

Daren C. Brabham, **Crowdsourcing**. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013, 176 pp., \$12.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by

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When Marshal McLuhan (1962) talked about the world becoming a global village via the onset of technology, he was predicting the information age we presently live in. Moving from the book era to our current technology-driven one, our world has become significantly smaller. McLuhan once predicted that

the next medium, whatever it is—it may be the extension of consciousness—will include television as its content, not as its environment, and will transform television into an art form. A computer as a research and communication instrument could enhance retrieval, obsolesce mass library organization, retrieve the individual’s encyclopedic function and flip into a private line to speedily tailored data of a saleable kind. (p. 293)

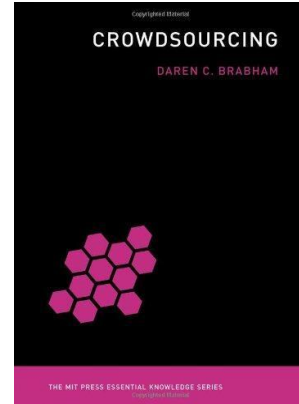
Information is now ubiquitous and one need not be in close proximity with another to share information.

For me—as someone infinitely interested in online human and computer interaction—**Crowdsourcing** is an essential addition to the body of knowledge in this field. What Brabham does in the first couple of pages is help the reader understand what crowdsourcing is, without sounding condescending. From the beginning, Brabham not only shares his own expertise on the subject, but also acknowledges other authors who have contributed to the study of crowdsourcing. For example, the term *crowdsourcing*, he states, was coined by Jeff Howe in June 2006 in his article “The Rise of Crowdsourcing.” Although several different definitions have evolved, Brabham believes that Howe’s definition is the one that most fully captures what crowdsourcing is. Drawing from a multitude of scholars who have published on the subject, Brabham writes that crowdsourcing involves

an organization that has a task to perform; a community (crowd) that is willing to perform the task willingly; an online environment that allows the work to take place and the community to interact with the organization; and mutual benefit for the organization and the community. (p. 3)

Because intellectual property is currently a vital part of economic growth, I found the point about “mutual benefit” unconvincing. Is monetary value the only “payment” contributors are to expect?

I did not have to go far into the book to get the answer to my question. Brabham elaborates in the book that whether a company chooses to assert sole ownership of the intellectual property of any crowdsourced content depends on the kind of agreement instituted between the company and the crowd



(contributors) from the onset. In practice, however, companies have more than one option for using the submitted material. For example, cases exist in which the material remains the intellectual property of the person who submitted it and is licensed under his or her name to the company who uses it. This is a practice called *licensing*. It is one of the most commonly practiced ways of dealing with issues of intellectual property rights in crowdsourcing.

Brabham's book is organized into four chapters, with each chapter focusing on one aspect of crowdsourcing. In the Introduction and the first chapter, Brabham focuses primarily on what crowdsourcing entails. He delves into the concepts and theories associated with the process and presents real life examples. The two chapters that follow focus on the typology of crowdsourcing and the issues surrounding it that have created a need for scholarly research on the subject. The last chapter focuses on future trends in crowdsourcing and how it will likely be applied.

Brabham introduces several concepts associated with crowdsourcing, as well as related ethical issues. The idea that the crowd is being exploited is introduced under the digital-sweatshop concept. As succinctly explicated by Brabham, offline sweatshops as we know them to be, are not synonymous with digital sweatshops. In an industry in which the crowd is sourced for their expertise and intellectual prowess, identifying and addressing such issues not only solidifies but also authenticates the true meaning of crowdsourcing. A major distinction between digital and offline sweatshops as identified by Brabham is the fact that with crowdsourcing, individuals *willingly* source out their intellect, time, and resources to the companies involved.

If you are looking for a book with practical representations of crowdsourcing, Brabham's text is a perfect start. Not only does it explain the term with clarity, but it also provides real life examples of crowdsourcing. This book will be useful to anyone interested in the economics of crowdsourcing, as Brabham does a great job here explaining it. Crowdsourcing is here to stay. Perhaps in the future, aside from its use in business, it can be applied in the political domain so developed countries can share innovative ideas with their counterparts in developing countries as a means of bridging the technological divide between these two groups. Coming from an international background and being aware of the flow of communication and information sharing among the different countries in the world, I would have liked to see Brabham examine how crowdsourcing can be a tool for economic development, especially for developing countries.

However, this does not take away from the expert knowledge presented in this book. Brabham clearly is knowledgeable about the dynamics of this phenomenon. He is eager to share what he knows and does so clearly in this book.

References

McLuhan, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg galaxy: The making of typographic man*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.