

# ‘Welcome’ Changes? Descriptive & Injunctive Norms in a Wikipedia Sub-community



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Anna Filippova, GitHub Inc.

Wikimedia Research Showcase  
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Hello everyone. I'm Jonathan Morgan, a researcher with the Wikimedia Foundation. Today I'm going to present some work that I performed with Anna Filippova, a research scientist at GitHub, on the role of social norms in a Wikipedia sub-community called the Teahouse.

# Open collaborations are **powerful**



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I want to start this presentation with what I hope is an uncontroversial statement. Open collaborations like Wikipedia are powerful: they are self-organizing systems powered by dynamic communities of diligent volunteers. They create things that benefit the entire world. In fact, in many cases the products they create, like a huge multilingual encyclopedias, are so good that we take them for granted. We may not be able to imagine a world without them, but we also often don't think hard about how they came to be.

## Low barriers to entry and exit

**Low commitment** → *easy to contribute*

**Volunteer-based** → *intrinsic motivations*

**Fluid boundaries** → *flexible coordination*

Forte, A., & Lampe, C. (2013). Defining, Understanding, and Supporting Open Collaboration: Lessons From the Literature. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(5), 535–547. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764212469362>

People who study open collaborations have identified several principles that underlie their success. Chief among these is that open collaborations feature low barriers to entry and exit. That means they have low commitment requirements--which make it easy for anyone to contribute; they utilize volunteer work, which means that contributors are intrinsically motivated; and they feature fluid boundaries around teams, practices, and roles, which means people can organize themselves and coordinate their work in whatever way works best for them.

# Open collaborations are **vulnerable**



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Castle\\_Bravo\\_Blast.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Castle_Bravo_Blast.jpg)

However, these same features that make open collaborations powerful, their low barriers to entry and exit, can also make them vulnerable. Let me explain.

## Low barriers to entry and exit

**Low commitment** → *high member churn*

**Volunteer-based** → *low rule enforcement*

**Fluid boundaries** → *low group cohesion*

Forte, A., & Lampe, C. (2013). Defining, Understanding, and Supporting Open Collaboration: Lessons From the Literature. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(5), 535–547. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764212469362>

Low commitment also often leads to high membership churn, with experienced people leaving and new people cycling in all the time. This, coupled with a reliance on volunteer contribution, also makes it harder to enforce rules, because people don't have to obey. And fluid boundaries can lead to low group cohesion, which erodes the sense of community that comes when you have more explicitly defined group boundaries, roles, and goals.

# Challenges

## **high member churn**

How to *teach* newcomers how to behave?

## **low rule enforcement**

How to *regulate* bad behavior?

## **low group cohesion**

How to *maintain* community and common purpose?

So maintaining a vibrant and successful open collaboration can be challenging. How do you teach all those new members how to behave? How do you regulate behavior when you need to be careful to avoid discouraging or alienating valuable contributors? And how do you maintain a sense of community and a common purpose?

# Social norms

*teach*

*regulate*

*maintain*



[https://sco.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tennis\\_shake\\_hands\\_after\\_match.jpg](https://sco.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tennis_shake_hands_after_match.jpg)

One way humans deal with these kinds of challenges in other social settings is through social norms. Norms are shared expectations about how to behave in particular situations. However, as powerful and ubiquitous as norms are, creating and maintaining strong social norms presents its own challenges.

# Compliance



Photo by [Micaela Parente](#) on [Unsplash](#)

One challenge is that people don't always comply with social norms, even when the norm is clear, and the reason for it is self-evident.



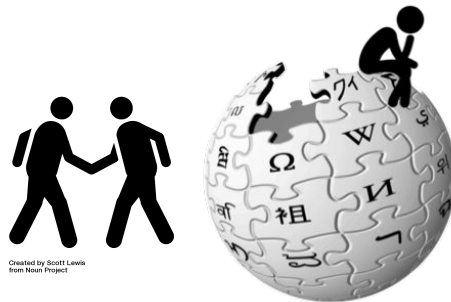
# Conflict



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Goats\\_butting\\_heads\\_in\\_Germany.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Goats_butting_heads_in_Germany.jpg)

Norms also don't exist in a vacuum. They can conflict with and contradict one another, making it hard to determine which norms, or whose norms, should take priority. Such normative conflict can tear communities apart.

# Building and maintaining strong norms



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Castle\\_Bravo\\_Blast.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Castle_Bravo_Blast.jpg)

So how do we understand how social norms affect behavior in open collaborations? And can we use that information to make the norms that govern communities like Wikipedia more effective tool for socializing newcomers, regulating behavior, and maintaining strong bonds and shared goals? One prominent criticism of ‘social norms’ from the social psychology literature is that it’s a poorly defined concept. It’s not always clear how to identify the norms at play in a given social context, or how those norms influence behavior.

