Parsing the Former Contributor Survey

Survey Analysis and Findings

Report Overview

I: Numerical Analysis

II: Comment Keyword Analysis

III: Representative Comments

IV: Summary & Recommendations

Part I: Numerical Analysis

Percentages and Breakdown of Responses

Survey Design

- Goal: to understand why casual contributors leave Wikipedia
- **How**: e-mailed online survey to 10,000 "casual contributors"
 - Volunteers with 20-99 lifetime edits
 - Volunteers who "left" (no edits in past 3 months)
 - Last edit in 2009
- **Timeline**: survey from 1/26/10 to 2/2/10
- Responses
 - 1238 completed survey (12%)
 - 989 provided at least one comment
 - 451 were open to a follow-up call

Reasons for Trying vs. Leaving

Reasons for trying Wikipedia

- 80% saw "information that I wanted to add"
- 58% saw "small error" to fix

47% liked sharing knowledge [™]

Reasons for leaving

Personal priorities

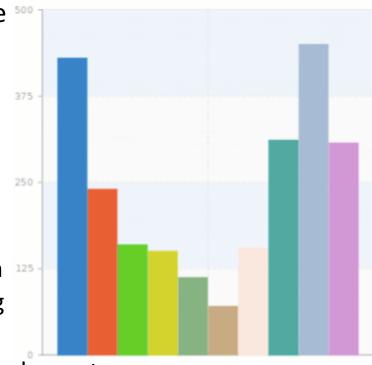
- 35%: Other commitments
- 20%: Contributed enough

Difficulty/Complexity

- 12%: Writing articles is difficult
- 9%: Too much time to maintain
- 6%: Found Wikipedia confusing

Community problems

- 12%: Found the atmosphere unpleasant.
- 24%: Felt that some editors made Wikipedia difficult



- I had other commitments (e.g. new job, new hobbies, started a family). (430)
- I contributed enough information to improve the articles I was interested in. (240)
- Writing an encyclopedic article is difficult and/or time consuming. (159)
- Editing and maintaining articles takes too much time for me. (150)
- Wikipedia is too confusing. (112)
- I felt that I was often working alone, with little feedback or support. (70)
- I found the atmosphere unpleasant. (155)
- Some editors made Wikipedia a difficult place to work. (311)
- I haven't stopped contributing. (450)
- Other (307)

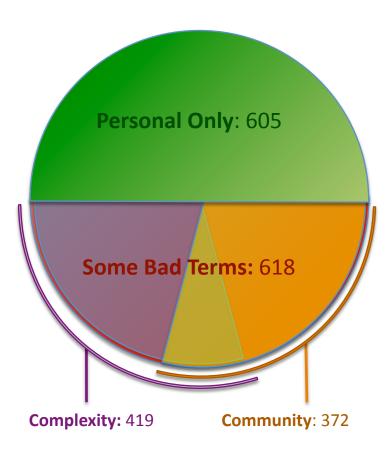
Q5: "Why Did You Leave Wikipedia?"

605 left solely for personal reasons

- Cited only personal reasons
 - "I had other commitments"
 - "I contributed enough information to improve the articles I was interested in."
- Zero complexity/community reasons

618 left (in part) due to bad terms

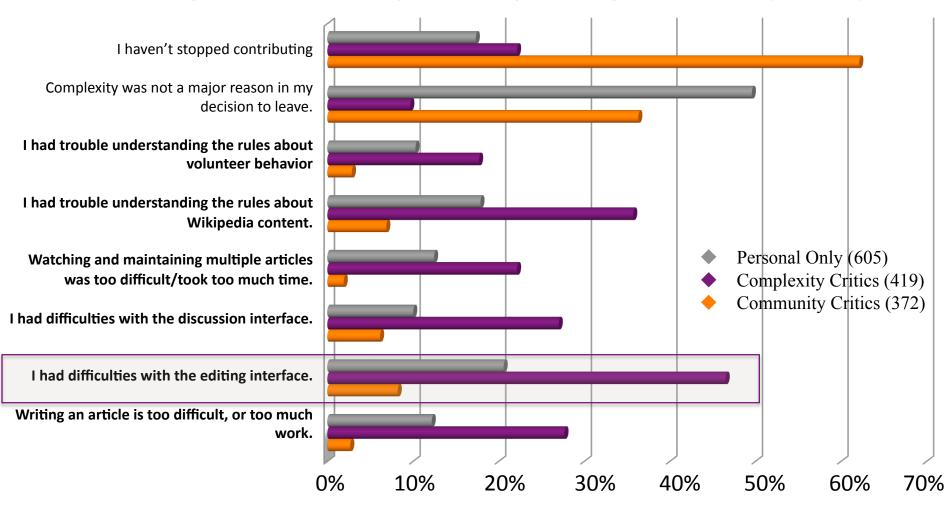
- 419 cited at least one complexity reason
 - "Writing an encyclopedic article is difficult and/or time consuming."
 - "Editing and maintaining articles takes too much time for me."
 - "Wikipedia is too confusing."
- 372 cited at least one community reason
 - "I found the atmosphere unpleasant."
 - "Some editors made Wikipedia a difficult place to work."



