

Wikipedia

Should professionals embrace it
or ignore it?

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Overview

- A brief history of Wikipedia
- Insights from the literature
- A study of Wikipedia & transport
- Our conclusions

Wikipedia – A brief history

- **1991:** First **html** document is made publically available on the World Wide Web
- **1994:** First **Wiki** site is invented by Ward Cunningham: The WikiWikiWeb.
- **2000:** **Nupedia**, a peer review online encyclopaedia is launched by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger
- **2001:** **Wikipedia** is launched by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger (as a feeder to Nupedia)

Wikipedia – A brief history

- Within the first 12 months:
 - Wikipedia generates **18,000 articles**
 - Nupedia has **21**
- After 11 years (2012):
 - Wikipedia covers **285** languages
 - Nearly **18 million** account holders
 - English language Wikipedia contains **4 million** articles
 - **6th most frequently visited site** on the internet
 - **Britannica** stopped publishing a print encyclopaedia

***“Imagine a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge.
That's our commitment.”***

<http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Vision>

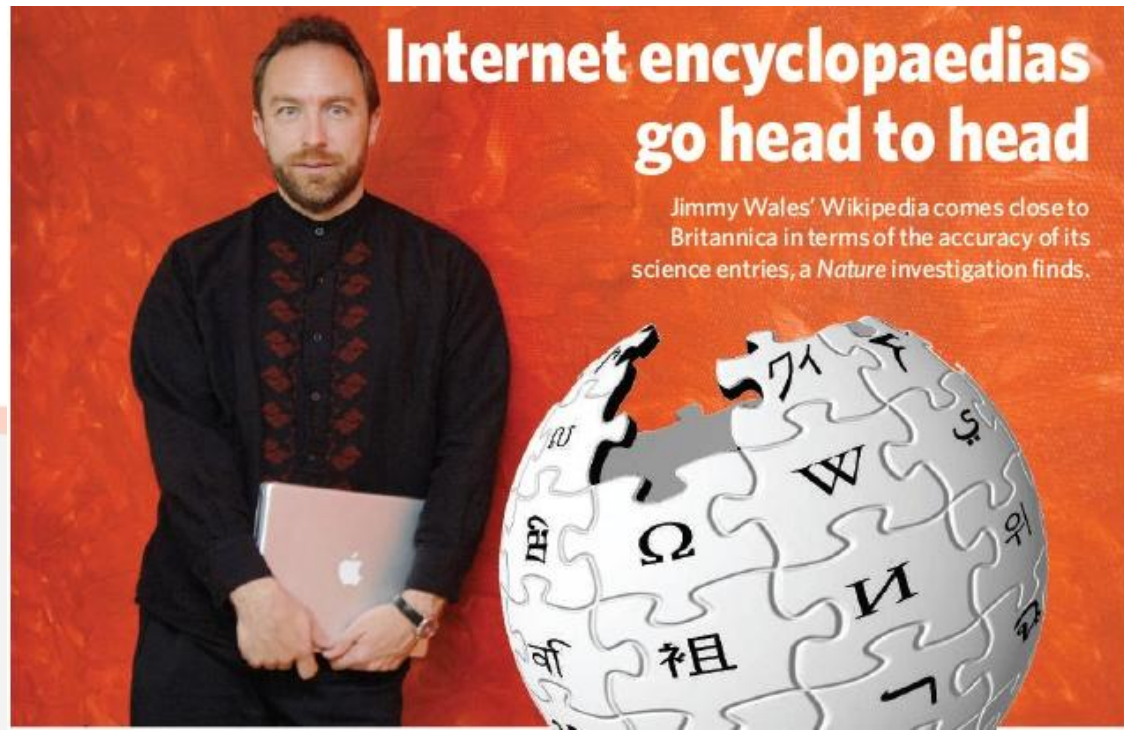


Wikipedia as an object of research



Reliable and credible(?)