# The Focus Theory of Normative Conduct

**Descriptive norms:** what people *do*

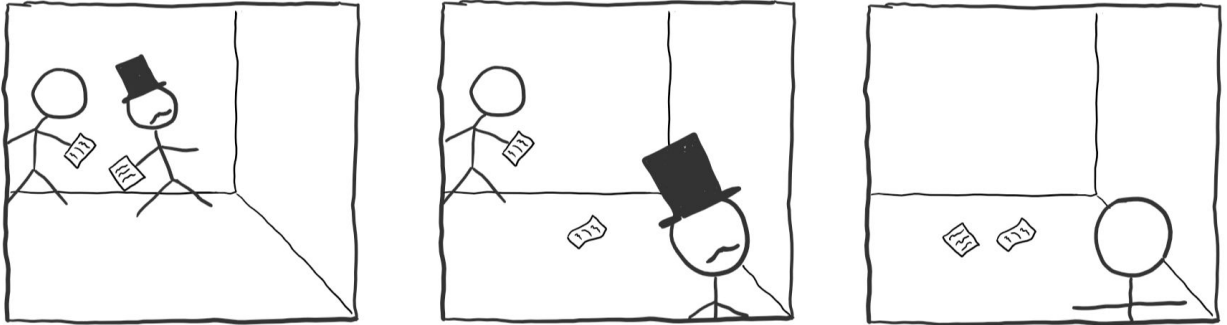
**Injunctive norms:** what people *(dis)approve of*

**Normative focus:** a social norm can only influence a person's behavior when situational or personal factors make it *salient* ("activation")

Cialdini, R. B., Kallgren, C. A., & Reno, R. R. (1991). A Focus Theory of Normative Conduct. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 24(C), 201–233. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60330-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60330-5)

The Focus Theory of Normative Conduct by Robert Cialdini and colleagues attempts to address this criticism empirically. The Focus Theory defines two types of norms--descriptive and injunctive. Descriptive norms are beliefs about how people DO act in a particular situation; injunctive norms are beliefs about what kind of behavior other people will approve or disapprove of, in other words, how you SHOULD act. The Focus Theory also posits that a particular social norm can only be influential if it is activated: that is, if a person's attention is focused on the norm through situational or personal factors that make the norm salient.

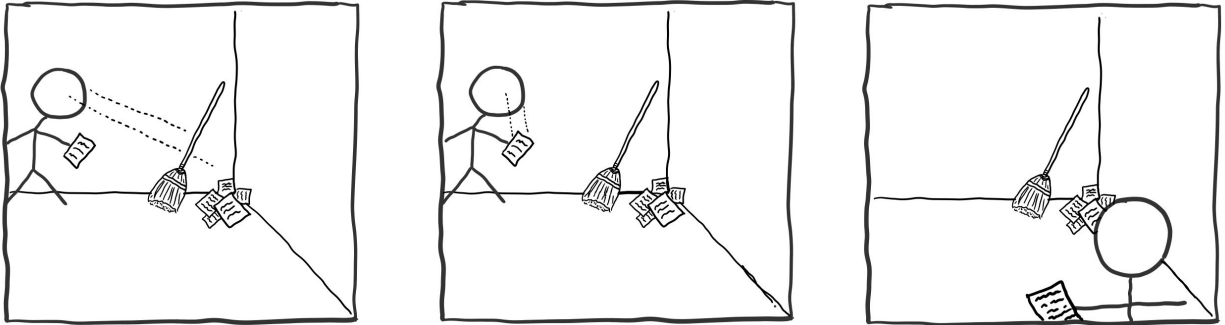
# Focus Theory: Experiments



**Salient descriptive norm:** *"it's okay to litter here"*

Cialdini designed a series of clever experiments to validate the Focus Theory, using littering in public places. They put an annoying handbill on the windshield of subjects' cars in a parking lot, and then tested a variety of conditions to see if by making pro-and anti-littering norms salient--that is, observable and interpretable as norms--they could change how much people littered. In one experiment, after the subject found the handbill they had a study confederate walk by and drop a similar piece of trash on the ground--making a pro-littering norm salient. Under these conditions, subjects were likely to follow the example of the confederate and litter their own handbill.

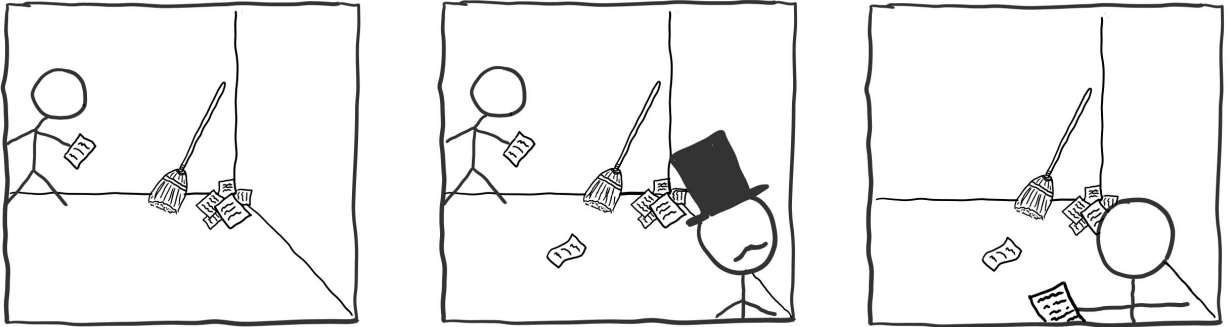
# Focus Theory: Experiments



**Salient injunctive norm:** *"it's NOT okay to litter here"*

In another experiment, they placed a swept pile of litter near the subject's car, in order to communicate the injunctive norm that although people did sometimes litter here it was not okay to do so. Under these conditions, they found that subjects were less likely to drop the handbill on the ground.

