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ANALYSIS OF WIKIPEDIA SURVEY DATA

Topic: Reasons for non-contribution

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Discussions regarding the sustainability of Wikipedia depend on an understanding of how many readers do not consider contributing to Wikipedia, the reasons for not contributing, and potential incentives that could be put in place to turn these readers into contributors.

The following tables examine responses¹ to the question, “have you ever considered to contribute to Wikipedia (e.g. created a new article, edited an article or participated in a discussion, etc.)?” in the context of responses to other questions in the survey. We observe important differences in the levels of interest in contribution among women, older readers and the highly-educated (note: these groups overlap). Only 24.53 % of highly-educated readers never considered contributing, compared to 31.08% of women and 47.26% of older readers.

As the tables below show, the main reason given for non-contribution (at 44-56%), is a concern that they “don't have enough information to contribute”, and similar shares (43-48%) who say they “are happy to read it and don't need to contribute”. Women show a significant reluctance to “edit other peoples' work” (about 26%) and about 30% of both women in general and the highly educated across genders say they “don't have the time”. About a quarter of women and the highly educated say they “don't know how” they could contribute.

The primary reason non-contributors would consider contributing is if they “knew there were specific topic areas that needed [their] help” (34-41%). Almost as important an incentive, (31-37%) for all groups, is a clear indication “that other people would benefit from [their] efforts”. A significant share (21-25%) of women and the highly educated (but only around 12% of older readers) also say they would contribute if they were “confident [their] contributions would be valued and kept”, reflecting uncertainty about the Wikipedia model of collaboration and quality control through continuous editing.

These results seem fairly positive for the sustainability of Wikipedia. In particular, among all groups, there was a relatively small share of readers who expressed that it would be a waste of time as their edits would be reverted; or that they don't contribute because enough others are contributing. Except for older readers, the availability of time to contribute is clearly an issue – which is not surprising for any voluntary activity.

We can expect contribution to increase if explanations of the technical aspects of contributing were made more readily accessible to readers; if it was made more explicitly clear that readers' contributions are welcome, and that people can contribute in many ways including those that don't require domain expertise, such as, for instance, correcting language or obvious errors. The single biggest incentive to increase contribution is probably making more clear what topics and what articles need editing. Wikipedia already has notices on pages which do not meet quality standards, need clean-up, etc. However, these notices are perhaps not explicit enough in addressing and engaging readers who are not yet part of the Wikipedia contributor community. Clearer, explicit identification of topics where readers might contribute, perhaps through notices and requests not limited to single articles, are likely to increase contribution: e.g., if a reader is looking at several articles on psychology, he or she could be presented with a request to contribute to other articles on psychology.

1 The following analysis only includes respondents identified as readers. Some of them also specified they were “other contributors” or “other non-contributors”. A first review of the textual explanations indicates that these other activities do not contradict the categorization as readers. A case-by-case review of other contributors and other non-contributors could lead to removal of a small number of cases from these results. The major findings will remain unaffected.

All respondents (regardless of age, gender, education) who have never considered to contribute

Answer	Count	%
No	28,897	24.88
Yes	75,804	65.27
Don't know	10,498	9.04
NA	940	0.81
	116,139	100.00

Table 1: Total non-contributors

Non-contributors

- Readers who have never considered to contribute and are >59 years old (A2 > 59 and activity = reader).
- Women who have never considered to contribute (A1 = 'female' and activity = reader).
- Highly educated who have never considered to contribute (A7 = 3/undergrad or 4/grad or 5/PhD and activity = reader).

Answer	Over 60 years old		Women		Highly-educated	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
No	957	47.26	10,994	31.08	12,659	24.53
Yes	906	44.74	19,904	56.26	34,045	65.98
Don't know	149	7.36	4,175	11.80	4,531	8.78
NA	13	0.64	304	0.86	364	0.71
	2,025	100.00	35,377	100.00	51,599	100.00

Table 2: Shares of non-contributors among older respondents, women, and highly-educated

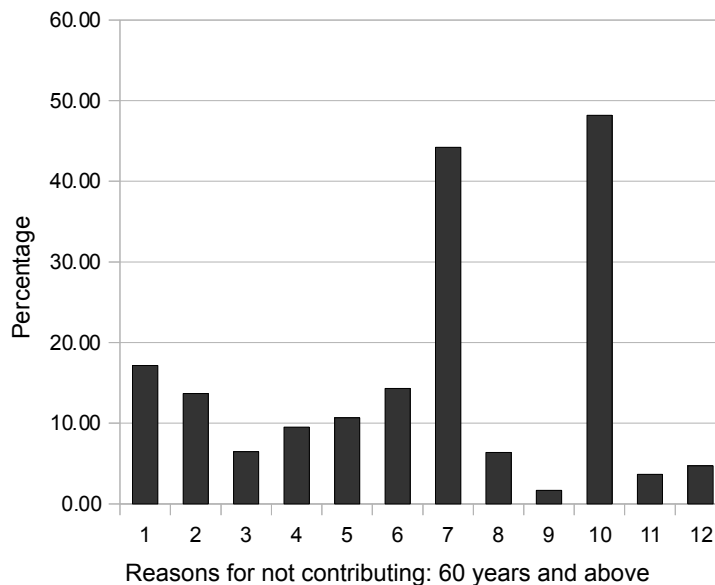
Non-contributors: People of 60 years of age and above

