Wikipedian Self-Governance in Action

Motivating the Policy Lens
Wikipedian Self-Governance in Action

Motivating the Policy Lens

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Computer Science and Engineering
University of Washington

Joint with:

David W. McDonald
Information School
University of Washington
Motivate the use of socially interesting datasets
Motivate the use of socially interesting datasets

A quantitative account of policy citation practice
Consensus-based Division of work

- Viegas et al. HICSS ‘07
- Kriplean et al. GROUP ‘07
- Cosley et al. IUI ‘06
- Viegas et al. INTERACT ‘07
Introspective

Consensus-based

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- Division of work
- Introspective
- Governance

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- Non-article content
- Author activity predicts quality, controversy
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Challenges:
- temporal analysis
- generalizability

Affordances:
- nuanced data
- identify social structures

Quantitative themes

Qualitative methods
- interviews
- ethnography
- case studies
- grounded analysis

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- grounded interpretation

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- tracking micro-actions
- global level analysis

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- ethnography
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Quantitative methods
- data mining
- social network analysis
- predictive models
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Actions of individuals & formation of institutions
Quantitative studies have been...
- focused article editing practices
- overly constrained by the format of the database dump
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- focused article editing practices
- overly constrained by the format of the database dump

Thanks Ed!!!
Quantitative studies have been...
- focused article editing practices
- overly constrained by the format of the database dump

...but to understand social structure, must:
- focus on conditions of production
- content-driven, rather than edit-driven
- engage with qualitative findings
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Outline

✓ Study motivation

• Wikipedia anatomy
  - namespaces: main, talk
  - policy & governance

• Policy citation investigations

• Discussion
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Anatomy: article pages

Jimmy Wales
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Jimmy Donal "Jimbo" Wales (born 7 August 1966 in Huntsville, Alabama) is an American Internet entrepreneur known for his role in founding Wikipedia and other wiki-related projects, including the charitable Wikimedia Foundation and the for-profit company Wikia.

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   3.2 Wikia
   3.3 Media appearances and honors
4 Issues and Controversy
   4.1 Bomis
   4.2 Wikipedia biography
   4.3 Birthdate
5 Personal philosophy
6 Published work
7 References
8 External links
   8.1 Audio/Video

Personal life

Born
August 7, 1966 (age 41)
Huntsville, Alabama, U.S.

Occupation
President of Wikia, Inc.; Board member and Chair Emeritus of the Wikimedia Foundation

Spouse
Christina

Anatomy: article pages

James Wales
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

James Donal "Jimbo" Wales (born 7 August 1966[^2] in Huntsville, Alabama[^3][^4]) is an American Internet entrepreneur known for his role in founding Wikipedia[^5][^6][^7] and other wiki-related projects, including the charitable Wikimedia Foundation and the for-profit company Wikia, Inc.[^8]

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Personal life
Anatomy: talk pages

Talk: Jimmy Wales

Jimmy Wales has had a peer review by Wikipedia editors which is now archived. It may contain ideas you can use to improve this article.

This page was previously nominated for deletion.
Please see prior discussions before considering re-nomination:
- Speedy Keep, 2007-08-31, see discussion.
- Speedy Keep, 2007-08-14, see discussion.
- Keep, 2006-05-31, see discussion.

If you need to contact Jimbo about something, please do so at User talk: Jimbo Wales, not here. As Jimbo explains...

"People who are trying to leave messages for me will likely be more satisfied if they leave messages on my user talk page than if they leave them here. This is the talk page for the article about me, not a place to talk to me. I rarely read this. --Jimbo Wales 06:05, 23 August 2005 (UTC)"

This is the talk page for discussing improvements to the Jimmy Wales article.
This is not a forum for general discussion about the article's subject.
Anatomy: talk pages

**Conversation threads**

First sentence in the education section

That part I fixed yesterday in the education section is logically inconsistent. It reads like the school was donating the software to itself. It's not Jimbo's user page so I have right to fix it, right? Why has it been undone then? —greg park avenue 13:23, 23 July 2007 (UTC)

**Birthdate**

I just blogged about this —Jimbo Wales 09:34, 8 August 2007 (UTC)

Supposedly, he was born on the 8th, and Britannica also thinks its the 7th. See this blog entry from The Oregonian newspaper. Also see the previous, related blog entry about an interview with him, Ward Cunningham and the newspaper, as well as a print article, Open-source thinking. —Jason McHuff 22:49, 27 July 2007 (UTC)