# Focus Theory: Experiments



**Normative conflict:** *"it's STILL not okay to litter here"*

They also experimented with providing conflicting normative cues. For example, they found that if subject sees swept litter and ALSO sees a confederate walk by and litter in front of them, they are still unlikely to litter. Experiments like this one provided compelling evidence that injunctive norms are often more powerful than descriptive norms. In other words, people are more likely to behave in a pro-normative fashion if they know they should, even if they see others violating the norm.

# Normative cues in online communities



Showing recent and/or popular posts first makes local *descriptive norms* more salient

<https://github.com/mitmedialab/CivilServant-Analysis>

Like physical environments, online environments also frequently provide cues to normative behavior. For example, showing the most recent, or most popular, posts at the top of the page is a common pattern in online forums. This design makes descriptive norms salient by allowing new arrivals to see what kind of things other people are posting and viewing right now.

# Normative cues in online communities

[–] **CivilServantBot** Science Butler [M] [score hidden] 6 days ago - stickied comment

Welcome to [r/science](#)! Comments will be removed if they are jokes, memes, abusive, off-topic, or medical advice ([rules](#)). Our ~1200 moderators encourage respectful discussion.

Posting community rules and expectations makes *injunctive norms* more salient

<https://github.com/mitmedialab/CivilServant-Analysis>

Another common pattern on forums is to post community rules, FAQs, or policies prominently. This makes injunctive norms more salient by letting newcomers know how they are expected to behave in this community, and how not to behave.



However, newcomers experience ...

### **Multiple environmental cues**

Which ones do I notice? Which should I attend to?

### **Widespread non-compliance**

How important are these norms, really?

### **Their own history**

I already know how to behave in situations like this!

However, even design cues like these will not assure that people always behave as expected. Online social and environmental cues around what is normative often conflict, which can make it difficult for a newcomer to decide with one to follow. It can also make them miss the cues you want them to notice. Furthermore, if they see widespread evidence that other people are NOT complying with your community rules, they may decide that it's not important for them to comply either. And of course, each person also draws on their own past experience when deciding how to behave in a new setting. If a newcomer believes they already know how to behave here, they are less likely to notice local rules or infer norms from other people's behavior.

## Research goals

1. Which norms (injunctive, descriptive) are more influential under varying compliance conditions?
2. Are aligned descriptive and injunctive norms mutually reinforcing?

In this study, we are interested in which type of norms--injunctive or descriptive--are more influential in online communities, and under which circumstances, and whether descriptive and injunctive norms are more influential when they are aligned rather than in conflict.



Welcome to the

# teahouse

A friendly place to help new editors become accustomed to Wikipedia culture, ask questions, and develop community relationships.

**Hosts are here to help** >>



Ebe123, Teahouse host

*Do you have a **question** about editing?*

**Guests, create a profile** >>

**Get answers** >>

Recent questions...

I logged on to wikipedia today to find my user page and user talk page deleted. I looked at the requests for deletion page and other deletion related pages, but I couldn't find anything about who deleted my page. As far as I can see, there was nothing wrong with either of my pages. Can you find out who deleted my pages, and see if you could restore them as they were? Thanks!-[Badger2424](#)  
([talk](#))[Badger2424](#) ([talk](#)) 8:45 am, Yesterday (UTC-7)



Wika

intellectual property is an issue of extreme importance, its protection

The community we studied in this case is the Wikipedia Teahouse. The Teahouse is a forum where new Wikipedia editors can go to get answers to common questions from experienced editors. In that sense, the Teahouse is itself a place where new editors learn about Wikipedia's norms. However, in this study, we are focusing instead on the behavior of the people who answer the questions--the experienced editors--and specifically on how the way they answer questions reflect and reinforces the local norms of the Teahouse.

Dear new editors, no question is too basic for our Q&A board. If you need help, just click the link below! And if you have some helpful advice for someone else, go ahead: **be bold!** Click the "edit" button to the right of his or her question and start the conversation.