Used "why did you leave" answers to categorize editors into three different segments

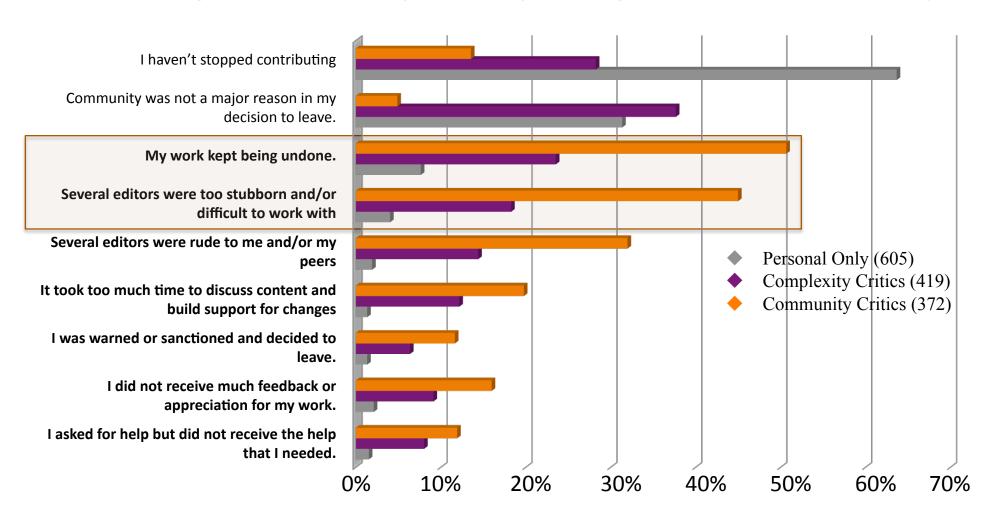
Complexity and Leaving Wikipedia

Each segment had different feelings on complexity



Community and Leaving Wikipedia

Each segment had different feelings about community



Numerical Analysis Wrap-Up

Roughly one half left solely for personal reasons

- This segment felt they had the least left to add (3.2/5.0)
 - Also said they were most likely to return to editing (4.2/5.0)

Others cited problems with Wikipedia

- Community critics
 - Mainly concerned with reversion and stubbornness
 - Not necessarily open hostility or rudeness
 - This segment felt they had most left to add (3.8/5.0)
 - Also the most uncertain about returning to editing (3.0/5.0)
 - Skewed towards more edits/experience

Complexity critics

- Mainly concerned with interface
- Skewed towards less edits/experience

Editors with 10-99 edits:

- ♦ 37% personal only
- **◆ 44% community critics**
- ◆ 25% complexity critics

Part II: Keyword Analysis

Open-Ended Responses, by Numbers

Comments Overview

- Asked users for their "most rewarding" experience, "worst" experience, and anything on their mind
 - 73% left a comment in good experience
 - 74% left a comment in bad experience
 - 48% left an additional comment
 - Inexact measure: many comments said "n/a" or "none"!
- Small but noticeable difference in comment frequency
 - Community critics were most likely to comment on all three
 - Those who left for personal reasons commented the least
- Applied keyword analysis on different segments
 - Compared frequency of certain words

Keyword Analysis Method

Analyzed frequency of words in all comments

about, add, after, all, also, am, an, and, any, are, as, at, be, because, been, being, but, by, could, didn't, do, does, doesn't, don't, even, every,