- Nature (2005): On average Wikipedia articles contain **4 errors** while Britannica articles contain **3 errors**
- **Perceived credibility** is as important as **actual credibility**
- User generated information is becoming **more accepted / trusted** over time



Who edits Wikipedia and why?

- Men (87%), with a tendency to be introverted
- Reasons for contributing
 - Altruism
 - Reciprocity
 - Community
 - Reputation building
 - Autonomy



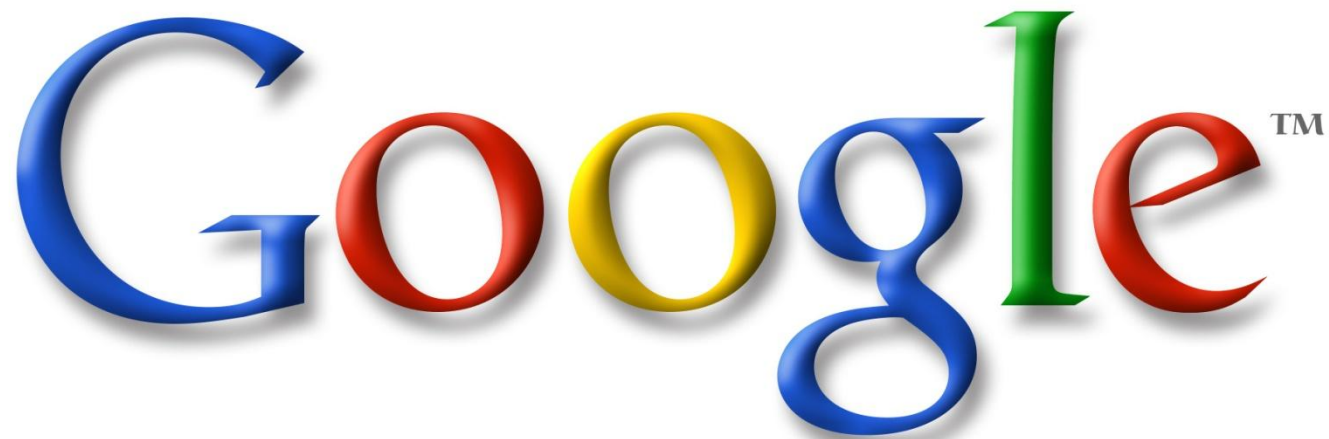
How are articles developed?

- **First mover advantage**
 - Initial article backbone tends to be retained
 - Points raised on **talk pages** translate into article modification



What articles are popular and why?

- Entertainment (43%)
- Politics and history (15%)
- Geography (12%)
- Sexuality (10%)

The Google logo is displayed in its characteristic multi-colored font (blue, red, yellow, blue, green, red) with a trademark symbol (TM) at the end. It is positioned in the bottom right corner of the slide, partially overlapping a decorative orange and grey gradient bar that runs horizontally across the bottom left.

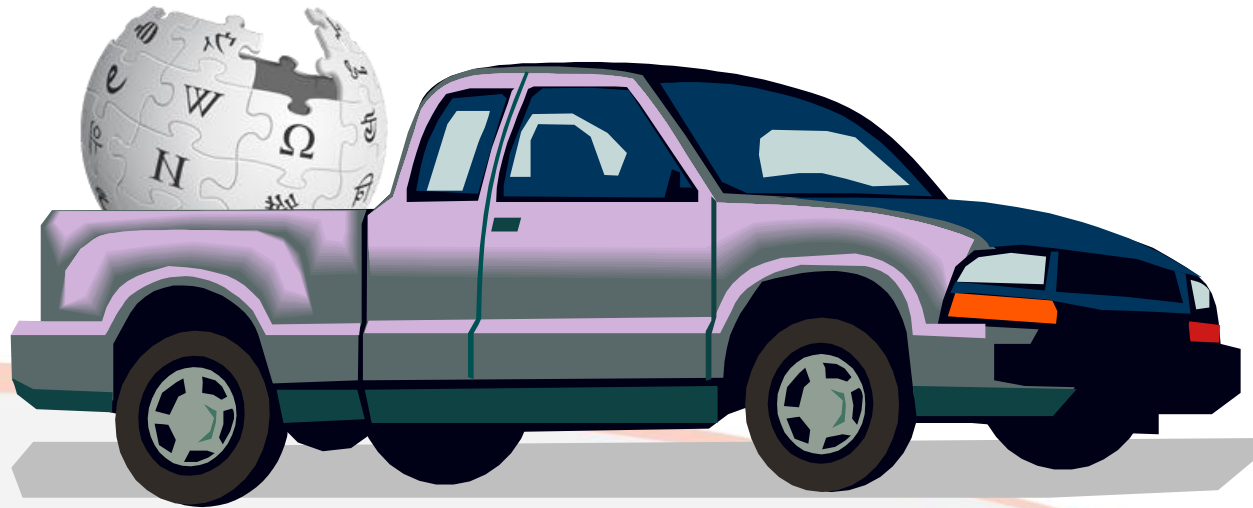
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Implications of user generated information

