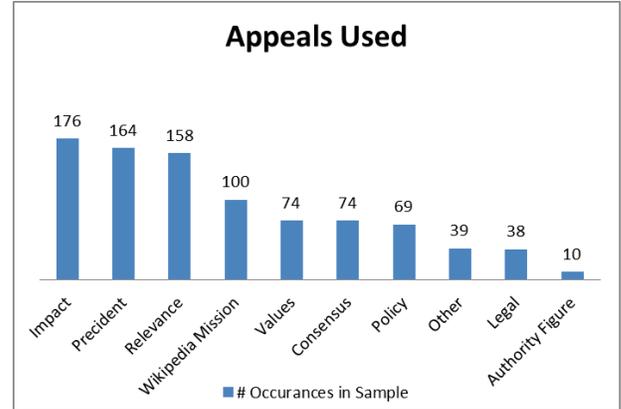
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[6] http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Data_dumps

Figure 2: Frequency of appeals used in the debate

top of the article; 13% advocated for the complete removal of the cartoons; 24% expressed support for a compromise solution. Among the most common compromise solutions mentioned were moving the cartoons further down the page 'below the fold' to minimize their visual impact on readers, removing them but making them available on a separate Wikipedia page hyperlinked to the *Jyllands-Posten* article, and creating two versions of the article—one with the cartoons and one without.

A Chi Square Tests for Independence demonstrated a relationship between the stance (*For, Against* or *Compromise*) on the inclusion of the Muhammad cartoons expressed in a given post and the types of appeals that post contained (N=842, p=.000)[7]. This finding indicates that authors on different sides of the debate tended to use different kinds of appeals to argue their positions.

6. DISCUSSION

Values Hierarchies. Considerations of the cartoons' impact and

Table 1: Appeals coded in the *Jyllands-Posten* Debate

| Appeal Type	Definition	% of total appeals
Impact	cartoons should be retained or removed based on their potential impact.	20%
Precedent	cartoons should be retained or removed based on previous decisions or the consequences of previous, analogous situations.	18%
Relevance	cartoons should be retained or removed based on their relevance to the article	18%
Wikipedia's Identity	cartoons should be retained or removed based on the stated or implied identity, mission or purpose of Wikipedia.	11%
Abstract Values	cartoons should be retained or removed based on some set of basic social values.	8%
Consensus	cartoons should be retained or removed based on editorial consensus.	8%
Policy	cartoons should be retained or removed based on the explicit policies of Wikipedia.	8%
Other	cartoons should be retained or removed based on a type of rhetorical appeal not classifiable according to this scheme.	4%
Legal	cartoons should be retained or removed based on specific legal considerations.	4%
Authority Figure	cartoons should be retained or removed based on the opinion or ruling of an authority figure.	1%
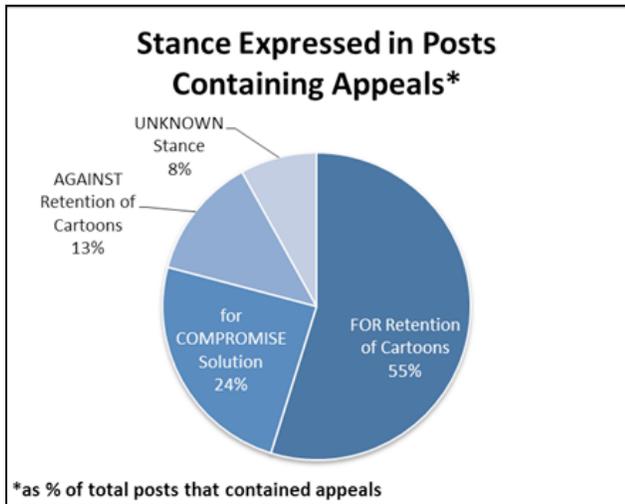
Figure 3: Distribution of stances in the debate

relevance, and precedents for their inclusion or removal were articulated by editors on all sides, suggesting that editors viewed these arguments as more salient or persuasive than other possible types of appeal. The ubiquity of the three most popular appeal types across all author stances suggests that, despite stark differences of opinion, the editors involved in the *Jyllands-Posten* debate in general recognized a common set of values for Wikipedia article content.

