The Inducks index, editorialized by Disney comics amateurs and professionals: New dynamics, new participatory models

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Introduction

Disney comics’ global index

Inducks (also known as INDUCKS or I.N.D.U.C.K.S., “International Network for Disney-Universe Comic Knowers and Sources”) is a free access digital database that aims to index and catalog Disney comics on a global scale. The name is a playful contraction of the words “index” and “duck,” which is the last name of Donald Duck and of one of the universe’s two main families. So far, the database has referenced a total of 153,630 stories and 147,733 publication issues. Since its launch in the mid-1990s, which arose out of the swapping of index files between collectors based in several European countries, Inducks has been used and stocked on a daily basis by Disney comics enthusiasts (collectors, fans, and curious minds), Disney professionals (archivists, publishers, story writers, artists, translators, publicists...) from 17 countries.
Over time, the platform has grown into one of the principal resources for Disney-related documentary production, and a privileged environment where users can gather references, establish contacts, and engage with players from very different social backgrounds. Designed as a contributive cultural platform, Inducks offers an original digital form of interaction and collaboration between Disney comic amateurs and professionals, as regards the construction and use of documentary resources derived from this cultural universe. This definition is conducive to an analysis of cultural participation that does not confine amateurs to the realm of observation, instead acknowledging their interactions with other actors and painting a more layered and representative picture of platform-based cultural participation. Following the typology put forth by Severo, Inducks can be described as an *ad hoc* platform built by collectors.
who have forged increasingly defined ties with professional players. Inducks’ story is all the more interesting because the new models of documentary organization embraced by participative documentarization vary according to the countries from which these professionals are from (especially in the US, Italy, France, and Scandinavian countries). Because of this, the platform is a composite and fertile ground for observation: over the years, each player has developed their own relationship to the platform. As a result, the platform incorporates amateur work and the related participatory model with its own documentary resources, to various degrees.

The growing editorialization of documentary practices

This study will follow an info-documentary approach: its focus lies with the socio-technical features of the platform, and with the various documentary practices it affords. A number of authors have examined the development of informational and documentary practices that followed from the emergence of Web 2.0, forging concepts that underline these practices’ relation to dematerialization (“redocumentarization” or “documentarization”) or to democratization (“folksonomies”). This study takes up the notion of “editorialization,” tapping into the operative scope of its definition as expressed by Vitali-Rosati. By questioning the implications of the document’s ingress into a shared digital space, editorialization helps set the frame for this analysis of transformations in documentary practices (both informational and socio-professional) pertaining to Disney comics. These transformations touch upon the traditional roles of archivists and publishers, as well as the dynamics between amateurs and professionals in documentary and knowledge production. In comparison with preexisting documentary practices and systems (private collections, paper archives), this platform allows for a simultaneous, immediate, and interactive handling of dematerialized documents. As such, contributors can collectively deal with a quantity of documents so vast, and spanning such a large number of countries, that it exceeds the documentary capacities of any one company’s in-house resources. In addition, the possibility afforded by digital technology to take apart an indexed document and make new use of its segments qualifies digital indexing as an activity fundamentally editorial in nature, to the extent that it taps into the productive potential brought on by new arrangements of indexed elements, made available through a content search. These are all helpful aspects when investigating the advantages and the far-reaching implications of the professional incorporation of Inducks’ documentary approach and practices.
The observation and analysis laid out in this study follow a double path that hinges on the divide and comparison between two types of assumed players—amateurs and professionals—throughout the observation of platform-based practices. Investigating how Induck reorganizes documentary and editorial practices, as well as evolving dynamics between professionals and amateurs in the wake of this reorganization, hence relies on a cross-case analysis of practices of content editorialization supported by this contributive cultural platform (indexing, referencing, fact checking, interactions between members), comparing them to documentary practices prior and contemporary to those related to Inducks. After setting out our proposed method of analysis and describing the platform, the presented results will be broken down into two parts: one dedicated to amateur practices, and the other to professional practices. Ending remarks will focus on the interplay between the two.

Methodology

At the present stage of analysis, my fieldwork is made up of observations and interviews with individuals based in France. However, information relative to practices in the US, Scandinavian countries, and Italy was also collected, the Inducks universe being highly interconnected. Interviews were conducted with professionals from Disney Hachette Presse, Glénat, and Disney Publishing Worldwide France, as well as with contributors from the French section of Inducks.

