EACH TIME A volunteer editor adds a new fact to one of Wikipedia's over 44 million articles, they're required to citewhere they learned it. The nonprofit Wikimedia Foundation, which oversees the encyclopedia, became interested in what kinds of sources editors rely on the most. A recent studyconducted by the organization revealed something fascinating: A single academic paper, published by three Australian researchers in 2007, has been cited by Wikipedia editors over 2.8 million times—the next most popular work only shows up a little more than 21,000. And the researchers behind it didn't have a clue.

"Those numbers blew me away," says Brian Finlayson, one of the authors of the study and a retired geography professor at the University of Melbourne. "None of us had any idea about this. We didn't know Wikipedia collected this information or anything about it."

"It's a statistic that's hardly believable," says Thomas McMahon, a retired engineering professor at the same school and another co-author of the paper.