

USABILITY REPORT: WIKISTORIES

A collaboration between Qhala and Wikimedia Foundation

INTRODUCTION

The Qhala team in collaboration with Wikimedia Foundation ran several usability tests on the [Wikistories prototype](#). This was in a bid to gauge the usability and attractiveness of the concept with potential users from outside of the Wikipedia editor communities.

SUMMARY

After thorough research activities on the ground in several cities in Kenya and South Africa, it was generally accepted that there were few differences in the interactions with the prototype across the three different countries.

The usability sessions were conducted with two key group representatives, i.e creators and consumers. It was noted during the sessions that the contributors had challenges navigating through the platform while consumers could easily interact with Wikistories and take up information without too much trouble.

This report presents the detailed research findings and design recommendations for improving the Wikistories platform with a bias towards the three countries representing creator and consumer markets within Africa.

APPROACH

Goal of the Study

The goal of the Wikimedia project was to gauge whether the envisioned Wikistories media would be able to attract, engage and retain new users by increasing the creation and consumption of content using a short story format. In partnership with the Qhala team, usability testing sessions were conducted within seven(7) cities in three African countries, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

The usability testing sessions helped to understand how real world users would potentially interact with the Wikistories platform. The aim was to gather information on usability issues to help improve the platform design with focus on the design, functions and features of Wikistories.

The Qhala team focused on three(3) questions:

1. Was the Wikistories platform accomplishing the tasks it had been created for?
2. How easy or difficult was it to use the platform?
3. What did users think about the look and feel of the platform?

The usability sessions were performed by interacting with the Wikistories prototype provided by the Wikimedia team to the Qhala team.

Research Activities

The Qhala team recruited 96 participants, both male and female across seven cities/towns in three African countries;

1. Kenya (Nairobi, Nakuru and Kajiado)
2. Nigeria (Lagos and Abuja)
3. South Africa (Cape town and Johannesburg)

These participants represented both content creators and content consumers. We had a total of 49 content creators and 47 content consumers. These participants also had different industrial backgrounds as illustrated below:

| Country | City | Creators | | Consumers | |
|-----------|----------------|----------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Nigeria | Lagos | (F)2 | (M) 6 | (F) 4 | (M) 4 |
| | Abuja | (F)1 | (M) 7 | (F)4 | (M)4 |
| Kenya | Nairobi | (F) 7 | (M) 2 | (F) 3 | (M) 5 |
| | Nakuru/kajiado | (F) 0 | (M) 7 | (F)4 | (M) 4 |
| S. Africa | Cape Town | (F)7 | (M) 1 | (F)5 | (M) 3 |
| | Johannesburg | (F) 2 | (M) 6 | (F) 5 | (M) 3 |

Distribution of participants and genders across the three countries

| Sector | Creators | Consumers |
|---------------------|----------|-----------|
| Agriculture | 4 | 4 |
| Law | 1 | 3 |
| Academia | 11 | 0 |
| Health | 3 | 0 |
| Entertainment | 1 | 4 |
| Fashion & lifestyle | 10 | 5 |
| Religious | 4 | 4 |
| Entrepreneur | 3 | 5 |
| Fitness | 1 | 0 |
| Theatre | 5 | 0 |
| Media | 3 | 0 |
| Photography | 2 | 0 |
| Bloggers | 2 | 0 |
| Technology | 0 | 3 |

Distribution of participants by sector

49% of participants across the three countries were between the ages of 20 - 30 years as shown in the table below:

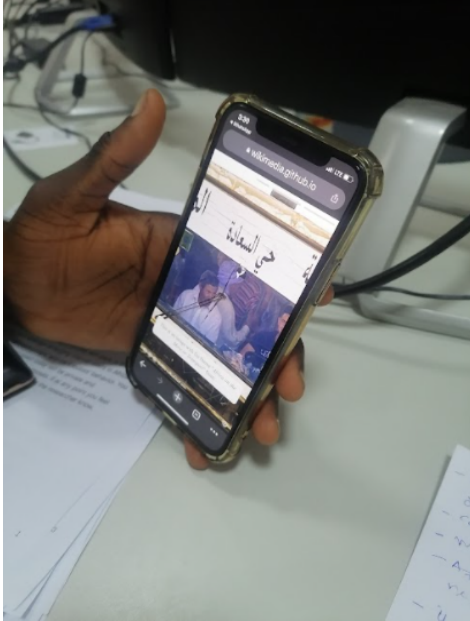
| Age Bracket | Creators | Consumers |
|--------------|----------|-----------|
| 18-20 | 1 | 3 |
| 21-30 | 23 | 24 |
| 31-40 | 19 | 12 |
| 41-50 | 4 | 5 |
| 51-60 | 0 | 2 |
| 61 and above | 1 | 2 |

