

Final Project- Partial

[note: partial project due to work partner's lack of contribution and eventual abandonment of the project in its entirety]

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Project Summary

Introduction

Wikipedia is a commonly used website, meant to exist as the world's largest encyclopedia. It is often used as a primary source for the casual user, though in academia or other "serious" intellectual work, such a practice is not acceptable. In this way, Wikipedia does truly exist as a digital format of an encyclopedia- a secondary source as a waypoint to primary sources of verifiable information.

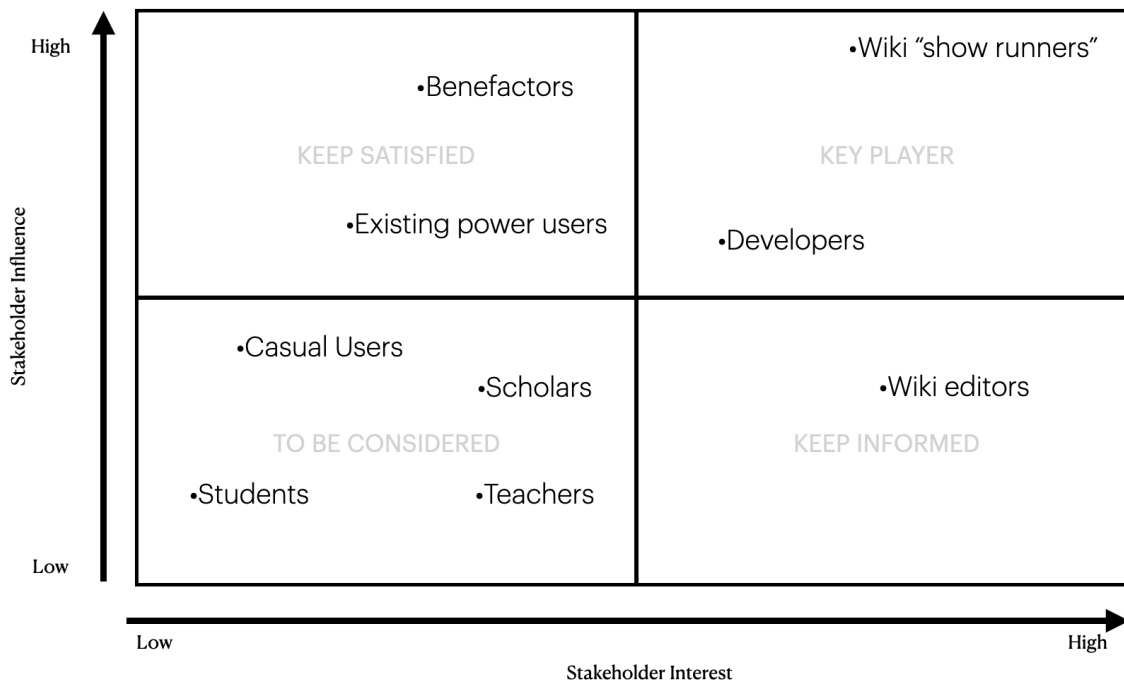
However, like an encyclopedia many serious scholarly work will often use Wikipedia as a starting point. Other users will visit Wikipedia for light research into a historical event or scientific subject; still others will even use it for current or recent events. While we can presume the latter isn't the intent of Wikipedia- encyclopedias aren't bulletins or analysis of current events- the variety with which Wikipedia is used signifies that there exists the possibility that Wikipedia could better reflect and serve its use through improved aesthetic and navigability.

The UX Test

The test is designed to measure how easy it is for a person to verify that a "fact" listed on Wikipedia is true. More conceptually, it is also designed to test how effective Wikipedia is at "being the thing" that it is commonly used for.

Stakeholders & User Groups

Stakeholder Matrix



User Groups

The principle user groups represented in this small UX testing were all adults, though demographic information (i.e. age, profession) was not recorded for this test. Each person seemed to identify as female (though again this was not confirmed explicitly). The reasons for being chosen as a participant for this experiment were simple: the researchers needed a sampling of basic use cases for Wikipedia's ease of verifying information; in this way, almost anyone with basic computer interface knowledge would do, regardless of the demographics or other ancillary information. Within the stakeholder matrix, the participants represented different individuals within the "Casual User" category, one of the principle targets of the theorized UX change.