Q: Why don't you contribute to Wikipedia? (select as many as apply)

- 1 I don't know how
- 2 I am not sufficiently comfortable with the technology
- 3 I would never interact on the internet
- 4 Others are already doing it, there is no need for me
- 5 I don't have time
- 6 I don't feel comfortable editing other peoples' work
- 7 I don't think I have enough information to contribute
- 8 I am afraid of making a mistake and getting "in trouble" for it
- 9 It's a waste of time: my edits would be reverted or overwritten
- 10 I am happy just to read it; I don't need to write it
- 11 Other
- 12 Don't know

Value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Count	164	131	62	91	102	137	423	61	16	461	35	45
%	17.14	13.69	6.48	9.51	10.66	14.31	44.20	6.37	1.67	48.17	3.66	4.70

N=957



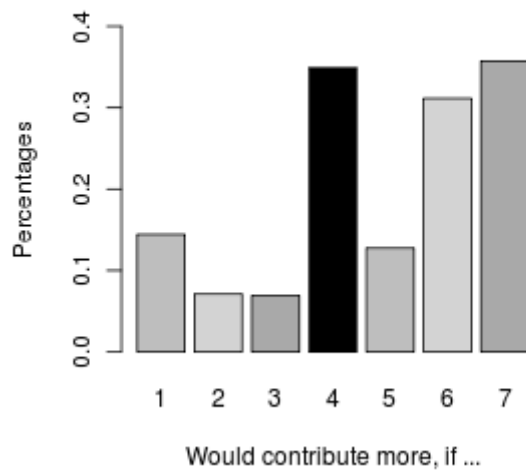
Non-contributors: People of 60 years of age and above

Q: I would be much likelier to contribute if (select as many as apply)

- 1 Someone would show me how to do it
- 2 The technology was easier to use
- 3 I knew that other contributors would be welcoming and encouraging
- 4 I knew there were specific topic areas that needed my help
- 5 I was confident my contributions would be valued and kept
- 6 It was clear to me that other people would benefit from my efforts
- 7 Other / don't know / don't want to say

Value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Count	138	68	66	334	122	298	342
%	14.42	7.10	6.90	34.90	12.75	31.14	35.74

N=957



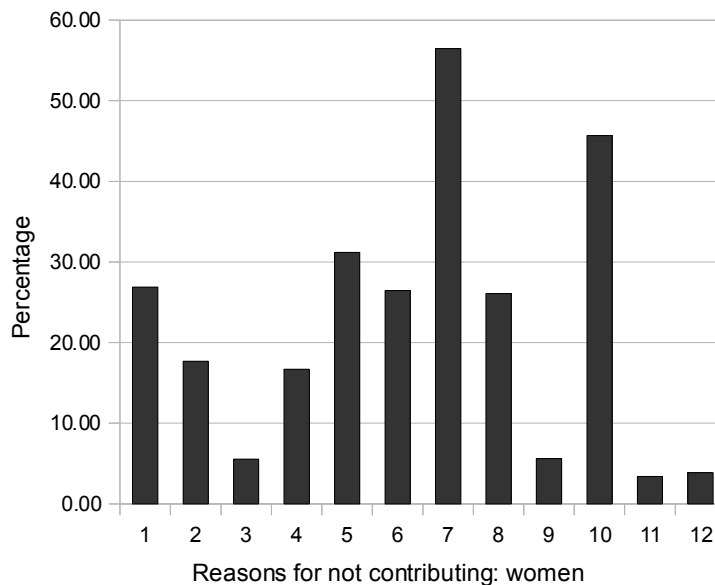
Non-contributors: Women

Q: Why don't you contribute to Wikipedia? (select as many as apply)

- 1 I don't know how
- 2 I am not sufficiently comfortable with the technology
- 3 I would never interact on the internet
- 4 Others are already doing it, there is no need for me
- 5 I don't have time
- 6 I don't feel comfortable editing other peoples' work
- 7 I don't think I have enough information to contribute
- 8 I am afraid of making a mistake and getting "in trouble" for it
- 9 It's a waste of time: my edits would be reverted or overwritten
- 10 I am happy just to read it; I don't need to write it
- 11 Other
- 12 Don't know