Ask a question

## I thought that one's sandbox was a private space

[edit]

Up until this evening, I had thought that one's sandbox was a private space. Then this: [happened](#) – somebody that I had never even heard of before now. I feel invaded. – [Gareth Griffith-Jones \(talk\)](#) 19:57, 12 July 2012 (UTC)

Hello Gareth Griffith-Jones. According to [WP:UP#OWN](#), "Traditionally Wikipedia offers wide latitude to users to manage their user space as they see fit. However, pages in user space belong to the wider community. They are not a personal homepage, and do not belong to the user. They are part of Wikipedia, and exist to make collaboration among editors easier. Other users and bots may edit pages in your user space or leave messages for you . . ." If you dislike the change, then feel free to revert it. Also, your "sandbox" page looks a lot like a talk page, so the other editor may have felt that the change was appropriate. In conclusion, there are no truly "private spaces" on Wikipedia, though most editors will leave most of your user pages alone, except for talk pages. Hope this helps. [Cullen](#)<sup>328</sup> [Let's discuss it](#) 20:48, 12 July 2012 (UTC)

## Deleted edits, what are they?

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In edit counter tool I found that I have three deleted edits. What are deleted edits exactly? It can't be undone edits because I've got more than three edits undone by other editors. [KRYSTALEEN](#) 18:54, 12 July 2012 (UTC)

Welcome, Krystaleen. It isn't undone or reverted edits, as a tool can't detect them. It is similar to [deleting](#) entire pages, except it's only one edit to the page. This can only be done by [oversighters](#) and means nobody can see the diff of what the edit was, except administrators. See [WP:SUPPRESS](#) for more information of deleted edits. [Rcsprinter](#) *(tell me stuff)* @ 18:57, 12 July 2012 (UTC)

It's not just that though. Rcsprinter is describing [revision deletion](#) and [oversight](#), but the "deleted edits" count also counts other things. Specifically, it counts edits when the entire pages are themselves deleted later. The important thing is that it doesn't mean that your edits were a problem. Like, if you see a bad article and tag it for deletion, and it gets deleted, that tag addition will count towards the deleted edits. So, for example, I do a lot of speedy deletion tagging; since I'm making a lot of edits to pages that get deleted, I have a lot of "deleted edits" (about 1,360 at my last count), even though my edits weren't problematic. (At least as far as I know!) So, don't worry about those three deleted edits; it doesn't necessarily mean you've been doing anything wrong. [Writ Keeper](#) 19:10, 12 July 2012 (UTC)

## YouTube citation: the wikipedia rules are?

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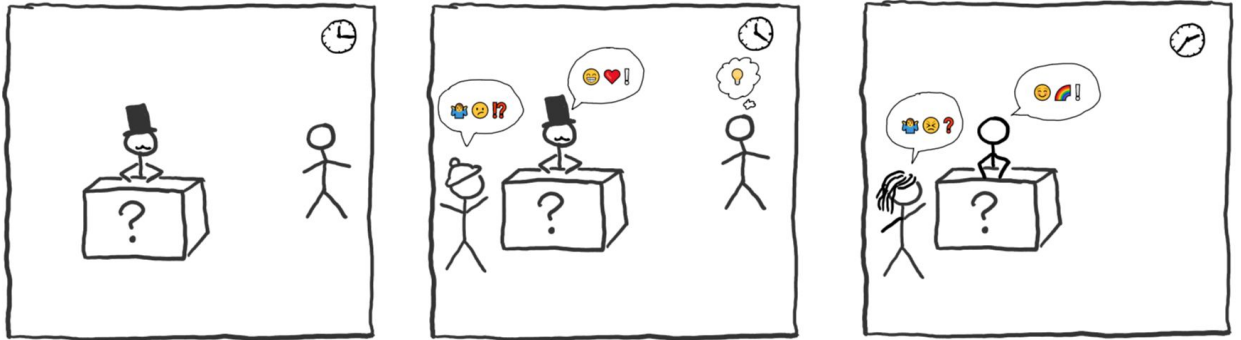
To see the archive pages of previous questions, click on show. [\[show\]](#)

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At the Teahouse, like many forums, the newest questions appear at the top of the page. This should make descriptive norms for answering questions salient to new answerers when they join, because it makes it easy for them to observe how other people answer questions.

## Descriptive norm salience



For example, if a newcomer notice that answers on the Teahouse generally have a friendly tone, they are more likely to use a friendly tone when they start answering questions themselves.

## How can i create a private list of favorite articles?



[Join this discussion](#) [\[edit\]](#)

how to create a private list of favorite articles? [STEV56](#) (talk) 16:27, 20 September 2016 (UTC)

Hello, [STEV56](#), welcome to the Teahouse. Within reason, you can do things like that on your user page at [User:STEV56](#). Please do read [Wikipedia:User pages](#) first, to understand what is and is not permitted on user pages. The very quick summary of staying safe within the policy is that it must basically be (reasonably) sensible content which directly relates to your activities on Wikipedia, and it must not promote you personally. It should not be used for things which look like article or draft article content (but you can use your personal sandbox for drafts). If the page content is mostly a list of links to articles within Wikipedia, there shouldn't be any major issues, as that isn't particularly unusual. You just should avoid using it as a form of social media page. If you have any more questions, please do ask them here. *N.B. it isn't "private", as everyone can see it, but it is personal.* [Murph 9000](#) (talk) 17:44, 20 September 2016 (UTC)

You can also watchlist favorite articles, as a way of keeping tabs on them and watching for vandalism and such.

