

Erin Bourgard
Western Libraries, London, Ontario, Canada

SUSTAINED WIKIPEDIA EDITORSHIP AND THE LIBRARY PROFESSION: ANALYZING THE EDITING PATTERNS OF #LIB1REF PARTICIPANTS

(Paper)

Abstract or Résumé:

One Librarian, One Reference (#lib1ref) is a Wikipedia campaign aimed at getting librarians, who share values on open information, to collaborate and improve the verifiability of information in the open encyclopedia. Paired with an overview of this campaign and of the relationship between libraries and Wikipedia, this study looks at the editing patterns of the campaign's participants to determine if its newly recruited editors continue to engage in sustained Wikipedia editorship.

1. Introduction

Wikipedia is arguably a staple in the information diet of Canadians, and to advocates of open and equitable information the encyclopedia's reach is impressive. While libraries and librarians share values on open access to information with Wikipedia, our relationship has been slow to take shape. One Librarian, One Reference (#lib1ref) is a Wikipedia campaign aimed at getting librarians and library workers to collaborate and improve the verifiability of information in the open encyclopedia. This study looks at the editing patterns of the campaign's participants to determine if its newly recruited editors continue to engage in sustained Wikipedia editorship.

2. Background

The inaugural GLAM-Wiki Conference of 2009 marked the formal start of collaboration between the Wikimedia Foundation (host of Wikipedia) and libraries. At this conference, recommendations were made to “encourage sustainable collaboration between institutions in the cultural sector and the Wikimedia community” (*GLAM-WIKI Recommendations*, n.d.). In reference to the potential of collaboration between Wikipedia and libraries specifically, Lubbock (2018) writes, “Wikipedia’s goal... is to tear down barriers to information, and in this, we seek the same aims as libraries do” (p. 66).

Many have expressed Wikipedia’s potential in open access to information (Willinsky, 2007; Duede, 2015; Teplitsky, et al., 2016; Stinson & Evans, 2018). However, during the early years of Wikipedia, and to an extent still, there has been concern with its use in library circles. Noting that “Wikipedia never closes”, one of the earlier concerns with the platform is one of competition in the information market (Batt, 2009, p. 60). In relation to the platform’s open editing policies, among other aspects, it was found that “librarians are cautious in advocating for Wikipedia in their work life” (Snyder, 2013, p.161). Through an examination of a library listserv, Pokinghorne & Hoffman (2009) note, however, that “listserv talk about Wikipedia appears to reveal a changing mindset in our profession about the relationship between the social web and

information literacy” (p. 102). Articles about libraries and Wikipedia highlight the growth of this relationship between the two institutions and a shift in libraries towards collaborating with Wikipedia (Phetteplace, 2015; Scholz & Beman-Cavallaro, 2017; Soito, 2017; Ayres, 2020). In 2018, a Spotlight on Wikipedia notes that, “five or six years ago [librarians] were really reluctant to engage with Wikipedia, but that’s really shifted a lot” (ALA, 2018, p. 34). As part of this shift, in 2016 the #lib1ref campaign began as a call to action for library workers worldwide to improve Wikipedia by adding references. (Stinson & Orlowitz, 2016).

Reflecting on #lib1ref, Jake Orlowitz frames it as an online micro contribution campaign to add citations and engage librarians. His viewpoint is that the campaign serves to rewrite the story of the relationship between Wikipedia and libraries. (2018a). In 2011, librarian and Wikipedia editor Phoebe Ayers noted, “there haven’t been any formal efforts by library associations to encourage working on Wikipedia” (Staunch & Gilson, 2011, p. 49). Five years on in 2016, #lib1ref has received formal support and encouragement from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (Scheeder, 2016). In Canada, participation in #lib1ref was encouraged by the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (FOPLED, 2019).

Globally, libraries are now collaborating to improve Wikipedia pages in multiple languages through the #lib1ref campaign (Gutiérrez, 2023). An example of this is #lib1ref in Latin America, which began in May 2018 “to commemorate the birthday of Spanish Wikipedia”. The May campaign includes libraries across the southern hemisphere in countries such as Ghana, Uruguay, Argentina, South Africa, Brazil, Australia, and India (Nartey, 2018). “While the January version of the #lib1ref campaign works well mostly for the northern hemisphere, it doesn’t for the countries below the equator” (Hinojo, 2019). Within the northern hemisphere, four libraries within Québec led Canadian libraries’ participation by prompting a friendly competition through Twitter to see who could add the most citations to Wikipedia during #lib1ref (Orlowitz, 2018a). In 2019, this involvement expanded to include libraries in other Canadian provinces. The friendly competition came together virtually through social media and joint Wikimedia Dashboards. Competitions, similar to that in Canada, have been one of the “great drivers of engagement” in the #lib1ref campaign (West, 2019).