Methodology

The research activities started with qualitative one on one interview sessions. These were discovery interview sessions meant to establish a foundation on participants' thoughts and experiences with social media. After the interviews were conducted the participants would be given a short break and then requested to participate in the usability testing session.

For the usability sessions, the participants were given guided tasks that they performed while providing instant feedback through think-aloud i.e talking through what they were doing, what they expected to happen and voicing any challenges they experienced while interacting with the prototype.

All sessions were conducted in person except for one (1) session in Cape Town where a virtual session had to be conducted due to covid restrictions.



A participant's phone during the usability testing session.

RESULTS

The insights herewith are shared on a screen-by-screen perspective based on the participants' interactions with the prototype. The information is based on their initial reactions, whether positive or challenging based on the tasks assigned to them to accomplish.

Content Contributors

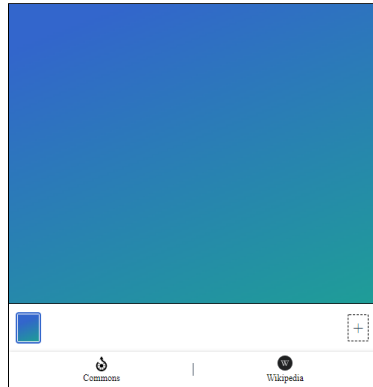
This group of participants was made up of persons who already actively create content for their target audiences. They received the prototype link and their main task was to try and create a Wikistory for an audience.

The tasks that the contributors had to accomplish were:

- Create a wikistory about Pilau
- Create a wikistory about Nelson Mandela
- They also had a chance to create a third Wikistory based on their own interests. This third task was to push for individual interests while also opening up discovery to issues that may naturally arise as the participants interacted with the prototype.

There were additional questions that participants answered. The tasks and follow up interview questions can be found in the complete usability guide used by the research assistants..

Landing page



When the contributors opened the Wikistories prototype, the first thing they saw was a blue screen. The screen is in no way intuitive and was largely confusing for the majority of them. In trying to understand how to start creating a story, participants initially tapped on the plus(+) button which consecutively led to creation of multiple blank blue pages. By the time participants figured out what was happening they would run into a second challenge of trying to delete the extra pages and start over again which was impossible, i.e deleting the pages.

*“...Um the blue bit, I didn't understand that. The button definitely could be more improved. Um, yeah, **there's like no text showing you anything what's actually happening. If somebody showed me that I couldn't do anything with it. Because it doesn't have any call to action.**” Participant CPT005*

The participants would then be guided by the research assistants on to carry out the various tasks as earlier outlined using either the Commons or Wikimedia links to create a story. The tasks were: Creating a wikistory about pilau (a rice dish), another wikistory about Nelson Mandela and finally a wikistory using a topic of their own choosing.

Selecting images and text from Commons



It is important to note that 98% of participants were not familiar with what Commons was.

“No idea what the Commons link was. I think maybe I wanted to, I wanted to press on it, but I wasn't sure what to use.” Participant CPT003

However, despite the lack of familiarity with Commons, all participants were easily able to interact with it, searching for images and creating stories.

There were some challenges experienced while creating the stories and these are:

- a. **Selecting multiple images:** It is impossible to select only one image and use that to create a story. One has to select a minimum of two(2) images before they can move further in their creative process. This is challenging in a scenario where one would want to create using only one image.
- b. **Difficulty viewing images:** After images are selected, they automatically have captions on them explaining what the image is. However, these captions overlap on the chosen images and where the caption is long it would tend to cover almost the entire image making it difficult to view the image.