It looks like a reporter from a major newspaper has reported on a public records search, confirming what I have been saying for a long time. According to my birth certificate, August 7th is not my birthdate. Perhaps someday I will produce a note from my mom for another reporter. And perhaps I will just continue to have a bit of fun with this. :) —Jimbo Wales 09:12, 8 August 2007 (UTC)

Mr. Wales has stated that his birthday is Aug. 7th, 1966. Links to these admissions can be found here and here. Also, both Current Biography and Who's Who is America list his birthday as being the 7th. 68.117.211.187 07:21, 28 July 2007 (UTC)

I hope I am not the only one who is amused that this anonymous ip number calls a discussion of my date of birth an "admission". :) Perhaps I shall next confess to having brown hair. —Jimbo Wales 18:36, 8 August 2007 (UTC)

Thanks for the links. I don't think I saw the archive of this page when I came here. I'm not seeing the first edit you link to in the page history, but the second one does seem somewhat conclusive. Its interesting, because here (at your links) he seems pretty firm that its the 7th, yet the blog post (written by a reporter for a major metro newspaper, so hopefully a reliable source) really sounds like he said that its not the 7th. Overall, it does seem that a difference of a day isn't much to worry about. —Jason McHuff
Anatomy: talk pages

Per Wikipedia policy, Wales' statement cannot be used as a source. See Wikipedia:Verifiability, "Articles and posts on Wikipedia may not be used as sources." This certainly includes statements in user space. **Quatloo (talk) 00:34, 3 March 2008 (UTC)**

We can adhere to the letter of the policy and pretend that they aren't separated, even though there is clear evidence that they are. Or, we can recognize that sentence as being a measure to prevent people from posting OR and then sourcing it elsewhere, and accept the man's statements about his life as definitive. I prefer the latter. --**Amarkov moo! 00:45, 3 March 2008 (UTC)**

There is no need to pretend anything. We can adhere to the policy by not addressing the matter, since it is not important and doesn't need to be in the encyclopedia. If it were important, there'd be a **WP:RS**. There is not. **Quatloo (talk) 01:38, 3 March 2008 (UTC)**

Also, your argument seems to be "I want this poorly sourced statement,
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Also, your argument seems to be "I want this poorly sourced statement, which violates both WP:Verifiability and WP:BLP, to remain in Wikipedia to prevent someone from possibly adding original research to the encyclopedia." I suggest that this is not a very good argument to justify a violation of policy. Quatloo (talk) 01:44, 3 March 2008 (UTC)
Anatomy: talk pages

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Also, your argument seems to be "I want this policy enforced, so I need to point out..." Structure negotiation of article content [1,2] - provide a common language and strategies of action - policies require interpretation - often enacted in power plays - similar to FAQ citations in Usenet [3]

[1] Viegas et al. HICSS ’07
Per Wikipedia policy, Wales' statement cannot be used as a source. See Wikipedia:Verifiability, "Articles and posts on Wikipedia may not be used as sources." This certainly includes statements in user space. Quatloo (talk) 00:34, 3 March 2008 (UTC)

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Anatomy: policy environment

Wikipedia: Verifiability

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

"WP:V" redirects here. For information on vandalism, see Wikipedia: Vandalism.

This page documents an official policy on the English Wikipedia. It has wide acceptance among editors and is considered a standard that all users should follow.

When editing this page, please ensure that your revision reflects consensus. When in doubt, discuss first on the talk page.

This page in a nutshell: Material challenged or likely to be challenged, and all quotations, must be attributed to a reliable, published source.

The threshold for inclusion in Wikipedia is **verifiability, not truth**. "Verifiable" in this context means that any reader should be able to check that material added to Wikipedia has already been published by a reliable source. Editors should provide a reliable source for quotations and for any material that is challenged or is likely to be challenged, or it may be removed.

**Wikipedia: Verifiability** is one of Wikipedia's core content policies. The others include Wikipedia: No original research and Wikipedia: Neutral point of view. Jointly, these policies determine the type and quality of material that is acceptable in Wikipedia articles. They should not be interpreted in isolation from one another, and editors should try to familiarize themselves with all three.

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2 Sources
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Wikipedia: Verifiability

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Material challenged or likely to be challenged, and all quotations, must be attributed to a reliable, published source.
Policy pages elaborate on strategies for applying the policy and possible exceptions.
Anatomy: policy environment

Policy is collectively authored [1,2] - not imposed top-down - consensus-driven - reflective of practice - repository of experiential knowledge

[1] Forte et al. HICSS ’08
[3] Viegas et al. HCII ’07
Anatomy: policy environment

Policy environment bounds legitimate activity
- content, behavioral, enforcement, deletion, legal
- ~40 official policies
- hundreds of less strict guidelines
- informal essays

[1] Forte et al. HICSS ’08
[3] Viegas et al. HCII ’07
Anatomy: policy environment

Embedded in a governance structure [1, 3]
- formal processes, judicial bodies, etc.
- violators of policy may be subject to sanction

[1] Forte et al. HICSS ’08
[3] Viegas et al. HCII ’07
Self-governance in action
Self-governance in action

Policy citations are a micro-macro link between everyday actions and the governance structure.

