"The Grant Shapps Affair Is a Testament to Wikipedia's Integrity and Transparency"

 By Justin Anthony Knapp

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In 1787 James Madison authored Federalist No 10 as part of a series of articles aimed at encouraging the American people to adopt the US constitution. His concern in that essay was "factions", which might be roughly analogous to political parties or interest groups in today's language. The danger was that "the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties".

| **Commented [BK1]:** Historical context, and helps give real-life clarity to the audience (stories method of development) |

Madison proposed several solutions to this problem which involved removing liberty and diversity—these were unacceptable options. The only genuine remedy was to have a large, vibrant and participatory republic that included the contributions of the many with an appropriate number of representatives to act as gatekeepers of democracy in the government. Two hundred and fourteen years later, a somewhat different and slightly less grand American experiment was founded: a free encyclopedia that anyone could edit named Wikipedia.

| **Commented [BK2]:** Sets argument up for main points to follow |

Common goods such as democracies or free cultural repositories can only exist through the hard work and goodwill of a large majority who dedicate their time and effort to cultivating them. There will always be those who choose to exploit these resources for their own ends and if we do not have vigilance on the part of others, these common goods will be spoiled.

| **Commented [BK3]:** Knapp's thesis statement |

It is good that British politicians such as Grant Shapps are among those who can edit Wikipedia, and it is also good that site administrators act as watchdogs against pernicious or inappropriate edits. What is undesirable is when someone seeks to undermine the wellbeing of those seeking to learn by editing in such a way as to make the encyclopedia a press release, an advertising platform, or a personal press. Whether Shapps himself did this is to some extent immaterial; what is most important is that these edits have been corrected, and whatever accounts made them have been stopped from editing.

| **Commented [BK4]:** Historical context, and helps give real-life clarity to the audience (stories method of development) |

| **Commented [BK5]:** Helps to support his thesis statement |

Wikipedia is largely self-policing and investigates itself as members find inaccuracies, potential libel or petty vandalism, but it is also policed by the greater community that we hope to serve: the public. This encyclopedia only works if others read it, contribute to it, criticize it, and engage with one another to do the same. We need a mixture of lay people and professionals who can go about fixing tedious typos, update statistics, or add media to plain text, and a small few who are willing to act as custodians with access to the tools that ensure the encyclopedia has integrity by blocking and investigating potentially abusive users.

| **Commented [BK6]:** Refutes the opposition's position (that position being that nothing can be done since these resources are so open) |

Wikipedia is not an experiment in democracy, anarchy or any other political philosophy, but a sui generis that brings together armchair historians with citizen journalists, university professors and video game enthusiasts, stay-at-home mothers alongside stamp collectors. Residents of every country in the world edit in almost 300 languages. In order for all their valuable voices to be heard and their knowledge to be shared, we need help.

| **Commented [BK7]:** Unique (Latin) |

The American ecologist Garrett Hardin popularized the idea of the "tragedy of the commons," drawing upon the work of the British economist William Forster Lloyd. He argued that public goods such as land would be ruined by selfish interests as well as apathetic welfare. It is only through the careful and active management of these goods by the many that we can truly benefit the many. I'm grateful when someone finds a problem with Wikipedia because that means the system works. It also has the added bonus of attracting more eyes to potentially abused articles: this kind of scrutiny results in better articles and serves to eliminate undue bias.

It's a goal that is never achieved but that is always in mind. Unlike most corporate or state-controlled entities, abuses and the remedies for these abuses are transparent at Wikipedia. Everyone has a stake in a world where the sum of human knowledge is freely shared. Will you help us?

| **Commented [BK8]:** Shift in tone |

| **Commented [BK9]:** Appeals to the audience by asking them to help do something about this matter |

1. Who is the writer?

Justin Anthony Knapp is the writer of the op-ed, for *The Guardian*.

2. Who is the audience?

The intended audience of the op-ed is those who read *The Guardian*, as well as those aware of or interested in open information resources, such as Wikipedia.

3. What is the rhetorical situation?

The purpose of this op-ed is to bring light to how much of an impact open information resources, such as Wikipedia, have on the spread of information, as well as the problems that can arise from the freedoms of allowing public contributions.