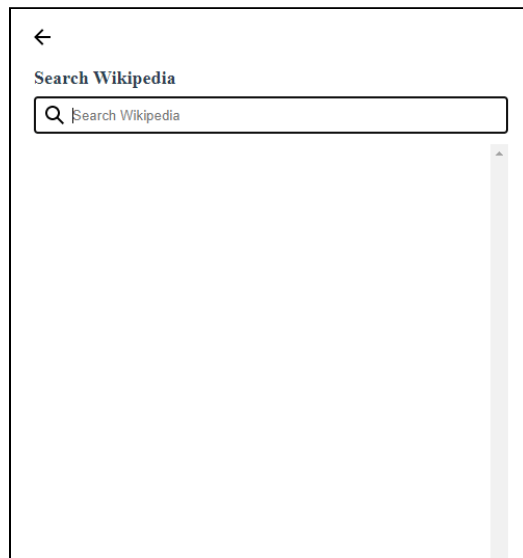
It was also impossible to edit the captions to make them shorter and also move their placement to below or beside the images to make them easier to view.

*“...Like kind of what you can do with the other sites is **with the image if I was able to zoom out a bit, and I could move with information, text wise, that would be nice.**” Participant CPT002*

- c. **Titles:** An untitled story cannot be published. All stories had to have titles on them. The contributor participants shared that this wouldn't necessarily work in the real world as most short story formats do not need titles.

*“...what I would prefer is maybe different texts about the topic and then on the add, **maybe I can edit that text and post it to story.**” Participant AB007*

Selecting content from Wikipedia



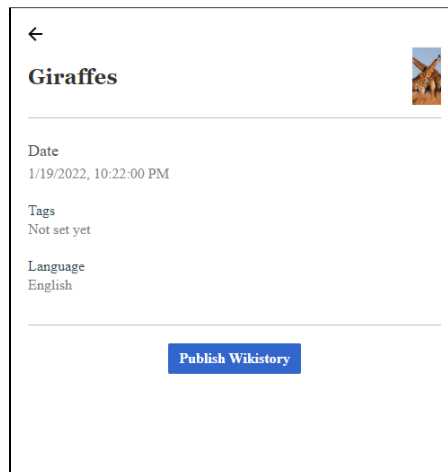
All participants had difficulty using the Wikipedia link to create a story and had to be prompted and assisted by the research teams in order to accomplish the task. In fact, one of the forty nine(49) participants was completely unable to create a story even with assistance from the research assistant.

Participants had initial difficulties navigating through the Wikipedia link; these were lack of results for some of their chosen topics i.e the search options were limited and they also experienced inability to choose only small bits of information or text to add to their story. After overcoming these initial challenges that they encountered they went on to share other challenges they encountered.

These challenges were:

- a. **Long load time for searched articles:** Participants had expectations of their searches yielding results within 10 seconds after tapping the search button. However, the load time would take longer than expected with load time up to 60 seconds. This was quite frustrating for participants. This challenge was, however, fixed before the time of publishing this report.
- b. **Lack of feedback for failed searches:** For instances where a participant searched for something and it was missing from Wikimedia, the platform did not display any details to communicate this. Participants would try several times to reload and search for the same thing assuming it was just taking time before realizing that the information they were searching for was unavailable on the platform. This created a sense of frustration for participants from time wasted.
- c. **Loss of stories:** Anytime a participant would refresh their pages or try building on their stories by trying to incorporate information sourced from the Commons link, everything they had created using Wikimedia would automatically get deleted.
- d. **Text highlighting:** When tasked with highlighting any interesting sentence or paragraph to use for their story, the participants would easily highlight something but they would get confused after tapping on the “highlight” tab because the platform would prompt them to choose an image. After choosing an image which they felt wasn’t necessary, a page would be created with the highlighted text overlapping on the image. Content creators felt this was unnecessary as there would be instances where they probably would need to only share text stories without necessarily having an image in the background. However, this is not a very common occurrence. This may happen in instances where a creator may want to share a quick opinion or statement, ask choice questions or have a question box they want filled in by their audiences as is sometimes done on the Instagram platform.

