Wikipedia

WIKIPEDIA ARTICLE

SEXUAL ORIENTATION
en.wikipedia.org
(september 2014)

↓

Manual

THREAD ANALYSIS

Threads reading
Manual thread data collection

Total threads number: 177
Analized threads: 16
(Choosen according to the number of comments:
equal or more than ten comments)

Tagging: thread title | user | number of user's comments |
relation between users (replay back to whom, link, quote from
one user to the others) wikipedia pages link | user position in
the threads | controversy level (subjective)

Particular attention at the replay back structure, tone of voice,
discussions content

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Gephi

NETWORK STUDY

costruction of the networks, not based on the
wikipedia reply back structure but on the con-
tent (real replay back, quotes, link to other
users, topics)

The analysis regards especially the content itself, looking at those qualitative data that are more difficult to collect as simple number.

Concerning the content, it is possible to distinguish two kind of threads:
-	Discussion over a specific topic (content of the Wikipedia's article)
-	Discussion over Wikipedia policy

Discussion over a specific topic:
Threads specifically regard the article topic itself, whether there is something to add / change / delete / rewrite. Those discussions are the best ones to investigate the topic, its controversy level and the society knowledge level and position. Users present their point of view trying to make it as much objective as possible using reference and quote, providing evidences, proofs and examples of their own thesis. Sometimes is right the "Neutral Point Of View" needing that it is used as a sort of excuse to start the discussion, saying for example, "this part of the topic is missed, so it is necessarily to add it and give the whole article a real neutral point of view". It is actually clearly that the user want to propose an editing not thinking first at the NPOV but at the topic itself. In those cases, it is explicit the users' point of view over the subject. It is possible to divide those kind of threads in different subgroups, according to the final status of the discussion:
-	Resolved: the discussion end with a common decision taken or the edit is accepted with no oppositions.
-	Open: the discussion doesn't not come to an end with a decision, the parties remain with different opinion with no solution (Sometimes, the same discussion is propose again later in the talk page).

Those threads are particularly interesting when the discussed topic does not appear in the Wikipedia article page. For example, taking the sexual orientation article and talk page: many discussion regards paedophilia and zoophile but this controversy is not shown in the article page. From the sociologic point of view, it could be interesting to investigate over those.

Discussion over Wikipedia policy:
Threads regarding Wikipedia structure and policy itself. How to edit inside Wikipedia, how and when add contents, what is a "Neutral Point Of View", hot to preserve it, what could be the best way to write "encyclopaedically". Some examples: is it better to give the same weight to all the opinions over a topic or to give them weight according to their presence in the society / references? What kind of "writing way" tends to be a point of view and what could be considered as neutral? Which could be considered reliable sources which not?
What is easily understandable from those discussions is that it is not clear how Wikipedia should be edited and emerges the nature of the platform. To underline this problem and try to solve it inside the threads, users use to link at the "Wikipedia policy pages". Than sometimes create even more confusion.
Some discussions over the Wikipedia policy hide different users points of view, differently from the previous ones, in those the users tend not to say explicitly their opinion and stand for "it is not neutral". It is not possible to say objectively that "a user have a definite position" but this position could be read between the lines. They declare itself as "neutral" but, in fact they are using the "neutral need" to vehicular the opinions and edit the article as they would like it to be.
Other comments regarding Wikipedia itself are clearly super parties, and look at the goodness of editing.

Those considerations are strongly connected with the "users types":
-        Users that act the goodness of Wikipedia (They generally do not stand for a position "regarding the topic itself" and modifies more than one Wikipedia article. Their "personal page" has information regarding their action around Wikipedia and about their identity itself)
-        Users that use Wikipedia as a way to arise their opinions (Less expert around Wikipedia policy. Usually, they do not have a "personal page" and use "the need of neutral point of view" in the direction of "supporting their opinions")

Because of this "different intent" and the nature of discussion involving many users, it is sometimes difficult to identify different positions in a

thread. Sometimes there are not even two different positions, but just a misunderstanding that ends up with a solution. Other times, there are more than two opinions, discussion over topic and Wikipedia policy are mixed in the same threads. "NPOV" and "Wikipedia Policy" are used to support or go against someone and, as said, the real user's opinion could be only "guess" by the reader, as long as it is not explicit (and so, objective).

There are also some limitations in considering these discussions and their result as "good" and in the capability to edit the article. These regard mainly the language used, the gender of the users and their "real life background". For this research, we have consider the English Wikipedia and so the English article. If it is true that English could be consider the main "web language", it is also to consider that not everyone are English mother tongue and not even English experts. Moreover, English (and internet itself) it is used by rich country and middle rich people. Not even people among all country can understand English. It could be interesting to spread this kind of research looking at different language, as mirror of different culture too. Gender is another great point. Is it known that Wikipedia is "masculine" but in some topics as sexuality, the point of view could be strongly related with sexual and gender nature.
Last, the users' identity. Who edit Wikipedia and how those people could be considered in relation with the "internet population"? What kind of positions do they occupy and what is its weight?

Looking at the Wikipedia talk page structure, what is important to notice is that not all the users respect the "replay back structure". Some users replay to others quoting them, others use the replay back structure and they are not actually answer to the previous user. The replay back is not always "negative" or in contrast, there are some cases of "agreement" between users or "thanks" for the edits.