The impact of #lib1ref extends beyond counts of citations added to Wikipedia and into community building and outreach. “This kind of campaign builds awareness and interest among the library community and allows for a dialogue that further shifts the Wikimedia community closer to the needs of libraries, and libraries closer to the goals of the Wikimedia community” (Orlowitz, 2018b, p.81). As an outreach project, libraries have used the campaign to organize events (Lubbock, 2018, p. 57). These events have been spaces for conversation among library staff about Wikipedia and their collections (Sengul-Jones, 2018, p. 228-229).

Overall, reported lessons from the inaugural #lib1ref event contain several measurable impacts of success, including hashtag counts, media coverage, and campaign website pageviews (*#lib1ref Lessons 2016* n.d.). The Wikipedia report of #lib1ref in January 2020 and January 2021 list statistics such as hashtag counts and number of participants (*#lib1ref Lessons January 2020* n.d.; *#lib1ref Lessons January 2021* n.d.). Thinking about the GLAM-Wiki recommendation to build sustainable collaboration between cultural institutions and Wikimedia,

this study responds to the question – Do #1lib1ref recruit editors go on to edit Wikipedia outside the #1lib1ref campaign period?

3. Methodology

Details pertaining to the editing habits of 228 #1lib1ref participants were randomly extracted from Wikipedia using its open API and a list of usernames from the #1lib1ref/1lib1ref Canada dashboards (2019-2022). These details include first and last editing dates and the edit counts by month for the observed period of January 2018 to June 2023. The observed period includes six instances of the annual #1lib1ref event in January. Preprocessing data transformations include controlling data type for dates and re-coding variables for analysis. To protect the identities of editors, usernames were anonymized.

For this study, sustained Wikipedia editorship is achieved when an editor has contributed to Wikipedia in 2022 or later, has edited during at least three months of the observed period, and has contributed to Wikipedia outside of the campaign period. Editors who first edited Wikipedia during the campaign period are defined as recruit editors because they signed up as #1lib1ref participants and first edited Wikipedia during the campaign. They are compared to other editors, those participants who first edited Wikipedia outside of the January #1lib1ref campaign period. This study uses descriptive statistics to analyze the editing patterns of participants. Statistical significance in cross tabulations is measured using Pearson’s chi-squared test.

4. Results

As shown in Table 1, the percentage of #1lib1ref repeat attendees is low with only 17.1% attending more than one instance of the annual event. Almost half (40.4%) of #1lib1ref participants in Canada made their first edit to Wikipedia during the campaign period and more than a quarter (29.3%) of these recruit editors have continued contributing to Wikipedia outside #1lib1ref. For recruit editors, 21.7% have been editing in 2022 or later and during three separate months within the dataset’s timeline.

All recruited editors contributed at least one edit during the campaign, whereas 30.1% of the other editors made no edits during the campaign. Moreover, 18% of the other editors made no contributions outside the campaign period; this subset of participants represents Wikipedia editors who are inactive during the observed period of editing.

Activity of participants	Recruit editors (n92)	Other editors (n136)	All editors (n228)
Active Editors (2022 or later)	21.7% (20)	26.5% (36)	24.6% (56)
Attended more than one 1lib1ref event	13% (12)	19.9% (27)	17.1% (39)
Edited in 3+ months	21.7% (20)	51.5% (70)	39.5% (90)
No edits during #1lib1ref	0% (0)	30.1% (41)	18% (41)
Edits during #1lib1ref	100% (92)	69.9% (95)	82% (187)
No edits outside #1lib1ref	72.7% (65)	18.4% (25)	39.5% (90)
Edits outside of #1lib1ref	29.3% (27)	81.6% (111)	60.5% (138)

Table 1. Activity of participants by editor type.

Overall edits to Wikipedia by #1lib1ref participants have been contributed by the other editors (97.6%), mostly outside the campaign period (74.6%). The other editors also contributed the vast number of edits (95.3%) during #1lib1ref.