Preview page



This is the page where participants would be able to view their stories before publishing them. As a preview page it didn't meet expectations. The challenges experienced were:

- a. **Inability to save story drafts:** First and foremost, participants noticed that they could not save story drafts. In the real world content creators do not usually publish all their content immediately after creating it. Sometimes they save drafts and release the content based on their personal release calendars. Not being able to save drafts was a key pain point for the participants. In reality, creators shared that they either have pre-planned content or spontaneous content that they share on the spot when experiencing interesting events.
- b. **Tags and languages:** It was also impossible to add tags to the stories and change or edit languages.
- c. **Titles:** Every story created had to have a title. This was a nuisance as generally not every information shared in a short story format needs to have a title.

Story sharing

Content creators and generally consumers too like sharing information they come across the internet that they think is interesting. They will normally share this with their friends and family members. Sharing is usually done via other social media platforms like Whatsapp, Twitter, Facebook, Slack, Google amongst others. On the

Wikimedia and Commons links participants did not find the sharing aspect easy and intuitive for them to accomplish.

Creators would also like their content to be attributed to them.

*“...It will attract more user because people would want to like to associate with others. Old Wikipedia is not a go to platform because people can’t see who wrote the content. Nothing there points to the owner, **people wants to be appreciated.**” Participant LAG002*

Assumptions and Misconceptions

a. Media

Participants assumed that they would be able to personalize the stories by uploading their own media from their individual galleries. This media would most likely be photos or videos. However, this function is currently unavailable on the platform.

*“For example if am a creating a video of my village **I should be able to drop and drag images, icons and add voice**, basically feature for presentation.”
Participant LAG002*

b. Text

There was also an assumption that one could type their own text as part of the stories created and share this information together with one sourced through Wikimedia. This is also currently impossible.

c. Plagiarism

A participant was worried about plagiarism. Their worry was if copying and pasting information from Wikipedia to create a Wikistory would be considered plagiarism.

*“But if I was writing a story **I wouldn't copy and paste it. That's plagiarism...**”
Participant CPT005*

Um, look, I think it's cool. You can add like the images and just copy and paste. But a lot of nano influencers create their own stuff. And you can't necessarily just use someone else's. Participant CPT005

Contributor Recommendations

As part of improvements that could be made to the platform to make it easier to adapt and take up by content creators, the following recommendations are advanced:

| Theme | Suggestions |
|----------------------------|--|
| User Intuition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create guides or tutorials for new users: This would be useful for new users to enable them to understand how to navigate through the Wikistories platform. Useful tips and tricks could be shared in short bite size sentences. Video tutorials are an option that can be considered. Optional text pop-up tutorials and chatbots are other styles that can be considered. |
| Navigation and Forgiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Addition of navigation features: Having additional navigation features on the different pages would make it easier for users to easily adapt to interacting and moving through the different pages. Some suggested features are forward and back arrows. ● The ability to delete unwanted pages and text would also be useful to users. |
| Feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feedback on failed searches: This would be an important addition to the platform. A phrase like, “<i>your search did not match any document/information</i>” would be useful in reducing frustrations and saving on time for users. ● Suggesting similar keywords to the initially |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <p>searched information would be helpful in scenarios where a user has used a wrong spelling in the search bar.</p> |
| <p>Customization and Personalization</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Having the ability to upload individual media like images and videos would be an added advantage for creators. ● The possibility of typing and sharing own text within the platform would also be appreciated by content creator users. |
| <p>Sharing Information</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure it's intuitive and easy to share stories across different platforms: In the connected world that we're currently living in, users want to have the ability to share information quickly and easily across multiple platforms. Having intuitive hamburger icon buttons with a share option is recommended. ● Enable rights and acknowledgement to content created & shared: For content creators it is important that they receive acknowledgement for their work especially when it is shared. For Wikistories especially, users would want it made possible that all their works easily portray who the creators are. This could be in the form of watermarks with their unique identifiers like names whether real or pseudos used for creation purposes. |