Collaborative Editing Activity

Enactment, Enforcement

Creation, Deletion, Modification

Policy Environment
Outline

✓ Study motivation
✓ Wikipedia anatomy

• Policy citation investigations
  - tracking community concerns
  - changes in community attention

• Discussion
Notes
- November 2006 dataset
- First policy citation in Jan. 2002
- Cumulative relative proportion
- Ordered vertically by total citations
- Aggregate last 150 policies/guidelines
No Original Research policy articulated on mailing list (9/03)
This page in a nutshell:

- Wikipedia does **not** publish original thought: all material in Wikipedia must be attributable to a **reliable, published source**.
- Articles may not contain any new analysis or synthesis of published material that serves to advance a position not clearly advanced by the sources.

No Original Research policy articulated on mailing list (9/03)
Governance connection #1: “stickiness” of policies
[Forte et al. HICSS ‘08]

No Original Research policy articulated on mailing list (9/03)
Biographies of Living People policy
Impact of Siegenthaler Controversy (12/05)
A false Wikipedia 'biography'

By John Seigenthaler

"John Seigenthaler Sr. was the assistant to Attorney General Robert Kennedy in the early 1960's. For a brief time, he was thought to have been directly involved in the Kennedy assassinations of both John, and his brother, Bobby. Nothing was ever proven."

— Wikipedia

This is a highly personal story about Internet character assassination. It could be your story.

I have no idea whose sick mind conceived the

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Impact of Siegenthaler Controversy (12/05)

Governance connection #2: Shift toward quality control

[Forte et al. HICSS ‘08; Viegas et al. HCII ’07]
Fraction of cumulative policy citations

Year

Top 50

Verifiability
Neutral Point of View
No Original Research
Signatures
Investigation: identifying changes in practice
Investigation: identifying changes in practice

Apply **Grounded analysis**
- interpret policies from the perspective of the community
- classify policies by probable activity surrounding a citation

**Method:**
1. read all policies
2. generate a codebook capturing range of social activity
3. code all policies with the codebook
Investigation: identifying changes in practice

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Fraction of cumulative policy citations per code

Year

Legal
Inclusion
Genre
Writing Style
Disposition
Bias
Consensus
Attribution
Factor increase of raw policy citations between 1/05 and 11/06

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>1.52</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.23</td>
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But what about aggressive policy citers?
Factor increase of registered users who have left a message on the talk page between 1/05 and 11/06: 7.5

Increase in unique citers to date:
- Attribution: 3.23
- Consensus: 9.20
- Disposition: 16.93
- Inclusion: 24.05
- Genre: 1.52
- Bias: 1.52
- Writing Style: 0.92
- Disposition: 8.04
- Inclusion: 15.14
- Genre: 0.70
- Consensus: 0.70
- Writing Style: 1.08
- Attribution: 1.00
- Consensus: 31.14
- Attribution: 19.28

Factor increase of raw citations:
- Attribution: 0.32
- Consensus: 0.92
- Disposition: 1.52
- Inclusion: 0.41
- Genre: 0.70
- Bias: 1.08
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- Attribution: 3.23
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**Unique citers to date**

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Governance connection #3: Wider participation in normative enforcement
[Forte et al. HICSS ‘08]
Conclusions

• The arrangement of institutions structures of a community
  - protection against from malicious activity (e.g. arbitration committee)
  - content evaluation (e.g. featured article process)
  - dispute resolution (e.g. requests for comment)

• Quantitative research can bridge social structure & dynamics
  - how do institutions form, evolve, and dissolve?
  - however, need to examine socially meaningful activity...

• We profiled the use of Wikipedian policy by contributors
  - only scratches the surface
  - no predictive models, etc.
Research opportunities

• Interpreting data about an evolving practice

• Transplantability of policy environment to other communities

• Tracing activities across different social spaces
  - articles + talk pages
  - talk pages + user talk pages
  - policy usage + policy authoring
Questions?

Acknowledgements:

Eytan Adar, HP’s Information Dynamics Lab (esp. Scott Golder and Bernardo Huberman)