Editor type	Edits made during #1lib1ref	Edits made outside #1lib1ref	Overall edits
Recruit editors	4.7% (1222)	1.7% (1261)	2.4% (2483)
Other editors	95.3% (24648)	98.3% (74723)	97.6% (99371)
Total edits	25.4% (25870)	74.6% (75984)	101854

Table 2. Edit counts by editor type for edits made during and outside #1lib1ref.

In the context of sustained Wikipedia editorship among recruit editors, most of their edits (50.8%) have been contributed outside #1lib1ref. This is true to a larger degree with other editors, who also contributed most (75.2%) edits outside #1lib1ref.

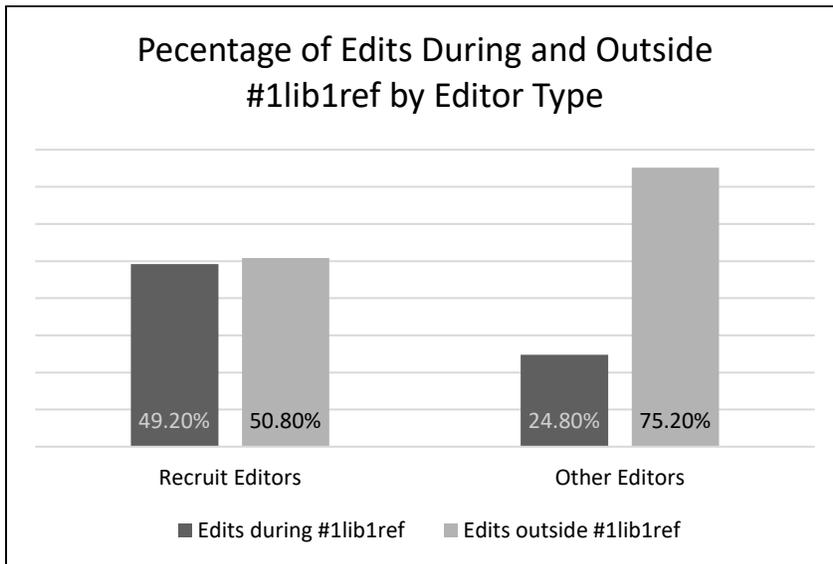


Chart 1. Percentage of edits during and outside #1lib1ref by editor type.

The median number of edits by editor type during the campaign is similar across both groups. The recruit editor represented by the median contributed four edits whereas the other editor represented by the median contributed three edits. There is greater variation between the number of edits by editor type outside the campaign period where the recruit editor represented by the median contributed no edits, and the other editor represented by the median contributed five edits.

Edits by participant	Recruit editors	Other editors
Overall edits	Mean – 26.99 Median – 4	Mean – 730.67 Median – 12
Edits during #1lib1ref	Mean – 13.28 Median - 4	Mean – 181.24 Median – 3
Edits outside #1lib1ref	Mean – 13.71 Median - .00	Mean – 549.43 Median – 5

Table 3. Mean and Median edit counts by editor type.

5. Discussion

Within the Canadian context, participant activity and edits outside the #lib1ref campaign show that sustained Wikipedia editorship is achieved by almost one quarter of the campaign’s recruit editors. Notably, all recruited editors contributed at least one edit during the campaign; the #1lib1ref campaign is successful in drawing new editors. Within the context of sustained Wikipedia editing, most of these editors do not go on to edit outside the #1lib1ref campaign period, and the contributions of those that do are relatively small when compared to other participants.

The small contingent of inactive Wikipedians who have added their username to #1lib1ref dashboards signals that engagement in the campaign is motivated by more than a desire to contribute. The #1lib1ref campaign is a form of virtual community building that is global in scale. As others have suggested, it makes space for dialogue about the library professional’s role in improving the verifiability of open and accessible information. There is motivation in Canada to engage in the #1lib1ref event, yet considering the editing patterns of participants, there are limitations for recruit editors to becoming active Wikipedians.

As library workers who value open information, Wikipedia editorship is an opportunity for global collective action to improve the most widely used open encyclopedia, so what is stopping us? Professionally, we may continue to carry caution in our alignment with the platform. Perhaps, however, there are other factors such as workload or recognition contributing as limitations to participation. Since Wikipedia is a global community, any future research in this area should be open and designed to be easily replicated across libraries internationally. Are the limitations experienced unique to Canadian libraries or are they common across the global library profession? Follow up to this study with research that is qualitative and global in inquiry can provide a more nuanced understanding of the drivers and limitations to large-scale active Wikipedia editorship within the library profession.

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