My fieldwork was divided into two parts. The first part consisted in a participative observation of documentary practices and platform uses during a ten-month internship in DHP’s Resources and Publishing department (October 2018-July 2019). During this phase, I took notes, engaged with professionals on a daily basis, conducted semi-structured interviews with the head of the Resources and Publishing department and with the editor-in-chief of the “Picsou” titles (July 2019), also drawing up a general
survey emailed to the entire editorial staff (14/41 replies). The second phase consisted in an online ethnographic observation of the platform, in establishing contacts with professionals at Glénat and Disney Publishing Worldwide France, as well as with collectors-contributors of the platform based in France (March-April 2020). As a result, I was able to conduct six semi-directive interviews with: a professional in the Editorial department at Glénat, the head of the Publishing division at Disney Publishing Worldwide France, the main contributor to the platform in France, two other “maintainers,” and one “indexer.” Surveys were also sent to French contributors via the platform’s messaging service (6/29 replies).

In order to conduct a cross-case analysis of the various practices related to the platform, this inquiry followed two separate avenues of research, with questions tailored to each profile: professionals on the one side, amateurs on the other. The professional line of inquiry investigated the platform’s influence on each publisher’s internal documentary order (organization of internal documentary order, frequency, types of use and reasons for using the platform, ways of engaging with amateurs). On the other hand, the amateur line of inquiry focused on the history of each collector’s relationship to the platform, and on their indexing activity (profile, initial introduction to the platform, role in the internal organization of Inducks, frequency, types of use and reasons for contributing, acquired skills, ways of engaging with other members and with professionals). In both cases, emphasis was placed on the evolution of documentary practices and players’ ways of engaging, as Inducks’ mode of editorialization progressively came into its own.

Amateur practices

Platform functions and operation

The platform includes a central interface born out of functional—rather than aesthetical—concerns. Targeting an audience already familiar with the codes of Disney comics, it provides a search engine that allows for a relatively large number of entries (story title, keywords, story code, creator, title of publication, publication serial number, characters, year of publication, number of pages, format, and so on) and modes of use (basic search, advanced search, by list, ranked, random). Searching the database does not require an account, but a digital account, which is very easy to create, lets users index stories and add visuals, review stories, chat, create their own digital collection, reference unindexed issues, produce their own statistics, point out potential mistakes, and access a personal messaging service. Personal accounts thereby offer a thoroughly personalized and private access to the search engine.
The platform provides a complete index of publications related to Disney comics (260 titles for the French section alone) sorted by publication type (magazines, supplements, books, newspapers, academic books and journals, manga) and historical value (discontinued series and magazines, collections and reprints). In addition to publisher, country, language, and year of each publication, the website also references story covers, illustrations, and gags, story or scan code, titles, creators, number of pages, and characters. Indexing on the platform follows a nonlinear order, allowing for a trove of connections and varied pathways in one’s browsing and documentary research.

Specific dynamics have solidified in each country, yet contributions to the platform are generally grounded in a very basic hierarchy in which “maintainers” (1 to 3 per country) monitor and legitimize the work carried out by “indexers.” New content must always be approved by an administrator before it is posted. Inducks’ internal messaging service makes it possible for members to discuss occasional topics such as the proposition of an index file or a reported mistake. On the other hand, maintainers—for the most part founding collectors of the database or more dedicated contributors—address broader issues (about the website’s organization, the legitimacy of a new story, a certain coding system for the index, etc.) through a mailing list that connects administrators from every country. While more basic contributions such as sending scanned images do not require specific skills, maintainers can provide training to indexers who wish to contribute to indexing on a systematic basis.

3.2. An editorialized archive

Contributors’ dedication to creating and running the platform, as well as their shift to collectively built indexes, is generally the result of a very acute taste for collection-building and of the desire to build and gain regular access to a comprehensive catalog, representative of the variety and global reach of Disney publications. One of Inducks’ original purposes was to fill the gaps in official documentary information, which failed to credit the stories’ writers and artists (“it was very difficult to know who had done...
the drawing; the names of the writers, artists, and so on, were never listed”), or failed to provide index codes for a number of old stories and strips. As a result, the database grew from the private collections of a handful of fans (generally one from each country) combined with access to professional documentary resources (the top French contributor mentioned regular access to Disney Hachette Presse indexes, e.g.) and the advent of the Internet, described by most players as the premise to the expansion of their practice to an international scale.