Despite the lack of demographic questions asked, it was assumed that some salient information would be gleaned from the basic introductory questions before the participants were asked to complete the task. Indeed it did. Of the 5 participants, the use cases within the Casual Users represented were to do casual research in their capacity as a teacher (e.g. for additional information on a subject they're doing a deep dive into, when hearing a piece of information on the news (usually current events), historical information (events, figures in history), things of general interest or coming across Wikipedia as a result of doing a Google search.

Accessibility & Equity Concerns

The questions of accessibility and equity were quite frankly not as much of a concern in this preliminary information gathering UX test. Additionally, Wikipedia- as a large organization- should be taking into account Accessibility & Equity themselves for the website. And to some extent, they certainly do. Regarding this specific UX test, however, the only true considerations given to the A&E were to make an honest attempt to find participants who did not fit the mold of scholars, to get some diversity in the backgrounds/professions within the stakeholder group represented, and above all else, to understand that this test specifically did *not* do a good job of having actual participants be of diverse A&E backgrounds. Further UX testing would require such considerations before final, public-facing product changes are made to the site, especially one as ubiquitous and widespread as Wikipedia.

Methodology

Pre-Question Script

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this exercise with us; it is much appreciated. Feel free to ask me any questions at any point in any of this.

The first thing I want to do is repeat myself in making clear that this test is not of your abilities or anything else about yourself; the test is of how easy the website is to use. While we're monitoring things like time, it is not a test of how long it takes you to do anything; we are making every effort to try to mimic a casual web browsing experience.

If you get uncomfortable with anything for any reason, you are absolutely able to stop, but you're also free to ask me clarifying questions if you need to. Likewise, don't feel like you need ask me anything. So here's what we're asking of you:

- We will be recording your voice and visual cues through your camera, and your interactions through sharing your screen through Zoom (I can help you with that; that's not the test). Once we start recording, I'll ask you again if you're ok with that so we have a record; this is both for our professor checking our work for this class, but it's even more important that we protect your privacy as you see fit. And again, if you're uncomfortable for any reason, you can stop anything at any time.
- However, we would also appreciate you thinking out loud as you interact with the site. If you're uncomfortable doing this, that's ok, but it would be helpful for us.
- I'll be asking you a few questions for background information before I give you the task. Feel free to say if there's any question that you don't feel like answering.

Questions

- From where do you get your information and/or news?
- Do you have experience sourcing information or checking sources?
- List 3 different websites that you enjoy using of different varieties
- Do you use Wikipedia? If so, how often and for what purpose(s)?

Task:

On Wikipedia, find an event that interests you - on the page of that event, locate a piece of information you find interesting, verify that the fact is true to the point that you would be comfortable referencing it in the future.

Upon Completion:

What would make you feel more confident in finding a reputable source?

The test was given over Zoom at 5pm MT (participants were in California and Colorado) to 5 individuals, given in 20min increments. The individuals were all family members- 4 from one and 1 from another. 3 participants were joining having finished their workdays, 1 was simply at home, and a third had a 1 year-old about to start being put to bed as she was interacting with Wikipedia (chosen to more resemble a real-world use case scenario).

The test was designed to last no more than 15min, with 10 minutes designated for the completion of the task itself. The task itself was deemed fairly straightforward, and thus the amount of time allotted was to allow for the conversational nature of the interview. The concept was to create a social setting in which the participant could operate. While this admittedly might not meet the rigors of a truly controlled test, the work was being done to best mimic a low-key scenario in which a person might use Wikipedia on their desktop.

Think-Aloud protocol was requested of the participants by the researchers, and the 10min was to also allow the participants the space to feel relaxed in order to express their thoughts (and feelings) freely. Any other seemingly-ancillary information said aloud would simply offer additional context to the researchers. Additionally, concurrent probing questions were asked by the researchers when the actions of (or questions from) the participants warranted interaction.