Content Consumers

This group of participants was made up of persons who already actively consume content. They were actively using various social media platforms like Youtube, Whatsapp, Instagram, Tiktok and Facebook. One participant from Cape Town was an avid gamer and was familiar with Discord which is still catching on in Africa. Participants also mentioned other video content platforms like Netflix and Flixtide for entertainment purposes. Sixty percent (60%) of the participants mentioned using their

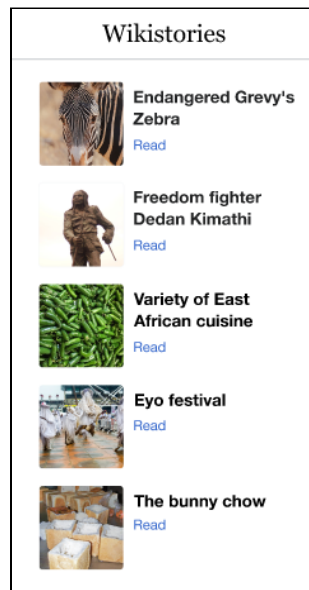
phones to access these social media and other such platforms that require an internet connection.

The participants received the prototype link and their main task was to try and read stories on Wikistories as listed below:

- Read the endangered Grevy's zebra wikistory,
- Read the bunny chow wikistory, and finally.
- Participants were asked to access a wikistory of their choice.

There were follow up questions after performing these tasks and they can be accessed on the complete consumer usability guide.

Homepage



This page was intuitive enough for participants to easily navigate and choose a story to read. All participants were able to navigate through and read the stories requested of them. These stories were the Grevy's zebra wikistory, about bunny chow and finally the option of choosing a story of their liking.

Story pages/Layout

As the participants read through the different pages of the assigned stories they noticed that the background images were not static but were moving from left to right.

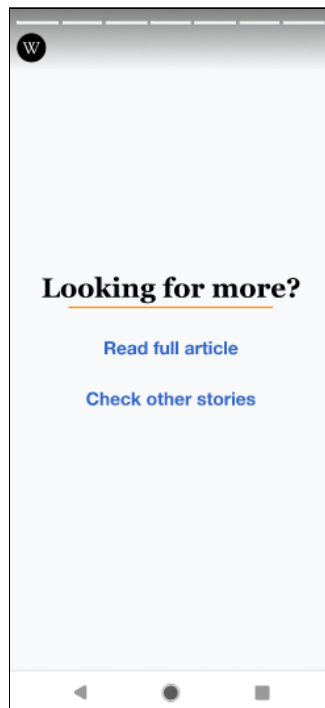
This was a major issue with the majority preferring to do away with the moving background images. The main pain point was that the background image movements were distracting.

*“...I didn't like it (moving images). **It's just distracting.** Yeah, **distracts from the text.** And there's really too much text. Okay. Yeah, I think you can either be like a still. So picture of the zebra or whatever, with a bit of text. Or it can be like a live action video of zebras running in the wild...” Participant CPT006*

*“...Its moving slowly. **There are some information we cannot see.**” Participant LAG002*

Despite this participants easily moved from one page to another until they finished reading the stories.

Read more page



Read full article: The option to read a more detailed version of the short stories was welcomed by some of the participants. This is because in a scenario where someone has gone through the short story and gains interest to learn more they could easily tap

on this option and get to read a full version article. However, participants were not inclined to open the full article as they assumed it would lead to a long article.

*“...it’s not just about the picture. The picture would attract you, so **I know this is to take me to Wikipedia page or a long read.**” Participant LAG002*

Check other stories: This option ended up being confusing for the majority as they assumed that this option would lead them to other story options related to what they had just read. However, this linked them back to the homepage that had totally different story options from what they had just read.

*“.. **I never had an idea it will take me back to main page, it looks like it will take me to end and give me more links.** It doesn't sound like it will take me to main page..” Participant LAG 001*

Generally, across the three countries all participants could navigate easily through the stories. There was an appreciation for the short story format which would be useful in learning new information quickly and easily with the option to go deeper into a topic of interest. Despite this there were a few challenges that participants brought up:

- a. **Images overlapped by text:** All images within the stories had text on them. On some pages where they were text heavy the images could barely be seen.
- b. **Inability to change visual themes:** It was noted that for visually challenged persons they would be unable to edit the themes to their light preferences.
- c. **Inability to exit stories halfway:** In a scenario where one is not interested in the content chosen and wishes to exit all the pages run through, it is impossible to do so. One has to wait out for the whole story to run through and then get the option that links back to the homepage.