4. What is the historical context surrounding the subject?

Allegations were placed against Grant Shapps, due to him allegedly making numerous edits to both his and other politicians' Wikipedia pages to better his political standing, as well as the writing of the Federalist papers.

5. What is the writer's thesis, and where does it appear?

Knapp states in paragraph 3, "*Common goods such as democracies or free cultural repositories can only exist through the hard work and goodwill of a large majority who dedicate their time and effort to cultivating them. There will always be those who choose to exploit these resources for their own ends and if we do not have vigilance on the part of others, these common goods will be spoiled.*"

6. Is the writer's thesis reasonable?

His thesis is reasonable, as it elaborates on how information resources such as Wikipedia should operate to create a functioning and free society. It takes a great deal of effort to maintain free access to accurate information, that resources such as Wikipedia create, and there is always the threat of those who wish to take advantage of that access to pursuit their own desires and benefit from it at the expense of others.

7. Are the claims made to support the thesis also reasonable?

These claims are also reasonable. One such claim he makes is that it is great that all people, including Shapps, have access to make edits on Wikipedia, however it becomes a problem when they take advantage of that access to help themselves, in this case better his reputation. By making mention of the recent scandal and claims such as this, he is able to connect real-life events to his thesis, to better support his standing on the issue.

8. What evidence is used to support the writer's claim?

In paragraph 4 he states, "*What is undesirable is when someone seeks to undermine the wellbeing of those seeking to learn by editing in such a way as to make the encyclopedia a press release, an advertising platform, or a personal press.*"

9.   What evidence is used to refute the opposition's position?

That even though these resources are open to the extent of which people can make negative changes, actions can still be taken to combat against them. In paragraph 5 Knapp states, "*Wikipedia is largely self-policing and investigates itself as members find inaccuracies, potential libel or petty vandalism, but it is also policed by the greater community that we hope to serve: the public. This encyclopedia only works if others read it, contribute to it, criticize it, and engage with one another to do the same.*"

10. How is the argument structured? Which argument styles does the writer employ?

Knapp structures his argument in the style of Toulmin argument. He begins it by making a claim, then eventually supporting it, as well as mentioning the counter argument momentarily.

11. What is the relationship between the method of development used and the line of reasoning?

In his argument, Knapp primarily relies on stories to assist him in developing his position. He makes mention of past real-life events, such as the Grant Shapps Wikipedia scandal. This assists in supporting his claims by giving real-life experience to them, as well as better clarity.

12. Why is the particular method of development used best suited for the rhetorical situation?

This method of development is best suited in this case because by making mention of these events, the audience is able to see related real-life events, which allow them to comprehend the reality of public contribution on open information resources (the greatness of them, as well as the problems that can arise).

13. What type of tone is created through the writer's diction?

Through his diction, Knapp creates a formal-assertive tone, which emits confidence to the audience. This allows him to better persuade his audience on why this matter is of urgent importance.

14. Do you see any logical fallacies? If so, which ones?

I do not see any striking logical fallacies throughout the argument.

15. Do you see any holes in the writer's argument?

I do not see any major holes in Knapp's argument.

Write a response explaining whether the writer's argument is effective. Use at least three pieces of evidence from your S.M.E.L.L. analysis to support your position. Your response should be between 150 and 200 words.

Justin Knapp makes an effective argument that open information sources, such as Wikipedia, have an enormous impact on the information that society consumes. While it is great that anyone has access to contribute information on Wikipedia, that leaves the door open for those who wish to use it to their own advantage. In paragraph 4 of his argument he states, "*What is undesirable is when someone seeks to undermine the wellbeing of those seeking to learn by editing in such a way as to make the encyclopedia a press release, an advertising platform, or a personal press*." This assists in supporting his thesis, in which he states, "*There will always be those who choose to exploit these resources for their own ends*." Through his diction he creates a formal-assertive tone, which allows him to better persuade the audience of this urgency. As well, mentions past real-life events, such as the Grant Shapps scandal, to assist the audience in seeing what has happened in the past, which gives them better clarity into his claims. These tactics allow Knapp to convey to the audience of why it is important that we do what is needed to protect the integrity of free information.