The framing of the task itself proved to be a difficult problem to solve: how to get the participants to be aware of the citations for the external links and references used without calling them out specifically (which was the point of the test). Thus, the wording of the question had to be carefully crafted so as not to tip off the obvious move, but also be quite clear about what needed to happen (the difficulty of this helps prove why there is UX change needed). In the end, the framing of the task ended up being confusing and requiring some clarification to the participants. It did not harm the experiment per se, as the results still yielded different degrees of completion, but the practical application of "assigning" the task at hand proved to be more difficult than even correcting what Testing of the Test bore out.

Results

Results

[Note: the analysis is based on memory and partial, unorganized notes]

Though circumstances do not allow for a true analysis of any results, there are some general themes that were quite apparent during the tests themselves. 3 out of 4 participants reported being familiar with sourcing information, most of this occurring in the past. Moreover, each participant had familiarity with Wikipedia, though the use cases were different as mentioned earlier in this report: historical information, casual research, general interest, or being directed from a Google Search. Only one participant reported using Wikipedia as a current events and news source.

Much of the insight comes from the use of the subjective term “comfortable” in the phrasing of the task itself. Naturally, the interpretation for each participant varied- some participants made it to the sources in the footer of the page, others clicked through to the source itself (if it had an external link). In any case, they each completed the task to their own satisfaction, as had been described to them, within the 10min allotted time to actually complete the single task.

Not one participant expressly mentioned the footnote/citation format as being a reason for being comfortable (to their personal level) that a fact they had found was in fact true. The most encompassing description for the group as a whole is that they seemed to feel comfortable with Wikipedia itself as the source- if it’s on Wikipedia, they assumed it was true due to a vague sense that the information displayed had been verified (in so many words).

Limitations of Test

The test contained several limitations, some dictated by circumstance, others self-inflicted. To begin with, the actual test itself- as well as the single task that was given- straddled the line too much between focus group testing and an actual UX test. In some ways, it was testing “do users understand how to verify information, conceptually?” And yet in other ways, it is testing how effective Wikipedia is at having its sources available for users to access. In the end, the test’s nature doesn’t yield enough clear information to offer much clarity into either question. Though there is insight that can be found (*see Analysis*), the foundation of the test

being flawed in concept and design rendered the other facets of the test and report difficult to complete in their true intent.

Another limitation was the Covid-19 pandemic and its effect on the User Groups that were represented in the test participants. Given the relative lack of resources, stakes of the situation (academic course), it was easiest to simply find family members who could help. Luckily, all the participants were appropriate but- as stated earlier- they were all somewhat similar; a greater variety in their selection would of course had lent more credibility to the results. Additionally, the limitations in the pool of readily available participants also meant there was little chance of being able to account for accessibility concerns.

Perhaps most severely, the results of the UX test were not organized in any meaningful fashion to yield any substantial, verified results to analyze.

Analysis & Suggestions

Despite the limitations, there were some high level learnings and potential UX changes that can be seen from this test. It was very clear from the results that each participant felt comfortable that what was on Wikipedia was in fact true purely by virtue of being on the site. This is, of course, part of the point- Wikipedia has become a place to reference, yet it is still frowned upon as a primary source. As such, it seems as if there is much potential to actually become a primary source and this might be achieved simply with a UX redesign. While the effort would be a near herculean undertaking, the underlying content, database design, and computer-human infrastructure all already exist. The initial impressions from this UX test suggest making a fundamental UX change to Wikipedia in order to make some common use cases a more reflective experience.

The next step would be focus group or UX testing with the explicit idea of getting enough feedback to start creating wireframes of a new UX design for Wikipedia. However, some high level thoughts and ideas can start to percolate just from the 4 results of a fairly homogenous group of participants:

Clearer visual clues to help differentiate the quality of a page would go a long way. While there is some degree of letting the user know how “solid” a page is in its accuracy / verification, there is much more that can be done to that end: perhaps vastly different aesthetics (color ways; layout) or functionality to reflect that degree of a page’s veracity. In this scenario, a

current or recent event would be one design, while an established and well-researched topic would have another, and so forth.

Additionally, based off of this very small sample size, it might be that the presence of the citation/ footnote format actually hinders Wikipedia's scholarly reputability. Perhaps a differentiation of the quality of the source itself would help users better understand the process that goes into judging the veracity of information.