HOW TO MEASURE A GIANT SQUID AND OTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT WIKIPEDIA’S QUALITY
CONTENT QUALITY HAS BEEN A KEY FACTOR FOR WIKIPEDIA’S SUCCESS
18 YEARS OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT...

▶ Today, our readers trust the quality of our content to an extent that they deem Wikipedia a useful tool

▶ That wasn’t the case in the early days of our project at all...
THE USER WHO VISITS WIKIPEDIA [. . .] IS IN THE POSITION OF A VISITOR TO A PUBLIC RESTROOM. IT MAY BE OBVIOUSLY DIRTY, SO THAT HE KNOWS TO EXERCISE GREAT CARE, OR IT MAY SEEM FAIRLY CLEAN, SO THAT HE MAY BE LULLED INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY. WHAT HE CERTAINLY DOES NOT KNOW IS WHO HAS USED THE FACILITIES BEFORE HIM.

SICK MAN STRANDED ON THE TOILET AFTER TAKING A LAXATIVE
J. SNEYD AFTER J. GILLRAY, 1804
THE GOOD AND THE BAD

- Content quality increased to a degree that millions of readers perceive Wikipedia as one of the most useful and trustworthy sources of information on the web.

- If we ever were to lose the readers’ trust in the reliability of our content, Wikipedia’s right to exist would be jeopardized.
DON’T PANIC. GIVEN WIKIPEDIA’S ENORMOUS POPULARITY IT SEEMS LIKE WE’RE GETTING MORE THINGS RIGHT THAN WRONG ABOUT QUALITY
WE ALL KNOW EXAMPLES OF BAD PRESS

- While the number of people being skeptical about the open and collaborative nature of Wikipedia might have decreased, the encyclopedia keeps being scrutinized by outsiders - we all know scores of press articles highlighting Wikipedia’s shortcomings.
ALLEGORIA DEL TRIONFO DI VENERE (DETAIL)
ANGELO BRONZINO, 16TH CENTURY
OUR MECHANISMS WORK

- Overall, our projects’ many mechanisms of improving quality have proven to be effective to a point that “looking something up on Wikipedia” has become a daily part of people’s lives.
EXAGGERATED REQUIREMENTS PROHIBIT TOP QUALITY CONTENT FROM EMERGING
POŽREŠNOST
HINKO SMREKAR, 1927
TOO MUCH CAN BE TOO MUCH

» Featured content candidacies play a vital role in achieving the highest level of accuracy and readability and set examples for others to follow

» However, when contributors of high quality content lose their belief that they can get an article or an image to be “featured”, they tend to lose their motivation
A CONTENTIOUS WORKING ATMOSPHERE AND A CULTURE OF REVERTING RATHER THAN FIXING DETER US FROM ACHIEVING THE QUALITY GROWTH THAT OUR READERS DESERVE
DE VIJF ZINTUIGEN: HET GEVOEL
JAN MIENSE MOLENAAR, 1637
Personal attacks and online harassment have a negative effect on improving the quality of Wikipedia’s content.

A culture of reverting rather than fixing keep us from attracting new contributors.
“QUALITY IMPROVES BY ITSELF” IS ONLY HALF THE TRUTH AT BEST
"Qualität entsteht auch von alleine"

"QUALITY IMPROVES BY ITSELF SOMEHOW"
USER:SANSCULOTTE, 2005 (CC BY-SA)
HALF THE TRUTH AT BEST

▶ Wikipedia’s quality improved in a striking way over the past 18 years

▶ However, Wikipedians only work on topics that they find most interesting. The resulting gaps can only be filled by recruiting new contributors who are interested in improving Wikipedia’s coverage and depth in their own field of expertise
WE NEED BETTER TOOLS AND METHODS TO MEASURE CONTENT QUALITY, EVEN IF CERTAIN ASPECTS OF QUALITY ARE HARD TO QUANTIFY
NORWEGIAN SCIENTISTS MEASURING A GIANT SQUID
NTNU VITENSKAPSMUSEET, 1954
HOW DO YOU MEASURE A GIANT SQUID?

- We have a very limited understanding of the overall quality of our content.
- While we succeeded at counting words or the number of references in an article, we struggle (and most likely will continue to struggle) with developing automated ways of measuring quality indicators like “elegance of language” and “focus on the essentials of a topic”.
There’s no better way of ensuring Wikipedia’s quality in the long run than keeping the existing producers and curators of content engaged and happy.
A TINY FRACTION

- Wikipedians are a very special breed and only a tiny fraction of the world’s population will ever be eager to contribute to our encyclopedia in an ongoing fashion.

- Dedicated support for our existing community of editors will play a vital role in the advancement of our mission.
Content quality has been a key factor for Wikipedia’s success

Don’t panic. Given Wikipedia’s enormous popularity it seems like we’re getting more things right than wrong about quality

Exaggerated requirements prohibit top quality content from emerging

A contentious working atmosphere and a culture of reverting rather than fixing deter us from achieving the quality growth that our readers deserve

“Quality improves by itself” is only half the truth at best

We need better tools and methods to measure content quality, even if certain aspects of quality are hard to quantify

There’s no better way of ensuring Wikipedia’s quality in the long run than keeping the existing producers and curators of content engaged and happy