- **52%** of European population used World Wide Web as a source of health information
- Wikipedia articles **rank higher** than NHS Direct
- **50%** of **American Doctors** use Wikipedia (in some way) **for work**
- WikiProject Medicine: Should Wikipedia be the online source of health information in place of dedicated platforms?



An exploratory study of **Wikipedia and transport**



Methods

1. A Wikipedia content audit
2. Case studies of selected transport articles
3. Short interviews with transport planners and researchers

Content audit

Audit item	No. of schemes identified	No. documented on Wikipedia	Average Google search rank
Road schemes	28	21 (75%)	30 (SD 45)
Rail track schemes	23	20 (87%)	5 (SD 21)
Rail station schemes	11	10 (91%)	4 (SD 4.9)
Airport proposals	21	21 (100%)	3 (SD 0.8)
Historical timeline	63	50 (79%)	Test not performed

Content audit

- Wikipedia ranks highly for transport topics
- Official information is easily accessible for road and rail schemes
- But official information has been lacking on airports
 - Wikipedia fills this vacuum

Article case studies

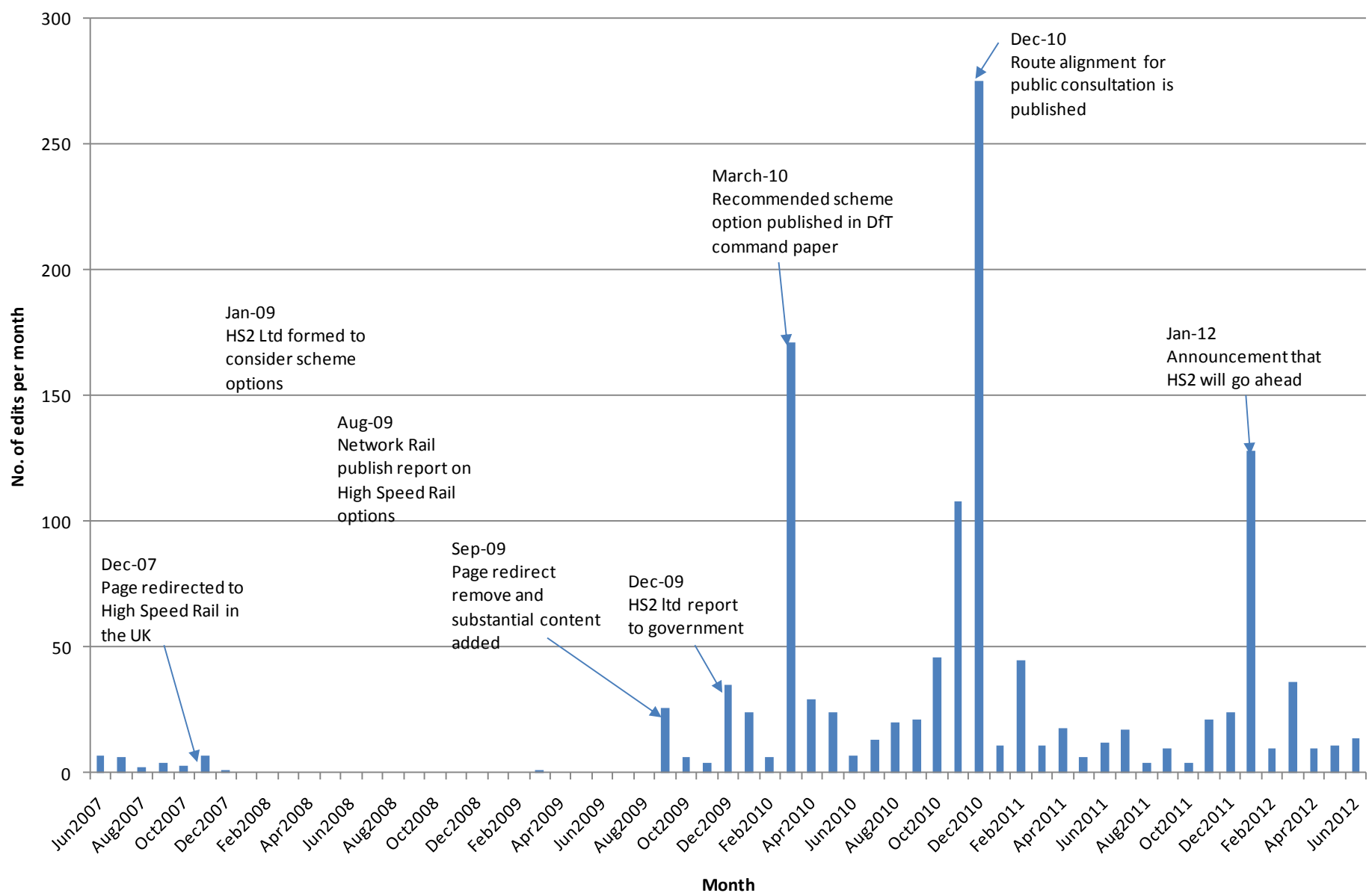
- User accounts suggest some professional engagement
- Official announcements drive editing and viewing activity
- Talk pages reveal
 - heated debates and disputes
 - A need for further professional engagement