This finding suggests that the values that underlie these appeals were likewise considered to be the most legitimate and salient within the group of participants, and that *impact, relevance,* and *precedence* represent both fundamental values-in-practice of the Wikipedia community and primary considerations in editorial decision-making. Differences in the frequency with which these appeals were used in posts that articulated a *For, Against* or *Com* stance indicate that although all sides acknowledged a set of common values, the relative priority of those values in this context was under dispute. In other words, these results suggest three different values hierarchies in action in the *Jyllands-Posten* debate. (**Table 2**)

We posit that the *For* editors were more successful at persuading other editors over to their side because the values prioritized by the appeals they favored closely reflects the values hierarchy of the larger Wikipedia community. That the *For* editors ranked

Table 2: Values hierarchies

Position	For Inclusion (FOR)	Against Inclusion (AG)	For Compromise (COM)
1	Relevance	Impact	Impact
2	Precedent	Precedent	Precedent
3	Wikipedia's Identity	Abstract Values	Relevance
4	Impact	Relevance	Wikipedia's Identity

considerations of *relevance, precedent* and *Wikipedia's identity* over the potential *impact* of publishing the cartoons may indicate a rift between the values-in-practice of Wikipedia and its stated organizational values, according to which considerations of impact (in the form of empowering users through knowledge access and opportunities for contribution) should be a primary concern.

These different values hierarchies reveal the extent to which deliberating groups can become polarized over controversial issues even when members recognize a common set of core values. In this debate, the values hierarchies framework shows how different prioritizations and interpretations of Wikipedia's fundamental values were pitted against one another, allowing the *For* editors to leverage their greater numbers and turn the debate into a zero-sum game, blocking all efforts at a compromise solution.

We also find that although appeals to *relevance, precedent, impact, Wikipedia's identity* and *abstract values* were employed by members of all groups, the proper interpretation of these arguments was hotly contested among the three factions. A close examination of the way editors framed their arguments allows a more nuanced view of how the same types of appeals can be evoked by different editors to very different ends. In the following sections we present a selection of appeals that demonstrate different interpretations of how Wikipedia's organizational values ought to be applied to the question of the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons.

Appeals to *Impact*. All editors in the debate relied heavily on appeals to the *impact* that the inclusion of the cartoons would have on Wikipedia and beyond. Among *Compromise* and *Against* editors, *impact*-based appeals ranged from expressions of general concern for insulting Muslim readers to predictions of specific, negative consequences of publishing the cartoons. Impact appeals also varied in the location where the impact would be felt. Some editors warned that retaining the cartoons would have a negative effect on Wikipedia itself, while others asserted that by re-publishing a set of cartoons that had already provoked such a violent global response, Wikipedia was as one editor put it simply pouring "fuel on the fire" of the international controversy.

Many editors argued that moving or removing the cartoons would have a specific, beneficial impact on the *Jyllands-Posten* article by reducing the number of malicious edits and increasing overall article stability:

> *"...At the moment any Muslim who casually clicks on the front page will get here, become offended & engage in the edit war. **I believe that if the picture was further** down **(just like you said) then much less Vandals would be attracted to this site…"**

Other impact-based appeals focused on the wider consequences of publishing the cartoons:

> *"Whilst this image is not offensive to most readers, and we should avoid self-censorship, we should be aware of how just how offensive this image is to observant Muslims, and **take care to avoid causing any unnecessary offence to roughly a sixth of the world's population."***

Among the *For* editors, appeals to impact often took the form of a *slippery slope* argument. These editors asserted that censoring the cartoons would set a dangerous example for censorship debates in future Wikipedia articles. These editors also claimed that deleting

the cartoons would cause long-term harm by "omitting them from the historical record," and that "If Wikipedia purports to be an encyclopedia, then the image needs to be retained for use by future researchers."

These editors also sought to diminish the impact-based arguments made by the *Com* and *Against* editors. In response to the *Against* editors, one *For* editor argued that readers who do not want to see the Muhammad cartoons "should never have visited this article in the first place." Another editor argued against a suggestion to move the cartoons further down the page by saying that such compromise solutions were ultimately "not going to satisfy the people… who don't want to image to exist at all."

