

Future Learning Vectors: Wikipedia and educational content creation

Shobha S V | July, 2023

project context

The Wikimedia Foundation is exploring “strategies for expanding beyond existing audiences of [consumers and contributors](#).” Focusing on the creators of short-form, educational video content (e.g., “learning”-oriented videos on TikTok), this project poses the following questions:

- *How and when do Content Creators use Wikipedia in their workflows?*
- *Do they cite Wikipedia when they use it? Why or why not?*
- *Do their audiences care about attribution?*
- *Are Creators interested in contributing to or collaborating with Wikipedia or Wikimedia projects?*
- *What strategic opportunities exist for the WMF to support this process?*



project phases

This project entailed interviewing short-form, educational video Content Creators, and comprised the following stages:

1. Background conversations with WMF staff:

- Many individuals in many teams have thought about this issue. Different WMF product teams likewise have different interests, including the quality of educational content, potential partnerships with Creators, and the (largely) youth audiences understood to consume repackaged Wikipedia content in this medium.

2. Qualitative interviews with content creators:

- Following a “snowballing” recruitment method, Creators were contacted through their public profiles and invited to participate in an interview.
- Of 32 Creators initially contacted, 10 eventually completed interviews.

3. Analysis and reporting



interviewed Creators

Channel	Platform(s)	Audience	Region	Topics
Popular vlogger	YouTube	more than 10 million	South Asia	Indian political explainers
Dalit Dastak	YouTube	1.5 million	India	News for and about marginalized groups
@jdraperlondon	TikTok	630k	UK	Museum tour guide in London / History
Cheshire Jack	TikTok, Instagram	400k	UK	London history
Uncovering California	TikTok	235k	USA	California history/geography
Thulasi Chandu	YouTube	180k	India	News + commentary in Telugu
Depths of Wikipedia	TikTok, others	165k	USA	Fun / interesting articles on/about Wikipedia
@la_history_girl	TikTok	125k	USA	Los Angeles history
The World of Science	Youtube, Instagram	52k	India	Science, Astronomy
Según Yo	Youtube	9k	Bolivia	Education / History / Biography / Bolivia



emerging themes



interviewed Creators use Wikipedia extensively.

- Wikipedia is often the starting point for background research. **Article references and wikilinks** are particularly valuable during this phase of Creation. Other sources include journals, news websites, government documents, etc.
- Journalists use Wikipedia for developing stories, and especially those who work on in-depth stories.
- Non-English Content Creators nevertheless lean heavily on English Wikipedia due to the abundance of coverage.



It wouldn't be possible without Wikipedia, because much of the information that is available on Wikipedia about [my country] isn't available elsewhere . . . what I use the most are the sources and the links. — interviewed Creator



Commons is also widely used, but it's hard to search.

- Creators access Commons frequently to source images used in educational content, regardless of the genre of production.
- Creators often make a living from their labor—license-free images are extremely valuable for Creators who monetize their content.
- Commons remains difficult to search, especially in the quest for non-English content—individual files are often accessed following an initial Google search.
- Creators with specialized niches are very aware of content gaps—world, European, and North-American topics are well covered, but Bolivian topics remain sparsely illustrated, for example.



“

Since the beginning of my career, I have been using Wikipedia for my stories and information gatherings every day.

”

- interviewed Content Creator



Creators aren't really interested in directly contributing to Wikipedia.

After all, many of them are creating content in order to earn a living.

Most interviewed Creators are unfamiliar with the mechanisms of editing.

- Some Creators have edited, but their video content creation is now prioritized.
- A few wanted to know how to edit their own biographical articles.

Most have had no contact with local editor or affiliate groups,

- with the exceptions of *Depths of Wikipedia* (for obvious reasons) and *Según Yo*, which has collaborated with the Bolivian WMF affiliate to make [videos about how Wikipedia works](#).
- Creators were generally receptive to the idea of contributing to Wikipedia *if* there were sufficient incentives in place, such as fellowships or monetary compensation.



some Creators acknowledge Wikipedia in their sources or bibliography.