Figure 5

Indexed publication, example 1.

Figure 6

Indexed publication, example 2.

A collective and dematerialized practice is a key factor in building the catalog: the platform is fueled and updated on a daily basis by regular contributors who are careful to index each new release or specific segments from a publication; by occasional
contributors who index visuals or side-stories (such as an occasional Disney comic published in non-Disney publications) and by administrators who sometimes add documentary research on older releases or stories to their coordination work. Editorialization practices supported by the platform include scanning content (visuals, covers, stories, indexes), referencing scanned content, sharing files, fact checking—often completed for purposes of reprint. The documentary knowledge produced by the platform is used by collectors in the context of other activities, whether non-professional (“I had a blog where I wrote articles on the comics and their creators”\(^\text{14}\)) or professional (“besides my thesis, I write for Hachette: we're making a set of collectible figurines and each figurine comes with a booklet that contains the character’s backstory. I work with other people too, and Inducks is very helpful with that”\(^\text{15}\)), drawing them closer to more editorial-minded approaches.

The editorialization practices used by platform contributors have helped to consolidate a new referencing system. This system is a central component of a (more or less complete) process of harmonization with various systems derived from publishers’ in-house databases (“each story has a specific code, usually written at the top of the first spreadsheet, but it is sometimes absent, or it’s sometimes created on Inducks and reused by publishers”\(^\text{16}\)). This points to a greater incorporation of amateur work by professionals. It sometimes happens that amateurs are contacted by professionals for additional information, editorial advice (as in the case of AH, an amateur who regularly works with DHP publishers), or to provide material (“I was in touch with a well-known American author who has published a number of books and who asked for scans to add to books that were being published in the US, so I scanned them and sent them to him”\(^\text{17}\)).

Borrowing from Vitali-Rosati’s definition of editorialization, we can now sum up some of Inducks’ specific features, and compare this digital archive with other professional documentary resources. Inducks is a processual and open-ended archive, constantly in the making. Because of this, it is a very rich archive and, to a certain extent, an unstable one.\(^\text{18}\) Its process does not follow preordained normative models, but rather creates its own norms, “performatively”\(^\text{19}\): hence its capacity to transform the dynamics at hand in documentary production, the platform compelling professionals to take part in this non-predetermined process and to adjust to it. It is also a manifold archive, a trait which accounts for its remarkably large temporal and spatial scope. Finally, it is a collective archive, stressing the ethical and political dimensions of the contributive process engaged by the platform, and the depth of the transformations likely to result from the professional incorporation of a documentary instrument of this nature.

### Professional practices

#### Documentary systems used by Disney comics professionals

Over the last fifteen years, French publishers working with Disney comics have come to rely on Inducks on a regular or even daily basis, especially within resources and publishing departments.\(^\text{20}\) Reasons for using Inducks go beyond its extensiveness and international scope, and beyond the possibility of comparing and contrasting with information provided by in-house databases. Added to these is the possibility of
exchanging with contributors who can provide additional information or material. Types of use include documentary research for publishing purposes, researching and verifying information, and occasionally exchanging with contributors. In some cases, professionals mainly contribute to the platform by reporting mistakes.

The following list of in-house indexing tools prior to Inducks or that are used to complement participative documentarization shows why these devices fail to rival Inducks in terms of its extensiveness and efficiency, not to mention its collective dimension:

1. The international database Disney Media Center, a global database whose main purpose is to order material (stories, covers, images, etc.) but whose performances remain inadequate for documentary or editorial research;
2. Kiosque Numérique, where users can browse digital editions of French publications, but which doesn’t allow for advanced searches through the indexed content;
3. PixBow, DHP’s in-house database and its main indexing tool. This database includes the possibility of editorialization with a document-scanning feature specifically designed for publishing. PixBow is a multi-entry search engine. While it is not as extensive as Inducks (indexing on PixBow is limited to French and Italian publications, whereas Inducks spans 17 countries), it is also more precise and thorough, since it offers an approximative assessment and a complete summary of each story. The database is fueled by DHP archivists;
4. A digital magazine archive launched in 2009, which provides access to the latest versions of French releases stored on DHP’s internal servers;
5. A paper archive that keeps track of every French title from the first 1920s issues onward, and most Italian titles.
6. A database managed by publishing house Egmont, where users can view a list of forthcoming releases in Scandinavian countries before placing an order.