[White Arabian Filly](#) [Neigh](#) 20:39, 20 September 2016 (UTC)

Here's an example of a typical answer on the Teahouse. Overall, it is friendly, personalized, thorough, and clear. But more than that, it reflects some specific answering norms that set the Teahouse apart from other discussion spaces on Wikipedia.

The Teahouse is a unique place, and as a Teahouse host, there are certain expectations that you should think about when welcoming and working with new editors.

1. **Welcome everyone** with a friendly hello when you answer questions or [greet new guests](#).
2. **Be polite and patient** with all editors who visit the Teahouse. Remember that although you may have seen that same question fifty times, the editor asking has asked it only once.
3. **Keep it simple.** Explain as much as possible, as simply as possible, to new editors when answering questions. (Don't use [wiki jargon](#)!)
4. **Avoid over-linking** when responding to questions. Wikipedia policies, procedures, and documentation are overwhelming to many editors. Do your best to explain processes and policies and answer the guest's particular question rather than pointing them to more documentation as a first resort.
5. **Leave a [talkback notification](#)** on the guest's userpage after answering a new question, to let the guest know you responded. (Find the script [here](#)!)

These norms are articulated in a document called the “Host Expectations” and consist of five different considerations for answering questions. These norms were developed and agreed upon by the community when the Teahouse was founded. They represent local guidelines for behavior--local norms--but they aren't enforceable, and there are no penalties for violating them.

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In this study, we will be focusing on two of these: #1 “Welcome everyone”, and #4 “Avoid overlinking in your answers”.



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*"Welcome everyone with a friendly hello"* → **highly salient**

Returning to our example, we can see how these norms shake out in practice. The post starts with a warm welcome, per the Expectation to "welcome everyone with a friendly hello." Because the "welcome everyone" norm usually happens at the beginning of the post, and follows a regular pattern, the Focus Theory would say that it is likely to be highly salient to a new answerer.

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*“Avoid over-linking... do your best to answer the guest’s particular question rather than linking to documentation.”*  
→ **less salient?**

This post also follows the “avoid over-linking” norm. It contains several hundred words of text and only a single link to a help page. However, this norm might be less salient because it doesn’t stand out or follow a regular pattern: so it may be difficult for a new answerer to infer what the “normal” number of policy links should be, just from looking at other people’s answers.

[\[edit\]](#)

Hello Gareth Griffith-Jones. According to [WP:UPDOWN](#), "Traditionally Wikipedia offers wide latitude to users to manage their user space as they see fit. However, pages in user space belong to the wider community. They are not a personal homepage, and do not belong to the user. They are part of Wikipedia, and exist to make collaboration among editors easier. Other users and bots may edit pages in your user space or leave messages for you . . . If you dislike the change, then feel free to revert it. Also, your "sandbox" page looks a lot like a talk page, so the other editor may have felt that the change was appropriate. In conclusion, there are no truly "private spaces" on Wikipedia, though most editors will leave most of your user pages alone, except for talk pages. Hope this helps. [Cullen](#)<sup>328</sup>  
*Let's discuss*" [20:48, 12 July 2012 \(UTC\)](#)

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### Source of injunctive norms

Which is unfortunate for the Teahouse, because the “Host Expectations” themselves are kind of hidden. They are not prominently linked to from the main Q&A page, and most answerers probably don’t know they are there.

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- 3 YouTube citation: the wikipedia rules are?
- 4 copyright clearance on images
- 5 Created article but still don't see
- 6 crerar's de luxe ginger beer
- 7 Simple English Wiki
- 8 Article rejected
- 9 Tables and virtual editing.
- 10 How to edit the location of a Facebook page populated by wikipedia.
- 11 retalk pages
- 12 How to measure undue weight of pseudoscience?
- 13 Causes for an earthquake
- 14 Proper format and content for a hard boiled novel The Little Sister page
- 15 How to stop someone from harassing me
- 16 User page etiquette question
- 17 Question on "List of episodes" articles
- 18 Notice board etiquette
- 19 I'm on page Category: French Women
- 20 Hi again
- 21 why cant I find my article?
- 22 Diplomatic way to add a new section to an existing wiki


The Teahouse is a unique place, and as a Teahouse host, there are certain expectations that you should think about when welcoming and working with new editors.

1. **Welcome everyone** with a friendly hello when you answer questions or **greet new guests**.
2. **Be polite and patient** with all editors who visit the Teahouse. Remember that although you may have seen that same question fifty times, the editor asking has asked it only once.
3. **Keep it simple**. Explain as much as possible, as simply as possible, to new editors when answering questions. (Don't use wiki jargon!)
4. **Avoid over-linking** when responding to questions. Wikipedia policies, procedures, and documentation are overwhelming to many editors. Do your best to explain processes and policies and answer the guest's particular question rather than pointing them to more documentation as a first resort.
5. **Leave a talkback notification** on the guest's userpage after answering a new question, to let the guest know you responded. (Find the script [here](#)!)