Different genres of production have different audience expectations in terms of information accuracy, author reliability, and author credibility.

- History-oriented Creators, for example, often include the research process in the content being shared. Such videos often include a ‘sources’ or ‘bibliography’ section, in which it is quite common to acknowledge accessing Wikipedia or Wikimedia Commons.
 - Some creators leave Wikipedia out of their video content, but acknowledge its use or include article links in their written documentation (e.g., blogs).
- Audience expectations of seeing the research process are less prominent in other genres of production, and Creators in these spaces may see less incentive to acknowledge Wikipedia as a source if their audiences aren’t interested in it.



“

Very few people go into the description and check where the information has come from. Only the geeky viewers really care. They care enough to go through the description . . . checking where the information comes from and going through each source. We can see that through the kind of analytics that we have.

”

- interviewed educational Content Creator



audiences care if the *Creator* is accurate.

Consistently accurate information is key to building audience trust.

- Creators are highly attuned to feedback from their audience—they are often doing this for a living, after all!
- Creators are generally able to recount times in which their audience has pointed out mistakes or oversights, including via their videos' comments and direct emails.
- Accuracy is a key component of credibility, which itself is central to audience trust in the educational content space.



about the “Wikipedia stigma”

Creators emerged from their education like everyone else—having heard that *you can’t trust Wikipedia because anyone can edit it!*

- In certain markets such as India, the Wikipedia project itself can also be associated with negative social values—Hindu right-wing activists sometimes describe Wikipedia as “anti-national”, for example.
- Acknowledging the use of Wikipedia as a source for a video about a “serious” issue may represent an unnecessary brand risk for some Creators, depending on the expectations of their audience.
 - One interviewed Creator stated that they would be wary of sharing with audiences the full extent of their use of Wikipedia.

For Creators who work on sensitive issues, or who produce content that challenges hegemonic narratives, issues of credibility are of the utmost importance and can even carry real-world, offline security implications.



“
I feel that [my audience] would get a sense that the quality is not high enough or professional enough.”

- interviewed Content Creator



acknowledging Wikipedia use can offer more risk than reward.

Perception of stigma: Creators are as aware of the stigma as anyone else. If acknowledging Wikipedia threatens their relationship of trust with their audience, they will be reluctant to do so.

No copyright concerns: Creators feel direct and indirect pressure to acknowledge use of other platforms and sources, but they generally don't feel such pressure when using Wikipedia.

Commons is typically acknowledged when used as the source of visuals, but this attribution is generally in response to perceived social/legal pressure. The mechanics of Commons or the Commons community aren't the focus of acknowledgement.

Not all audiences care: Showing sources helps to demystify the research process and build Creator credibility and legitimacy, but audiences may only care about this in certain genres (e.g., history videos).



opportunity areas for the WMF

Creators generally aren't Wikimedians, but they're transparent with their audiences.

Creators may have a lot to learn about Wikimedia projects, communities, and accuracy mechanisms. If they have an opportunity to learn, though, some of this learning will be transmitted to audiences, especially for Creators in genres where the research process forms part of the content.

Possible routes of collaboration with the WMF:

- Invite Creators/infotainment influencers to WMF-sponsored events such as Wikimania and regional conferences.
- Sponsor IRL Creator meetups, similar to influencer-oriented campaigns organized by YouTube and Meta.
- Invite Creators from specific markets to produce content for relevant Wiki Education projects or local WMF affiliates.
- A fellowship for individual Creators of educational content, journalistic content, or related genres to produce content sourced from Wikimedia projects.



appendix



further reading

- [Future Audiences bucket](#)
- [FY23-24 OKRs](#)^[WMF login]
- [TikTok Working Group Intro](#)
- [Future Audiences - Design sprint](#)
- [2020 study of between-language differences in Wikipedia knowledge networks accessed by learners \(Mehler et al.\)](#)
- [2021 study of the online learning landscape \(Kross et al.\)](#)
- [*Wikipedia in the Wild*](#)



Creator spotlight: [jdraperlondon](#)

Created account while studying for guiding qualification exams during 2020 lockdown.