The case of France shows different ways of engaging with Inducks and points to various degrees to which documentary work can be outsourced (or to which participative documentary work can be incorporated), even within the same publishing house. Within DHP’s Resources department, Inducks appears to coexist with the preexisting in-house indexing software, whereas other services appear to make a more extensive use of the platform, as expressed by the editor-in-chief of the “Picsou” titles (he uses Inducks for editorial research), as well as by the Editorial department at Glénat and the Publishing division at Disney Publishing Worldwide France, for whom Inducks, given the problematic performances of Disney Media Center’s in-house device, has become in both cases the sole indexing tool.

**Inducks as a professional tool**

Various implications can be derived from professionals’ regular use of Inducks, one of which is a shift in their relationship to the amateur world. Generally speaking, the platform has superseded direct contacts professionals used to have with connoisseurs of the Disney comics universe, who would provide similar additional information (“when we first started, we worked with Ulrich Schröder, an artist who provided a great deal of editorial advice”). The platform now serves as a mediating space between professionals and experts. Contacts made possible by this mediation can translate into material assistance for amateurs: lending material, financial support (“the Danish publishing house Egmont pays for the server”), sending issues to be indexed in the case of Scandinavian countries (“I know Egmont sends him the magazines, [the contributor] indexes them and works as a consultant”), or acknowledging Inducks in *Picsou Magazine* in the case of France. These different forms
of support are sometimes reciprocated by amateurs, who provide editorial consulting and send material, with dynamics varying from one country to the next.

It is also clear that the use of an external and participative documentary system is not neutral, but has rather led—more or less consciously—to an inevitable shift in professional practices and modes of production. For instance, while story annotations produced by users of the platform are not necessarily directly taken into account by publishers in their editorial choices, they nevertheless showcase certain stories or publications within the archive, and spark a visual recurrence for platform users. Just as in the past, amateurs’ concern with crediting up-to-then anonymous artists and story writers progressively worked these criteria into official indexing procedures, using an amateur catalog means accepting or, at the very least, trusting choices and reflections that lie outside the publisher’s realm: the first among which concern the referencing system (the code), with its underlying decisions about classification, inclusion, or exclusion of stories, as well as the choice of criteria that determine such operations; other indexing choices include which characters of a story are deemed worthy of being indexed; the description of the story or its summary, which can influence editorial choices; or connections made by amateurs between stories, from which narrative microcosms can emerge (see fig. 7, story no. D 2003-062, where “An Impish Bad Birthday” is connected in terms of narrative continuity with story no. D 97202, “L’agité du bocal” [The Imp and I], as well as to the cover of publication no. FC JM 2730 in terms of drawing).

Figure 7

![Story page](Inducks, screenshot, February 8, 2021.)

The professional world is no stranger to these shifts, as evidenced by repeated comments from DHP’s head of Resources and Publishing on the potential and limits of professional uses of Inducks.
Conclusion

This article has shown the different ways in which editorialization plays out on Inducks, and in which the platform channels transformations in documentary systems, paving the way for new participatory models of documentary and knowledge production. These models compel us to rethink traditional roles of the archivist and publisher as they establish new socio-professional dynamics between amateurs and professionals. Inducks has been from the onset a hybrid space born from the interplay between the work of Disney comics collectors, professionals, and semi-professionals, reflecting a collaborative rationale that predates the platform and has fostered its development. Some of the platform’s pioneering members were in fact semi-professionals or individuals with access to publishers’ documentary resources (records and paper archives), by virtue of connections forged prior to Inducks’ creation, or of professionals’ willingness to share information. The editorialization of the catalog has endowed amateur indexing with a community feel and a systematic dimension, allowing a greater number of collectors to take part in this international indexing project, and leveling documentary practices and skills. As a result, amateur practices have become easier to use by professionals as well as by collectors seeking to develop profitable activities by tapping into the documentary knowledge produced by Inducks. By facilitating contacts with publishers, the platform furthers intermediations between these two players on a variety of levels—a process heretofore unimaginable because of their diversity and geographical scattering. To a certain extent, Disney professionals have always reached out to inside and outside experts for editorial consulting, and are readily taking interest in amateur work and services provided on Inducks. But the appropriation of documentary activity by amateurs and its concentration on the platform has forced professionals to reconsider their relationship to collectors by outsourcing indexing work to various degrees, in a context where participative documentarization supplements other professional indexing practices or, in some cases, supersedes them. In addition to the workforce required to carry out traditional indexing tasks, outsourcing would also affect choices made about codes and organization, legitimizing forthcoming releases in the index, and the passing on of technical expertise relative to the digital archive to newcomers. In a professional context defined by the growing technologization of publishing (all of the publishers interviewed stated regular or frequent use of the platform for editorial purposes), using an outside tool designed for and adjusted to amateur activity is not neutral. Because of this and because of the weight of this work in the economics of the editorial process, some French publishers are still reluctant to consider the complete outsourcing of indexing tools, turning instead to solutions complementary to Inducks: in-house catalogs, systematically reporting mistakes and, in the case of Scandinavian publishers, regulating. In other contexts, the incorporation of the participatory model is being embraced in a less circumspect and more enthusiastic manner.