## Sources of descriptive norms

## Source of injunctive norms

As a result, most new answerers learn how to answer questions through descriptive norms, not through injunctive norms.



I promise to:

Remain in good standing on Wikipedia, welcome guests in the Q&A board, speak to others in a friendly and patient way, and generally uphold the **methods of the Teahouse**.


*Sign here*

**Make me a host!**

The Teahouse is a unique place, and as a Teahouse host, there are certain expectations that you should think about when welcoming and working with new editors.

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Writ Keeper's been editing Wikipedia for about six months. Currently working on writing [user scripts](#) for the Teahouse host interface, WK can often be found around [the third opinion noticeboard](#), and also doing some [recent changes patrol](#) from time to time.

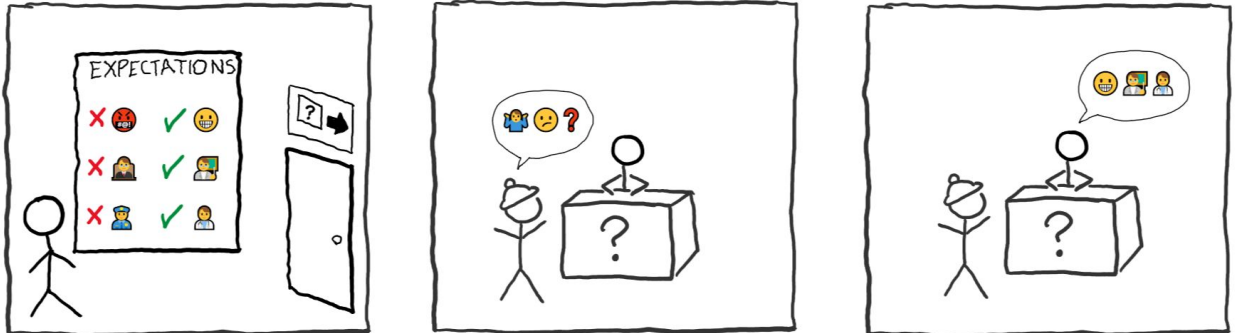


Writ Keeper

However, a sub-set of new answerers are exposed to the Host Expectations when they join. People who create a host profile are shown these expectations and asked to uphold them. Creating a Host profile doesn't grant you any rights or responsibilities, and you don't need to make one to answer at the Teahouse--you can just start answering questions. In fact, many experienced and long-term contributors never create a profile. However, the presence of this feature creates an information asymmetry when it comes to norm exposure, which allows us to perform a kind of natural experiment. Because while all new answerers have the opportunity to learn how to answer through descriptive norms, injunctive norms are only made salient to some new answerers.



# Injunctive norm salience



According to the Focus Theory, being exposed to the injunctive norms of the Teahouse should have a stronger and more resilient impact on behavior than being exposed to descriptive norms alone. Someone who reads the Host Expectations should be more likely to act according to them even when other people are not. And they should also be more likely to follow even norms that are hard to infer from observing behavior--like the norm against over-linking.

## Research goals


1. Which norms (injunctive, descriptive) are more influential under varying compliance conditions?
2. Are aligned descriptive and injunctive norms mutually reinforcing?
- 3. Does past experience in communities with different norms affect local norm compliance?**

In addition to understanding the interplay between local descriptive and injunctive norms, we are also interested in understanding what happens when someone joins a community after participating in other communities that have conflicting norms. Do they adapt their behavior to local norms, or do they bring their old norms with them, and continue acting the same way they did before?

Welcome to Wikipedia

Help index · Ask questions · Report a problem · Learn wikicode · Wikipedia FAQ · Glossary

Live editing help via web chat · **Help desk** · Reference desk · Tutorial



Shortcuts:  
WP:HELPEDESK  
WP:HD

### Wikipedia Help Desk

- This page is **only** for questions about **how to use or edit Wikipedia**. For other types of questions, use the [search box](#) or the [Reference desk](#).
- **Do not provide your email address** or any other contact information. Answers will be provided on **this page only**.
- We are all volunteers, so sometimes replies can take some time. Please be patient.
- **New users:** While this is a good place to ask questions, you may also ask your questions at **the Teahouse**, an area specifically for new users to get help with editing, article creation, and general Wikipedia use, in a friendly environment. There is also a [new contributors' help page](#).

Are you in the right place?