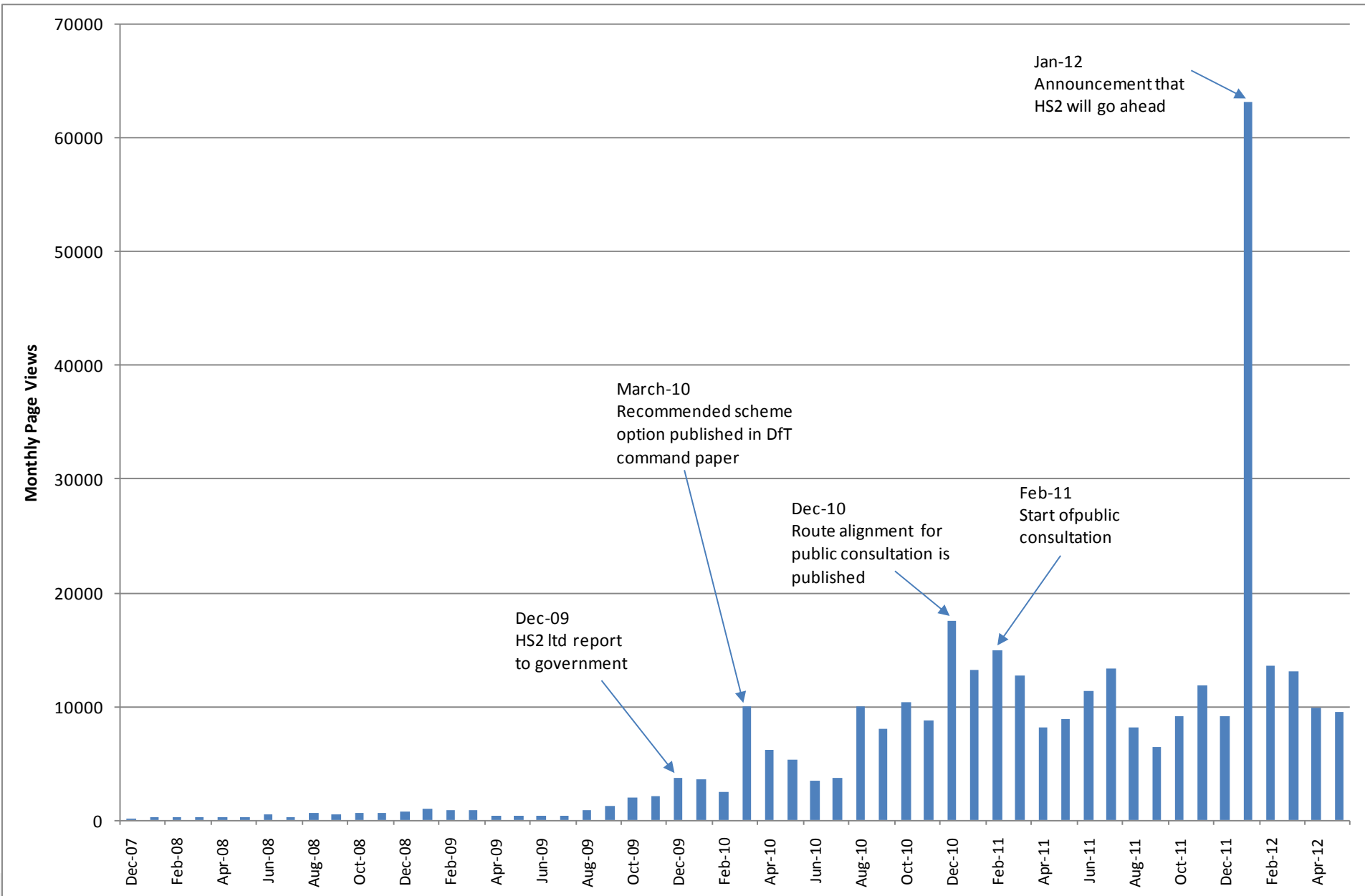
This article **needs attention from an expert in Transport**. See the [talk page](#) for details. [WikiProject Transport](#) or the [Transport Portal](#) may be able to help recruit an expert.



HS2 – Editing activity



HS2 – Page views



Interviews

- Wikipedia is **read** in the workplace

*“when you’re doing a **transport assessment**, it’s always useful to get a bit of **background** on a **local area**. It [Wikipedia] will...give you the **highlights** which you can then validate through more targeted research”*

“signposting”

“a reference farm”

“part of the Google furniture”

Interviews

- Wikipedia **fills a vacuum**

“consultancies...don’t tend to have access to the same level of library access as the university students and staff do...”

*the first port of call is **Google** and pretty quickly on Google you tend to find the **Wikipedia** article”*

Interviews

- Trustworthiness is **variable**

*“the one thing you want...is the **authoritative voice**...the difficulty is...the anonymous nature of Wikipedia doesn’t help”*

*It’s “**value laden**”*

*“It’s better for **technical** information”*

*“my perception is that it’s **getting better** in terms of accuracy, but I’ve got no evidence for that”*

Interviews

- Little appetite for editing
 - *“life is too short”*
- Some have occasionally contributed
 - *“very few people outside the academic field actually read those [journal] publications”*
 - useful for *“placing the concepts in the appropriate part of the debate”*
 - Contributed content had survived

Wikipedia

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Our conclusions

- Professional communities **should** engage with Wikipedia
- Professional bodies could:
 1. Actively encourage engagement with Wikipedia
 2. Formalise a relationship with the Wikimedia Foundation
 3. Provide guidelines on how members can effectively engage with Wikipedia



“Researchers should read Wikipedia cautiously and amend it enthusiastically”

Nature (2005)