Why the academic world still does not trust Wikipedia and how can trust be increased?

https://w.wiki/ejN

Prof. Dariusz Jemielniak, Ph.D.
Chair of MINDS (Management in Networked and Digital Societies), Kozminski University
Faculty associate Berkman-Klein Center for Internet and Society, Harvard University

WMF Board of Trustees member (but speaking in personal capacity only!)
Why don't scholars use Wikipedia more?
Is Wikipedia reliable?

- 2005 Nature study
- many other studies since (with mixed results)
- complex problem: multiple versions, topics, knowledge standards
- nevertheless, the numbers speak for themselves: Wikipedia is reliable enough
- research also shows that Wikipedia shapes academic language (even if they deny using it)
Merton (1938) ideal of "organized scepticism"

Scientific claims should be exposed to critical scrutiny, one should be able to check them independently.

https://w.wiki/efV
Some academics embrace Wikipedia

- American Psychological Association,
- Association for Psychological Science,
- great work by WikiEd Foundation...
And yet, most don't.

One of the main reasons is the PERCEIVED unreliability.
Why is Wikipedia perceived as not reliable?

- anyone can edit
- it does no longer happen
- openly editable
- not peer-reviewed
- everyone can edit
- it's easy to find errors
- 'unreviewed'
- from commoners
- lots of low quality
- everybody can edit
- anybody can edit
- no authorship
Common academic misconceptions:

- association with plagiarism,
- misunderstanding the continuous release approach,
- historic bias,
- lack of credentials,
- distributed authorship.
Yet, Wikipedia's image is also tarnished by some actual errors.
What type of errors deters scholars most?

- Stub-stage errors: 1
- Factual omissions: 5
- Types: 0
- Vandalisms: 3
- PR edits: 1
- Malicious disinformation: 0
- Non-academic sources: 7
- Inconsistent language: 0
- Systemic bias: 1
Traditional encyclopedias are prone to other errors

→ outdated information,
→ expert bias,
→ lack of transparency in sources,
→ lack of correction possibilities.
Real problems:

- blatant vandalisms undermine the overall perception of quality,
- misunderstanding how Wikipedia works makes it difficult to trust it,
- knowledge gate-keeping is related to power, which academics used to wield,
- Wikipedians notoriously don’t recognize credentials, just street cred, almost as if Wikipedia was a RPG.
What can Wikipedia teach best in the classroom?
Why Is Wikipedia a perfect classroom tool?

- It teaches synthesis and critical thinking,
- It saves professor's time on plagiarism checks,
- It teaches scientific reasoning and using reliable sources,
- It is a knowledge solidarity tax – an informational Robin Hood,
- Student essays don’t end in a shredder but serve billions,
- Writing for the general public is a powerful motivator,
- It minimizes the ego, teaches dispassionate argumentation.
Let's welcome academics in Wiki worlds

- acknowledge, not diminish their fears and misconceptions,
- engage projects in overseeing classroom use,
- provide more specific support to newcomer professors and students,
- possibly even, engage Wikimedians in grading!
Related sources:

→ Bridging the Gap Between Wikipedia and Academia: bit.ly/Wik-bridge
Questions? Comments? Insults?

0 questions
0 upvotes