[Click here to ask a new question about how to use or edit Wikipedia.](#)

Skip to today's questions · Skip to the bottom · Special help services · Archived discussions · How to answer

Contents [\[hide\]](#)

1 February 22

- 1.1 thread answering
- 1.2 Request for Feedback
- 1.3 Global Positioning System article feedback
- 1.4 whitney houston
- 1.5 The tools above the edit box – Internet Explorer vs. Chrome
- 1.6 Redefine "My Sandbox"?
- 1.7 Should they still be listed?
- 1.8 warning of Jacques Cousteau about our seas pollution
- 1.9 italics
- 1.10 Suggestions greatly appreciated

Search Frequently Asked Questions

Search the help desk archives

32

We address this question by examining the behavior of people who join the Teahouse after participating in the Wikipedia Help Desk, a separate Q&A forum which has different norms around what makes a good answer, and which also shares members with the Teahouse.



## Making a Page for Occupy San Antonio

---

I need help making a page for Occupy San Antonio. — Preceding [unsigned](#) comment added by [Loveyk \(talk · contribs\)](#) 04:50, 30 January 2012 (UTC)

Start with [WP:YFA](#). [RudolfRed \(talk\)](#) 05:53, 30 January 2012 (UTC)

But read [WP:CORP](#) and [WP:PROMO](#) first, and make sure any article you write is [neutral](#) and not promotional, and demonstrates in its text why the subject is [notable](#). Also, if you are associated with the organisation, you should read [WP:COI](#) very carefully and make sure you follow its guidance. —[ColinFine \(talk\)](#) 12:34, 30 January 2012 (UTC)

Here's an example of an answer to a question on the Help Desk that reflects its own local norms. The answer doesn't include a welcome, because the Help Desk doesn't have a "welcome everyone" norm like the Teahouse does, and welcoming is uncommon there.

## Making a Page for Occupy San Antonio

I need help making a page for Occupy San Antonio. — Preceding [unsigned](#) comment added by [Loveyk](#) ([talk](#) · [contribs](#)) 04:50, 30 January 2012 (UTC)

Start with [WP:YFA](#). [RudolfRed](#) ([talk](#)) 05:53, 30 January 2012 (UTC)

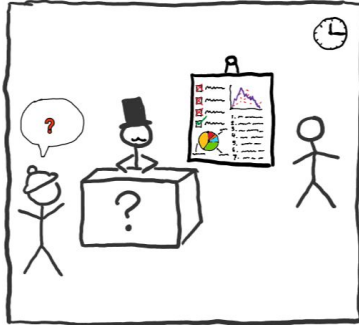
But read [WP:CORP](#) and [WP:PROMO](#) first, and make sure any article you write is [neutral](#) and not promotional, and demonstrates in its text why the subject is [notable](#). Also, if you are associated with the organisation, you should read [WP:COI](#) very carefully and make sure you follow its guidance. —[ColinFine](#) ([talk](#)) 12:34, 30 January 2012 (UTC)

*New users who ask questions at the Help Desk may be unfamiliar with Wikipedia jargon, so linking these terms is very helpful... Directing questioners to these pages ensures they get the most accurate instructions.*

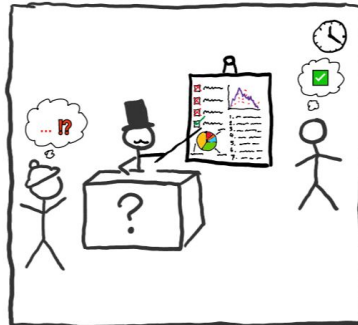
“The spirit of helpfulness 1.2: Provide links”  
*WP:Help\_Desk/How\_to\_answer*

Like the Teahouse, the Help Desk does have an injunctive norms around how many links to use. But that norm is the opposite of the Teahouse norm: on the Help Desk, answerers are encouraged to add many links in their replies to ensure “the most accurate instructions.”

# Imported norm salience



help desk



help desk



teahouse

So per the Focus Theory, we might expect that when an answerer starts on the Help Desk, and learns the norms there, they will bring those conflicting norms around linking and welcoming with them when they join the Teahouse.

## Methods

**Dataset:** 29k replies by experienced editors to 10k questions asked by new editors between 2012 and 2016.

We attempted to answer all of these questions by collecting a corpus of over 29,000 replies to new editor's questions posted to the Teahouse between 2012 - 2016.

## Methods

**Models:** Binary logistic and negative binomial regressions.

### Dependent variables

- Reply contains a welcome
- Link ratio: links to policy and help pages over total post word count

And we performed regression analysis to learn what factors are the best predictors of an answer that reflects local injunctive norms--ones that contain welcomes and a high link-to-text ratio.

# Methods

## Independent variables

- Answerer has host profile
  - injunctive norm exposure
- Welcome frequency, link ratio in recent posts
  - descriptive norm exposure
- Answerer first post location (TH or HD)
  - 'imported' norm exposure

The factors that we examined as predictors of norm compliance were whether the answerer had a host profile, the overall welcome frequency and link ratio in recent posts, and in the case of answerers who work on both the Teahouse and the Help Desk, which forum they worked on first.

# Findings

Here are some of the things we found.

**Q.** Which norms are more influential under varying compliance conditions?

*Descriptive norms are contingent*

**For highly salient norms:** All answerers welcome more when there are more recent examples of welcoming

**For less salient norms:** there is no relationship between the number of policies answerers cite and the number of policies in recent answers.