Value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Count	2954	1944	611	1837	3428	2910	6207	2870	618	5021	373	423
%	26.87	17.68	5.56	16.71	31.18	26.47	56.46	26.10	5.62	45.67	3.39	3.85

N=10994



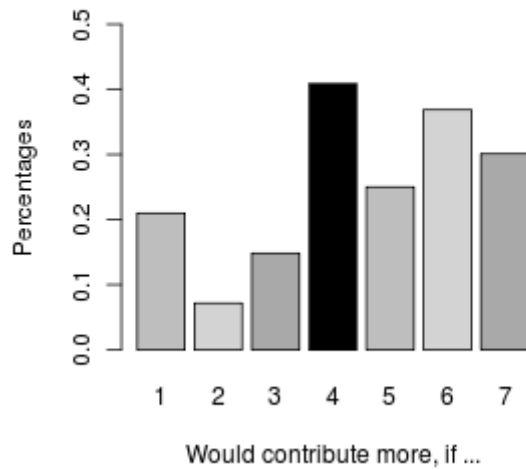
Non-contributors: Women

Q: I would be much likelier to contribute if (select as many as apply)

- 1 Someone would show me how to do it
- 2 The technology was easier to use
- 3 I knew that other contributors would be welcoming and encouraging
- 4 I knew there were specific topic areas that needed my help
- 5 I was confident my contributions would be valued and kept
- 6 It was clear to me that other people would benefit from my efforts
- 7 Other / don't know / don't want to say

Value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Count	2309	789	1632	4493	2751	4054	3310
%	21.00	7.18	14.84	40.87	25.02	36.87	30.11

N=10994



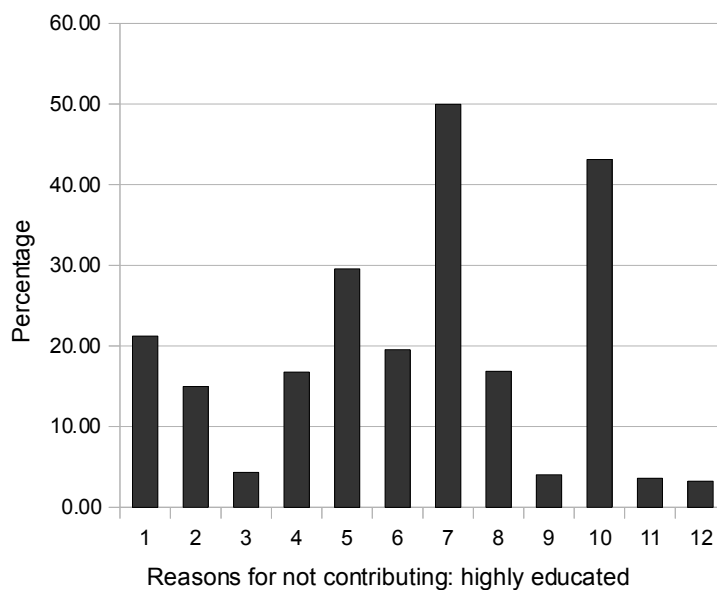
Non-contributors: Highly educated

Q: Why don't you contribute to Wikipedia? (select as many as apply)

- 1 I don't know how
- 2 I am not sufficiently comfortable with the technology
- 3 I would never interact on the internet
- 4 Others are already doing it, there is no need for me
- 5 I don't have time
- 6 I don't feel comfortable editing other peoples' work
- 7 I don't think I have enough information to contribute
- 8 I am afraid of making a mistake and getting "in trouble" for it
- 9 It's a waste of time: my edits would be reverted or overwritten
- 10 I am happy just to read it; I don't need to write it
- 11 Other
- 12 Don't know

Value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Count	2688	1894	546	2122	3742	2472	6324	2136	510	5461	455	410
%	21.23	14.96	4.31	16.76	29.56	19.53	49.96	16.87	4.03	43.14	3.59	3.24

N=12659



Non-contributors: Highly educated

Q: I would be much likelier to contribute if (select as many as apply)

- 1 Someone would show me how to do it
- 2 The technology was easier to use
- 3 I knew that other contributors would be welcoming and encouraging
- 4 I knew there were specific topic areas that needed my help
- 5 I was confident my contributions would be valued and kept
- 6 It was clear to me that other people would benefit from my efforts
- 7 Other / don't know / don't want to say

Value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Count	2280	1063	1495	5171	2706	4324	3640
%	18.01	8.40	11.81	40.85	21.38	34.16	28.75

N=12659