Appeals to *Precedent*. Like *impact*-based appeals, appeals to *precedent* took several forms. Such as precedents on other Wikipedia articles and precedents set by other publications. Editors in favor of keeping the cartoons in their current configuration pointed to other Wikipedia articles that contained controversial images (such as the articles *Autofellatio* and *Piss Christ*) and to international newspapers, including several in Arab countries, that had re-published the original *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons in uncensored form. *For* editors also pointed out that the Islam had not always had a prohibition on depicting Muhammad—pointing to early Muslim paintings that depicted the Prophet, several of which were published on the Wikipedia article *Muhammad*—and that even in modern times this prohibition was not universal among Muslim sects.

Participants advocating a compromise solution countered that the image at the head of the Wikipedia *Muhammad* article featured an image depicting a calligraphic inscription of Muhammad's name, rather than a picture of Muhammad himself, as a justification for moving the controversial cartoons further down the page. These editors also pointed to major news organizations, such as CNN, which had elected not to re-print the images out of respect for Muslims.

Appeals to *Relevance*. The relevance of the cartoons was one of the most hotly-contested arguments made in the debate. Editors that took an *Against* or *Compromise* stance tended to argue that the cartoons were less relevant to the article, since the subject of the article was not the cartoons themselves, but rather the controversy generated by their original publication.

> **"This article is not explanation of the cartoons***, it is about the controversy caused by them."*

> *"It should not be a requisite to be forced to see this picture **just because one wishes to learn about a relevant current event in the world.***"

For editors, on the other hand, framed the cartoons as essential to the informative purpose of the article:

> **"the image is the subject matter of the article. Of course it should be placed at the top.** *If people want to be informed about the controversy, Muslim or non-Muslim, they have no choice but to both read about and look at the cartoons, otherwise they will not be "informed", they will just be ranting about cartoons they have not even seen."*

Appeals to Wikipedia's Identity. Appeals to *Wikipedia's identity* or mission were a more common strategy of editors who took a *For* stance, but was also a frequent rhetorical strategy for editors lobbying against inclusion or proposing a compromise. Editors who used this appeal emphasized how publication of the images either affirmed or contradicted some essential aspect of

Wikipedia's unique identity or purpose. The aspects of Wikipedia's identity that *For* editors emphasized were objectivity and neutrality, contrasted with ideas of censorship and bias.

> *"Wikipedia **is about informing***, not about catering to the tastes of one group or another, or making political concessions."*

In some cases, *For* editors did address the issue of how the cartoon's presence might effect the article's accessibility to readers who found them offensive, but even in these cases those editors still prioritized Wikipedia's identity as an objective information source. We found appeals to *Wikipedia's identity* used as arguments against both the cartoons' removal and against proposed compromise solutions aimed at minimizing the impact of the cartoons.

> *If someone's sensitivities are hurt by viewing any specific drawing, then I should respect that, but it is their own responsibility to avoid that happening. It certainly should not affect the rest of the world's access to information.* **Censorship is censorship, whether it consists in making information inaccessible or just less accessible. Wikipedia is about the opposite of both.**

Interestingly, editors arguing from a position of compromise or against the publication of the cartoons used some of these same arguments. They often affirmed Wikipedia's mission as a neutral source of information, but argued that in this case, because were so inflammatory, their publication actually *constituted* a source of bias into the encyclopedia:

> *"Writing about this controversy is one thing, publishing the idiot cartoons that caused it is quite another… Wikipedia is (at least in principle) an ENCYCLOPEDIA, I publish NPOV facts… **This is nothing neutral about an act like this**."*

Other editors lobbying against the cartoons or advocating compromise also acknowledged that freedom of speech was an important consideration, but claimed that it should take a lower priority than considerations of equal access. One editor framed it this way:

> "*I think seeing the encyclopedy like you do is not the best angle of view… **you surly know the main idea of wikipedia wich is the free circulation or the equality in chances of access to informations.**"*

Appeals to Abstract Values. Appeals to abstract values, such as general appeals to fairness, cultural sensitivity or freedom of speech were more frequently used by members of the *Against* group than either the *For* or *Compromise* groups. One *Against* editor framed an *abstract values* argument as an issue of respect for religion:

> *"**we should respect religions, and showing such a picture is not the best way to calm things,** and two cannot disargue that showing this picture is provoking others feelings."*

The *Against* editors preference for *abstract values*-based appeals over appeals to *Wikipedia's identity* (**Table 2**) may be illuminated by an observation made by Perelman and Obrechts-Tytecha [18], who note that such appeals are more likely to be made by those who are arguing for change than by those arguing to maintain the status quo: "Abstract values can readily be used for criticism, because they are no respecters of persons and seem to provide criteria for one wishing to change the established order." Viewed through this lens, the *Against* editors' use of this appeal type was

a strategy of last resort after appeals to more widely-recognized community values had failed.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Our content analysis enabled us to identify the types of rhetorical appeals made most frequently in the debate, and to demonstrate that different individuals from the same community tend to favor different types of appeals, a behavior which seems to refect the interpretations and relative priority they assign to community values. We found that although the most popular appeals were common to editors on all sides of the debate (indicating a shared set of values), editors who lobbied for the retention of the cartoons tended to favor different strategies than those who advocated greater or lesser degrees of self-censorship in the form of either minimizing the cartoons' impact on readers (by moving them down the page, or making the images smaller) or removing them entirely from the article. These results suggest that differences in the appeals editors used stemmed not only from differences among general socio-cultural values but also from fundamental differences in their beliefs about how Wikipedia's mission and its values-in-practice should be applied in the context of the *Jyllands-Posten Muhammad Cartoon Controversy.*

We propose that the *For* editors gained the editorial support necessary to successfully enforce their decision to retain the cartoons despite a lack of consensus because the values hierarchy they articulated reflected the values-in-practice of the broader editorial community of Wikipedia. The *For* editors' emphasis on the importance of *precedents* for the inclusion of the Muhammad cartoons, the cartoons' *relevance* to the article and their successful framing of *Wikipedia's mission* in terms of its anti-censorship stance may help illuminate other instances where English language Wikipedia has prioritized freedom of information over multicultural inclusivity, in spite of its official rhetorical emphasis on equal access and global empowerment.

Implications for Wikipedia. This case study contributes to an understanding of how social regulatory mechanisms within the Wikipedia community allow editors to enact and enforce decisions that do not reflect consensus or compromise, despite Wikipedia's open editing model and its ideological commitment to inclusivity and consensus-based decision making. In this case, the decision to include or exclude the Muhammad cartoons became a zero-sum game, in which invocations of Wikipedia's core values only served to increase polarization and defeat attempts at compromise. Ideological conflict between free expression and cultural sensitivity is common to many human societies and communities, both on- and offline. However, because of its global reach, radical openness, and explicitly ideological foundation, Wikipedia may be especially vulnerable to such conflicts and their consequences. Without additional mechanisms for resolving cultural controversies, Wikipedia risks losing access to the valuable knowledge assets of a potentially large number of contributors and may also have trouble succeeding in its mission of being a true "encyclopedia for everyone." Recognition within the community of the ways in which Wikipedia sometimes falls short of its own lofty rhetoric by over-emphasizing certain values at the expense of others could make the community better able to fulfill its mission and meet the information needs of its global audience.

Implications for the Design of Online Communities. These findings have additional significance for online interaction beyond Wikipedia. Distributed, wiki-based online collaboration has become a popular model for both brick-and-mortar organizations hoping to leverage the knowledge resources of their individual members and for a growing number of decentralized, massively-multiuser online communities built around shared goals and interests. This exploratory and qualitative study suggests that the assumption that *technical* equality of access leads to *equal potential for contribution* is doubtful. This study of the *Jyllands-Posten* debate reveals that the social and technical regulatory mechanisms of open online communities like Wikipedia can sometimes be used to enforce *inequality* and marginalize minority opinions instead of serving their intended purposes of facilitating egalitarian self-governance and fruitful collaboration. Both designers of online communities and community members themselves may seek to create additional governance mechanisms to check these tendencies and facilitate contribution by minority stakeholders.

7. REFERENCES

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