*“ ..like from here, so **I have to get to the end of the transition before I can go back to the main screen...I cant even get back, from this last slide I can't get back to the first slide, that's not good..**” Participant LAG001*

- d. **Limited “top stories” on the homepage:** The homepage only had a total of five(5) stories. Participants would have liked to see more options available to them. However, as this was a prototype to gauge the usability of the platform this can be remedied in the future when Wikistories becomes a fully fledged platform.

Consumer Recommendations

As part of improvements that could be made to the platform to make it easier to adapt and take up by content consumers, the following recommendations are advanced:

| Theme | Suggestions |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Homepage and Exploration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Addition of a search feature on the homepage. Currently there is no search bar making it impossible for a user to search for stories they are interested in. This would become a problem when the platform has multiple stories on it. It will be tedious scrolling up or down until a user gets to an interesting topic. ● Multiple “top” stories on the homepage: This will be advantageous once the platform goes live as it’s another way of enticing potential consumers to start using Wikistories for their informational needs. |
| Categories and Themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Having categories or themes of different stories that users can choose from would be an added benefit to the platform. Two major categories to classify the stories under would be entertainment and educational categories. |
| Displays | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enabling light and dark themes on the Wikistories makes it easier for visually challenged users to comfortably choose and use the lighting that works for them. ● Generally, the ability to choose a visual theme makes it comfortable for readers/consumers to enjoyably interact with the platform whether |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| | during daylight or nighttime. |
| Images and Texts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Images and texts should be separated: For stories where images are necessary as part of the content, it should be made possible to have the text beneath, on top or besides the images. This would make it easier for users to enjoy both the images and still read the text aligning with the images. |
| Multimedia Options | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Additional media types like videos, GIFs, podcast previews etc can also be enabled on the platform. Variety will always attract users. |

NOTABLE TRENDS TO CONSIDER

Consumers and creators alike have shifted their preferences towards ‘new’ digital media channels as compared to more traditional forms of media such as TV, print and radio. This shows that the Wikistories platform is playing in an increasingly attractive space and especially with new efforts being directed towards the African space. Some of the trends in the digital space that Wikistories can align with are:

1. Increased penetration of mobile phones and especially more affordable smartphones has seen a rise in the African youths acquiring or having access to smartphones. With smartphones this group is able to download multiple applications(apps) and especially light versions due to sometimes constrained internet bandwidth. Generally, most apps are easy to download and navigate. This phenomenon drives the consideration to turn Wikistories into an app.
2. Popularity and penetration of some platforms that have the short story functionality e.g Instagram is heavily influencing how users perceive and navigate through apps. There is a need to align to some of these features users are familiar with when creating platforms.
3. Content creators are using social media platforms as a means of sharing short story formats for both educational and information purposes. To make this content interesting and enjoyable they include varied multimedia easily consumed by their audiences. It is key for Wikistories to enable these options on

their platform. Currently the most commonly used platform for short stories is Instagram.

4. Increasing popularity in use of vernacular (non-English) language across different social media platforms e.g podcasts, Youtube, Instagram. As more African audiences are turning away from the “Western gaze”, popularity of content creation, consumption and sharing in vernacular languages has increased. This works for persons working to get in touch with their heritage and roots and also for marginalized communities or persons who may not necessarily be comfortable and fluent in English like part of the elderly generation or persons with limited education.
5. Reducing or removal of ads and pop-ups. There is a divide where creators want to make money off the different platforms they share their content on. One of the ways that this is possible is through use of ads. Too many ads discourage consumers from using a platform. Initially Wikistories can start off without ads or at least too many ads in a bid to be attractive to users.

CONCLUSION

There is great potential for Wikistories in the African market especially if personalization and customization of content is enabled. Africans are ready for stories focussed on them and the continent that are not necessarily biased by outsiders. It is recommended that the Wikistories platform incorporates the changes and improvements suggested to make it more appealing to the target audience.