Who Edits? - A Cross Language Comparison of Wikipedia's Editor Community

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By declaring itself as the "free encyclopedia that anyone can edit", Wikipedia aims to create a freely shared platform representing all human knowledge. The community-created encyclopedic giant has management to establish itself as one of the most influential sources of online information worldwide and has become indispensable for all kinds of learning and educational purposes. Theoretically, Wikipedia should represent an unbiased and neutral source of knowledge; its self-proclaimed guidelines include notability, verifiability, as well as neutral point of view (Wagner et al., 2015; Wagner et al., 2016). Yet, in practice, Wikipedia's community is not diverse and a survey conducted by the Wikimedia Foundation (WMF), the nonprofit organization behind the various Wikipedia projects, revealed that the percentage of female contributors barely reaches 10 percent. Although Hill and Shaw (2013) corrected this statistic by estimating the actual female contribution to be slightly higher at 16.1 percent, Wikipedia has still failed to reach a minimal gender balance (Massa, & Zelenkauskaite, 2014). In addition, Wikipedia is facing a steady decline in the number of active contributors and recent research suggests that this primarily can be traced back to the failure to retain newcomers (Halfaker et al., 2013).

The reason why Wikipedia editors' diversity is of importance is related to the fact that it is one of the most accessed online sources of knowledge, containing more than 5 Million articles available in over 280 language editions (Wikipedia Homepage). Because so many people use the free encyclopedia, it is crucial to understand that what these pages reflect is predominantly the point of view of a white male population. The issue of gender distribution has also been tackled by the WMF itself (Antin et al., 2011; Massa, & Zelenkauskaite, 2014) and one of the central goals of their 2010 five-year strategic plan was "doubling the percentage of female editors to 25 percent by 2015" (Wikimedia Foundation, 2011, p.6). However, recent studies show that they have failed to reach this goal. According to MacAulay and Visser (2016) the corporatized diversity initiative designed by the WMF is more effective when it comes to organizational growth and its failure can be explained by insufficiently addressing the underlying reasons behind the gender gap.

In light of the above described situation, since 2011 various studies have tried to analyze and understand the reasons as well as extent of the pronounced gender gap in Wikipedia. Despite various efforts, a solution for comprehending and improving the online encyclopedia's situation has still not been found. In addition, many studies merely focus on the English language edition of Wikipedia (MacAulay, & Visser, 2016).

This paper aims at understanding the gender gap across various language versions of Wikipedia. Using the English Wikipedia as a reference point, the study uses existing research in the field as well as a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic approach to look into the gender distribution in other language editions. Furthermore, interviews with Wikipedians will be conducted in order to identify possible techniques that would encourage a more diverse community. The goal is to translate the findings into a framework of action for the Wikipedia editor community in order to reduce the gender gap in the future.

In addition, we hope our paper contributes to providing a richer and more detailed picture of the gender gap, as well as to creating awareness about gender imbalance online. Furthermore, we hope that the framework of action presented in the paper can be used to analyze, monitor and evaluate the Wikipedia editor community on an ongoing basis.

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