The centralization of a number of documentary practices and exchanges between Disney comics amateurs and professionals on the platform’s digital space has given Inducks an unprecedented mediating role between players, making these practices more collective, layered, and dynamic. As such, the convergence of interests and collective documentary endeavors afforded by its interface has led to socio-professional, informational, and documentary shifts in the relationships between collectors and
publishers, as well as in the construction and processing of documentary knowledge derived from this cultural universe. New issues pertaining to the evolution of this configuration have in turn come to light.

One of the results of these changes is the *platformization* of (pre)existing relations of reciprocity between two social worlds, insofar as their identities, respective roles, and interactions are determined by the models and expressive possibilities afforded by the participatory model. Another result is the ever-deepening *internationalization* of documentary production and the attendant “geographical” hybridization of production and production models: not only does the platform let any user access and contribute to documentary information from different countries, but models of documentary production relative to each country mutually condition each other (the model of partial incorporation of participative documentarization is interdependent with the Scandinavian model, where Egmont, by paying for Inducks’s server, promotes a deeper incorporation of participation in its system of documentary production).

Several other aspects warrant examination in the analysis of the Inducks platform, including a comparison of the French model with other main countries using the platform, such as Italy, US, Greece, Germany, Finland, Denmark, or Sweden, which all reflect different stages of evolution in the relationship between amateurs and professionals. The Scandinavian model in particular, with the publishing house Egmont financing Inducks’ server and providing systemical contributions to the platform (“it depends on the country, some have tighter connections, for instance in the Netherlands, where publishers themselves do the indexing”29), offers an interesting professional model for outsourcing indexing work and cooperating with collectors.

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NOTES

2. Telephone interview with the editor-in-chief of Disney Hachette Presse’s “Picsou” titles, conducted July 8, 2019.
4. “The purpose of this definition is not only to encompass the situation of platforms created and managed by an institution (ex: Les Herbonautes by the MNHS), but also impromptu and self-organized initiatives likely to rely on preexisting participatory media such as Wikipedia (e.g., PCI-Lab) or even Facebook (see the study of the Facebook group Patrimoine A’Laon” Tour, Istasse, 2017) or ad hoc platforms created by amateurs, as in aforementioned case of ‘1 jour 1poilu,’ where the institution is only subsequently involved,” HDR professorial thesis, Université de Lille, 2018.
9. See fig. 3.
10. The main publisher for Disney comics in France, Disney Hachette Presse (now DHP) was bought in the summer of 2019 by Unique Héritage Médias.
This article presents ongoing empirical research on the topic of Inducks, an open access, online database offering an indexing and cataloguing service of Disney comics for approximately twenty countries. Created and used by collectors and editors of the Disney comics universe, who continue to add contributions, this database is at the center of a reorganizational process regarding documentary and editorial practices related to Disney comics, and thus can be studied as an ideal space of problematization where both amateurs and professionals interact. Beginning with a cross-analysis of the various documentary practices of these two types of actors (including indexing, referencing, consultation and exchange practices) this paper questions the
documentary, editorial, and socio-professional implications surrounding the adoption of this documentary tool by professionals within the dynamics of editorialization.

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**Keywords:** amateur, participation, document, digital, editorialization, Disney

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