

Wikipedia has seen a spike in people editing pages during the pandemic

TECHNOLOGY 1 March 2021

By [Chris Stokel-Walker](#)



With not a lot to do during the pandemic, people turned to Wikipedia editing
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Bored of the pandemic and stuck at home, many of us passed the time editing Wikipedia pages, according to data on the collaborative website's changes over the past few years.

An analysis of 223 million edits to Wikipedia between 2018 and 2020 shows a 20 per cent increase in the number of changes made to pages on the English-language version between January and September 2020. Similar rises were recorded on 11 other language versions of the online encyclopaedia.

The impact wasn't immediate, however: the number of edits stalled in the immediate aftermath of major milestones in the course of the pandemic, such as Italy's lockdown, before rising rapidly as people sought diversions from being stuck at home.

The [Italian-language version](#) of the site saw an 80 per cent relative increase in new editors signing up to amend pages on Wikipedia following the introduction of Italy's lockdown in March 2020. "The impact and severity of the lockdown appears to have had an effect," says Thorsten Ruprecht at Graz University of Technology in Austria, one of the team behind the findings.

Read more: [Wikipedia's civil wars show how we can heal ideological divides online](#)

What Wikipedia editors turned their attention to during lockdown isn't yet fully clear, but is the subject of follow-up work by Ruprecht and his colleagues. Preliminary analysis shows that pages on elements of culture it was still possible to participate in – such as video games – saw increases in views, while pages on cinema and other restricted pastimes saw a decline in edits. Just over 1 per cent of all edits between January and September 2020 on the English-language Wikipedia were made to pages about covid-19.

"My interpretation of this result is that during times of stress and uncertainty – and when many of us are stuck at home behind our screens – one way we've responded is by collaborating to share all kinds of knowledge," says Kaylea Champion at the University of Washington in Seattle. "Part of the story here is what didn't happen: they don't find a correspondingly large increase in the rates of contribution removal."

Wikipedia is infamous for its protracted, pernicky [quibbles among editors](#) over small points of fact – so-called edit wars. "We found some hints there might be a decrease in edit wars on Wikipedia during the time, which leads us to believe during the crisis there might be a higher level of solidarity," says Ruprecht.

Reference: arxiv.org/abs/2102.10090

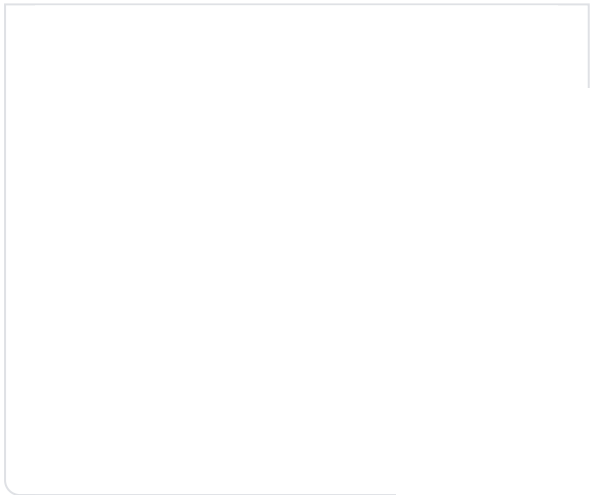
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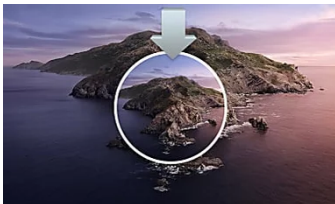


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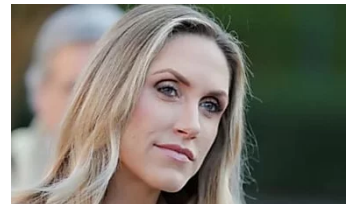
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