CUNY Queens College

A Profile of Wikis

Aryeh Winter

Media Studies 255: New Technologies

Professor Andréa DeFelice

February 13th, 2018

Wikis are online documents designed so that people collaborate information and allow information to be searched and found. Authors link them both internally and externally, and these links can take readers to external sources or other parts of the wiki to find related information. Wikis are typically very easy to use, and authors can easily add tables, images, video links, and change the text, while the original author can log all changes and verify or revert them if he so chooses. All comments, posts, additions, and changes are logged in a history page for all users to see. Furthermore, users can comment and dialogue about their posts and revisions using the editing tools provided by the wikis. On top of that, all users are informed of any changed through an RSS notification or an email alert. As such wikis are kept in a constant dynamic state that keeps them updated and their users informed.

Wikis differ from other technologies such as blogs, as blogs only allow readers to comment on the authors work whereas wikis allow the readers to change the actual content. “Wikis allow people to socially construct knowledge in a dynamic, simultaneous, and non-hierarchical fashion”1. An example, if not the prime example, of a wiki is Wikipedia. It is kept updated and in a constant change by the collective public, any changes constantly checked, and its readers, informed. “Although some question the accuracy of its information because its contributors can be anyone, independent studies have demonstrated that its accuracy is comparable to a conventional encyclopedia such as the Encyclopedia Britannica”1 or the World Book Encyclopedia.

Wikis began with the first wiki back in 1994, “WikiWikiWeb” created by Ward Cunningham. It was the first website that had pages and links that could easily be edited and changed and kept a history for each page. Over the next 5 years many alternative wiki websites were created, while the first wiki changed its name to Wards Wiki and evolved as new features were added and new users joined the website. It was in this period of time that the “wiki culture” began to develop. In 2001 the website Wikipedia was launched and quickly became, and has continued to be, the most popular wiki as it was a free content encyclopedia and introduced wikis to the general public. Between the years 2004 and 2006 there was an explosion of interest in wikis and Wikipedia, and everyone from corporations to organizations to schools began using them, and the term became a household name. Finally, from 2007 through the present-day wikis have become mainstream, so much so that the word “wiki” was entered into the Oxford English Dictionary.

The prime example of a wiki is Wikipedia, so much so that it is a household name and the most popular wiki on the planet. Originally, one of the biggest draws to Wikipedia was the fact that when compared to all other information resources, such as traditional encyclopedias, was that it was completely free and open to the public. Normally this wouldn’t be possible for an encyclopedia because of the costs involved with researching and peer reviewing an article, but because it was open to the public it was a collaborative effort that removed almost all of those costs entirely. This added a danger however in that the reliability of the information came into question, but when research studies have compared Wikipedia articles to other ones such as the Encyclopedia Britannica it found that the encyclopedia Britannica had an average of only one more error per page than Wikipedia.

Another example of a very different style of wiki is one used for a fandom. The example I’d like to use for this is the Star Wars wiki, wookieepedia. As a general rule, the use of the wiki is the same in that it can still be reviewed and revised by anyone, and articles can be written by anyone, however in this case there is a lore and information that the information is based on. This limits the number of articles as users must wait for new information to be released. However, because all of the information belongs to one fandom, many of the articles connect to each other and are linked together, and many of the readers come for a single reason and know a lot about the lore. Furthermore, as so many people know the information and it can be easily verified, there is far less chance of corruption or misinformation as the articles do not change often and therefore any changes can be reviewed quickly and thoroughly.

A final example of a wiki is an educational or school-based wiki, such as the TeachArt Wiki. Typically, people will only work or collaborate with a few close friends or coworkers because it is often difficult to maintain such things with so many people. For this reason, the TeachArt Wiki was created “to provide a platform for any individual, group, or class of students at the college or secondary level that is involved in the visual arts to continuously co-construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct knowledge about art and ideas for teaching and learning.”1 As an educational wiki, it not only gives users information about the subject and the creator, it also provides lessons and the means for the reader to learn and improve. When brought into a classroom it improved the students work as they could learn from observing and trying to find errors in each other’s work and in turn use the good and the bad they learned from each other to improve their own and create a better finished product.

In conclusion, I have found this technology to be highly effective and easy to use. It is used by people in all circumstances and in all walks of life, for a variety of different reasons, and succeeds in all of them. It rivals the best published encyclopedias, collects and connects different information and fans from different fandoms, and assists students with working together, learning, and improving. It is very intuitive and easy to use, and has a vast array of possible applications, from the ones mentioned above all the way up through the corporate world. As such I find this to be an overall excellent technology.

Bibliography:

1. Guey-Meei Yang, Tom Suchan, and Rina Kundu, “TeachArt Wiki: A collaborative, interactive, and dialogic platform for teaching and learning art, National Art Education Association, Vol. 64, No. 4 (July 2011), pp. 48-53, Web, Feb 13, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org.queens.ezproxy.cuny.edu/stable/23034020>
2. Author Unknown, “History of Wikis”, Wikipedia, October 11, 2007, Web, Feb 13, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_wikis>
3. Rahman, Mohammad M., “An Analysis of Wikipedia”, North South University, JITTA (Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application), Date Published Unknown, Web., Feb. 13, 2018, <http://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=jitta>
4. Morgan, Brian and Smith, Richard D., “Technology in Literacy Education: A Wiki for Classroom Writing”, International Literacy Association, The Reading TeacherVol. 62, No. 1 (Sep., 2008), pp. 80-82, Web., Feb. 13, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org.queens.ezproxy.cuny.edu/stable/20204663>
5. Gibbons, Scott, “Collaborating Like Never Before: Reading and Writing through a Wiki”, National Council of Teachers of English, The English Journal Vol. 99, No. 5 (may 2010), pp. 35-39, Web., Feb. 13, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org.queens.ezproxy.cuny.edu/stable/27807189>