A MANIFESTO FOR WIKIMEDIA RESEARCH

In an age where Wikimedia operates as public knowledge infrastructure, we must ask new questions concerning open data, public knowledge, the agency of Wikimedia contributors, and the outcomes of their labour. Here, we present 10 principles for researchers working to understand Wikimedia's role in the global knowledge environment.

Map the dispossession of the commons · 1

We witness the ongoing struggle to determine what it means for information to be "free" and for whom this freedom generates value. We follow Wikimedian data as it circulates within techno-legal regimes of the public domain, copyright, and intellectual property law in ways that provide radical openings and concerning enclosures that alienate the altruism of community labour.

Recognise Wikimedia's role as a hub of global knowledge infrastructure · 2

We trace how Wikimedia projects intersect, combine, and feed into other applications, platforms, systems, and knowledge institutions. We work to understand how Wikimedia operates at the level of knowledge infrastructure, supplying and being supplied by data that affects the coverage of topics far from the Wikimedia platform. We also examine how its existence is influenced by the ready supply of volunteer labour, expertise, and funding.

Examine power relations · 3

We investigate the power relations that characterise Wikimedia's global community and stakeholders, including the Wikimedia Foundation. We also critically examine the role that these power relations play in Wikimedia as a knowledge institution, which results in ideological biases and epistemic gaps in the platform and manifests its own kinds of digital politics.

Explore the juxtapositions of Wikimedia policies and practices · 4

We explore the differences between ideal rhetoric – or what Wikimedia says it wants to be – and what Wikimedia is, i.e., the actual practices that have emerged, accumulated, and calcified over time. We ask how Wikimedia's practices and outcomes differ depending on contexts and the positions within the infrastructure that the activity is located.

Investigate linguistic and cultural plurality · 5

The English-language Wikipedia, for example, does not stand-in for all of Wikipedia or all the other Wikimedia projects including Wikidata or Wikimedia Commons. We work to understand how different Wikimedia language versions and projects reflect different kinds of problems, puzzles, and ways of knowing that stem from differences in culture, scale, resourcing, and objectives.

Assess the implications of algorithms · 6

We study the role of AI models and algorithms in shaping the production, circulation, and reception of Wikimedia projects and data. Studies of production include bots and bespoke code such as templates that frame subjects and direct editorial activity. Circulation studies include applications such as chatbots, search rankings, and recommendation systems that shape sustainability, knowledge integrity, and information discovery for Wikimedia projects. Reception studies analyse how users across the web who interact with Wikimedia data via search engines, social media platforms, chatbots, as well as galleries, libraries, archives, and museums interpret and make meaning from the Wikimedia data they encounter.

Historicise Wikimedia's epistemology · 7

We examine Wikipedia and Wikimedia's epistemological foundations, including its emphasis on consensus, neutrality, and the "verifiability, not truth" policy. Likewise, we examine how the project of Wikimedia has inherited ideas from the Enlightenment, historical practices of encyclopaedic production, and twentieth-century dreams of technocratic governance. We consider how these principles and histories influence knowledge representation and other epistemic institutions and activities.

Study Wikimedia's data as partial, temporary, fallible and shifting · 8

We resist treating facts, information, and policies as finalised, even though data's fluctuation does not mean it has less impact on those it represents, however fleetingly.

Situate research practice · 9

We reflect on our positionality as researchers based in particular places, with particular understandings and theories of knowledge, and in positions of power concerning global knowledge systems. This also means being cognisant of the ethics of studying online spaces as groups of people and not just as text, information, or data.

Build a shared project of critical investigation across disciplines · 10

We encourage researchers from different fields to discuss, debate, and conduct critical research about Wikimedia data. Importantly, new research questions demand that old methods be repurposed and that new methods be developed, ones that are sensitive to the diverse socio-technical situations of Wikimedia data and recognise its inherently qualitative and quantitative nature, thereby opening pathways for innovative mixed-methods research approaches These conditions make drawing on each other's disciplinary strengths necessary to stay attentive to research gaps and methodological oversights.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Dr Heather Ford
Dr Bunty Avieson
Dr Francesco Bailo
Dr Michael Davis
Dr Michael Falk

Dr Sohyeon Hwang
Dr. Andrew Iliadis
Dr. Steve Jankowski
Dr Amanda Lawrence
Dr Francesca Sidoti

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