Approach to sources: strives for accuracy in content; uses reliable sources (books, Archive.org, etc.). Shows audience the research process.

Content style: casual, storytelling, accessible.

Audience insights: mostly teenagers, UK and international viewers.

Other platforms: longer-form videos uploaded to YouTube. Currently migrating content to Youtube for accessibility.

Use of Wikimedia projects:

- Wikipedia used early in research process—used with caution and verification of sources.
- Commons used extensively as source of images.
- Copyright-free images preferred for channel monetization.
- Attribution typically given to sources cited in Wikipedia, but not to Wikipedia itself.



jdraperlondon

Follow

Message



228 posts

11.4K followers

323 following

Jenny Draper

Tour guide and TikTokker. Finding something new in London every day!

📍 [linktr.ee/jdraperlondon](#)

POSTS

REELS

TAGGED



Creator spotlight: [la_history_girl | Malia Miglino](#)



la_history_girl

MALIA MIGLINO | HISTORY | TRAVEL

Follow

286 Following 127.3K Followers 1.8M Likes

History & Travel
Victorian Homes

Inquiries 

maliamiglino@gmail.com

 linktr.ee/maliamiglino

Uses Wikipedia for research, often comparing article content to external sources.

Primary sources: newspaper archives, birth/death records, local historical societies, libraries, etc.

Content style: concise and digestible; uses conversational and humorous tone; makes content relatable; mixes visuals and narration.

Audience insights: diverse and broad audience on TikTok. Viewers are curious and interested in learning.

Screenshot of TikTok profile created on 7/27/23.



Creator spotlight: Uncovering California



The image shows a screenshot of a TikTok profile for 'uncoveringcalifornia'. The profile picture is a green circle with a map of California and the text 'UNCOVERING CALIFORNIA'. The name 'uncoveringcalifornia' is in bold black text, with 'Uncovering California' below it. A red 'Follow' button is visible. The profile statistics are: 227 Following, 235.4K Followers, and 3.4M Likes. The bio reads: 'It's a huge state. We're explaining it.' followed by an email address 'info@uncoveringca.com', a 'Support us!' link with a blue arrow icon, and a Linktree link 'linktr.ee/uncoveringcalifornia'. At the bottom, there are tabs for 'Videos' and 'Liked'.

uncoveringcalifornia
Uncovering California

Follow

227 Following 235.4K Followers 3.4M Likes

It's a huge state.
We're explaining it.
✉: info@uncoveringca.com
Support us! [👉](#)
linktr.ee/uncoveringcalifornia

Videos  Liked

Screenshot of TikTok profile created on 7/27/23.

Uses Wikipedia for research, looking up topics mentioned in the news. Starting point to find information on many topics. Commons to source images used in videos.

Attribution: doesn't typically cite Wikipedia, but cites sources located via Wikipedia.

Content style: visually appealing and engaging; concise narration; real-world examples; collaboration with other Creators.

Audience insights: mostly from California, slight male majority. Broad age range. TikTok and Instagram. Corrections originate in audience.



Creator spotlight: Según Yo

Uses Wikipedia for initial research, looking for overviews and accessing references.

Attribution: cites wikipedia when it's accessed. Aware of educational stigma, but also aware that videos are used by Bolivian instructors in classroom settings—videos include “comprehensive” bibliography to benefit viewers and instructors who may use the videos in instruction.

Content style: fun and enjoyable, drawing on pop culture, youthful language, and flashy visuals.

Audience insights: diverse audience. Content originally intended for Bolivian teens, but actual audience is much broader. In response, attribution and research process are highlighted directly in videos.