First, in alignment with Cialdini's experiments on littering in parking garages, we found that whether someone complies with descriptive norms is contingent on several factors. If it's a norm like welcoming that is relatively more salient--easier to detect--then their likelihood of complying is higher if they see a lot of other people welcoming too. But for a norm like policy linking--where the expected behavior is harder to detect--then there is no overall relationship between the number of links an answerer includes and the link ratio in recent posts.



**Q.** Which norms are more influential under varying compliance conditions?

*Injunctive norms are persistent*

Hosts (exposed to injunctive norms) welcome more frequently *and* include fewer policy links than non-host answerers—regardless of how prevalent these behaviors are at the time of answer (descriptive norms).

On the contrary, injunctive norms are more persistent. People who were exposed to the Host Expectations, who we call Hosts, tend to welcome more, and include fewer policy links, regardless of whether other recent answers contain welcomes or high link-to-text ratios.

**Q.** Are aligned descriptive and injunctive norms mutually reinforcing?

*Norm compliance is highest when descriptive and injunctive norms are both salient and aligned.*

Answers given by hosts at times when there were many other examples of welcoming posts present had the highest likelihood of containing a welcome.

We also found, as predicted by the Focus Theory, that norm conformity was highest when descriptive and injunctive norms are both aligned and salient--in this case, answers given by hosts at times when there were many other examples of welcoming posts present on the Q&A board had the highest likelihood of containing a welcome.

**Q.** Does past experience in communities with different norms affect local norm compliance?

*Starting at the Help Desk appears to reduce compliance with Teahouse norms.*

**Injunctive vs. descriptive:** Answerers who started at the help desk are less likely to welcome.

**Injunctive vs. injunctive:** Answerers who started at the Help Desk have a lower link-to-text ratio.

When we analyzed norm compliance among answerers who worked on both the Teahouse and Help Desk, we found evidence that prior exposure to conflicting norms reduced local norm compliance. Compared with Teahouse first answerers, those who started at the Help Desk are less likely to welcome, even when everyone around them is welcoming, and they tend to include more policy links, and less prose, in their answers.

# Implications

While we think these findings are interesting in their own right for what they say about Wikipedia, we also see broader implications.

## Support for Focus Theory

- Effects from offline experiments can be observed in a naturalistic setting online
- The effects of exposure to injunctive norms persist over time, and are more robust when overall compliance is low
- Activation matters: norms that are hard to identify as norms are less influential

First, we have found evidence in a naturalistic online setting that supports the Focus Theory, which was developed and tested under experimental conditions in physical spaces. We also observe theory-aligned effects of exposure to injunctive norms, specifically that they exert a more persistent and more powerful influence on behavior, even under conditions where descriptive norms conflict. And we've seen that activation matters: norms like policy-linking, which are harder to observe and infer, are less likely to be activated than more salient norms like welcoming, even among people who are exposed to injunctive norms and examples of pro-normative behaviors.

## Design Implications

- Posting 'community rules' is useful, even if you can't enforce them, even if not everyone complies
- Surfacing examples of recent, pro-normative behavior encourages more of the same

We also see several concrete implications for design in these findings. First, our evidence suggests that posting community rules in a forum can be helpful, even if they are not enforceable, and even if not everyone follows them all the time. In fact, the Teahouse would probably benefit from posting the Host Expectations more prominently to increase their salience to a wider group of answerers. We also found evidence that highlighting recent examples of pro-normative behavior--perhaps through mechanisms such as upvoing or "featured answers"--can increase norm compliance.

## Design Implications

- Interface nudges may be useful for activating less salient norms
- People who join your community from other, similar communities may need different forms of socialization than brand-new members.

For less salient norms, like the ones around over-linking, simple user interface ‘nudges’ may be useful. For example, the interface for drafting an answer could track the link-to-text ratio, and suggest reducing links or providing additional elaboration to people who include too many. Finally, our findings suggest that people who join a community from similar communities may need different kinds of socialization than newcomers who have no directly-applicable experience to draw on when deciding how to behave.

...and much more!

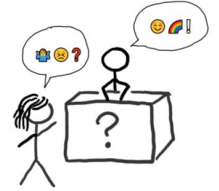
- Detailed methods
- Additional findings
- Additional research (interviews with answerers)
- Additional discussion and implications

... Read the paper, or ask us during Q&A!

Preprint available on SocArxiv: <https://osf.io/84gvh/>

But there's more! It's a long a detailed paper. For additional methodological details, more findings, some ethnographic interviews that dive into some of these phenomena more deeply, and lots more discussion and implications, read the paper which is available on Soc Arxiv and will be presented at the Computer-Supported Cooperative Work conference next month. Or, ask us during Q&A!





## Thank you! Questions?



Jonathan Morgan, Wikimedia Research  
Anna Filippova, GitHub Inc.

Wikimedia Research Showcase  
Oct. 17, 2018



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