- Did not count common "everyday" words of, on, once, one, only, or, out, put, really, so, some, than, that, the, their, them, then, there, these, they, this, to, too, up, us, want, was, wasn't, were, what, when, where, which, who, with, without, won't, would, you, your
- Did not count common "Wikipedia" words work, work,

Compared word frequencies between responses

- Looked for 5+% differences on certain key words
- Analysis had systemic biases
 - Could not detect synonyms and suffixes
 - Comments that used a word multiple times got more weight
- The trends are more important than the exact values

Best Experience Analysis

"Most rewarding experiences" mentioned similar key words

	Word	f%		Word	f%		Word	f%	
1	seeing	11.4	1	seeing	12.5	1	knowledge	13.7	
2	knowledge	10.3	2	knowledge	9.3	2	seeing	9.5	◆ "seeing"
3	adding	7.8	3	adding	8.0	3	able	8.5	◆ "knowledge
4	rewarding	6.9	4	other	7.4	4	adding	7.4	
5	able	5.9	5	able	6.1	5	new	7.0	◆ "adding"
6	other	5.5	6	good	5.4	6	made	6.3	◆"able"
7	made	5.2	7	made	5.4	7	other	6.3	◆"made"
8	others	5.2	8	more	5.4	8	others	6.3	
9	more	5.0	9	rewarding	5.1	9	rewarding	6.3	
10	many	4.6	10	contribute	4.8	10	something	4.9	
Personal Only Comp				mplexity Criti	CS	Coı	mmunity Crit	ics	

Worst Experience Analysis

"Worst experiences" differed by segment

	Word	f%		Word	f%		Word	f%
1	none	11.6	1	deleted	9.5	1	editors	19.7
2	bad	11.4	2	editing	9.2	2	time	13.7
3	experiences	7.6	3	time	8.3	3	editor	12.4
4	experience	7.1	4	how	8.0	4	removed	12.5
5	deleted	4.7	5	editor	7.0	5	deleted	12.0
6	someone	4.7	6	more	7.0	6	other	11.5
7	seeing	4.3	7	bad	6.8	7	someone	8.6
8	editing	4.0	8	editors	6.8	8	editing	7.6
9	editors	3.5	9	much	6.1	9	made	7.3
10	see	3.5	10	know	5.8	10	more	7.3
11	time	3.5	11	new	5.8	11	did	6.7
•••			12	removed	5.8	12	new	6.1
•••			13	trying	5.8	•••		•••
•••			14	difficult	5.5	•••		•••
•••			15	made	5.5	•••		•••
16	removed	3.1	•••		•••	16	he	5.4
•••			17	other	5.2	•••		•••
21	how	2.9	•••		•••	19	how	4.8
22	know	2.9	22	pages	4.6			
Per	rsonal Only	Co	mplexity C	ritics	Community Critics			

Community Critics

- "editors", "editor"
- "removed"
- "other"
- "someone", "he"

Complexity Critics

- "how"
- "know"
- "difficult"
- "pages"

All Critics

- "time"
- "deleted"
- "made"
- "more"
- "new"

Personal Reasons Only

• "none"

Other Comment Analysis

"Is there anything else you would like us to know?"

	Word	f%		Word	f%		Word	f%
1	editing	14.0	1	more	22.1	1	editors	21.0
2	keep	11.6	2	make	17.2	2	should	15.4
3	more	11.6	3	editing	14.2	3	more	15.0
4	good	10.6	4	time	13.7	4	can	14.0
5	contribute	10.2	5	think	11.3	5	make	13.6
6	can	9.6	6	how	10.8	6	editing	11.7
7	will	9.2	7	much	10.8	7	much	11.7
8	make	8.9	8	should	9.8	8	think	11.2
9	great	8.5	9	good	9.3	9	time	10.7
10	see	7.5	10	can	8.8	10	how	10.3
	•••		11	interface	8.3		•••	
12	think	7.5					•••	
			13	editors	7.8	14	good	7.5
		•••					•••	
16	time	6.8	16	find	7.4	17	why	7.0
17	much	5.8	17	great	7.4		•••	
					•••	19	content	6.5
20	how	5.1	21	contribute	6.3	•••		
			22	easier	6.0	•••		
						•••		
•••			25	easy	5.9	25	needs	6.1
		•••	25	edsy	5.9	25	needs	0.1

Personal Only

Complexity Critics Community Critics

Community Critics

- "editors"
- "why"
- "content"
- "needs"

Complexity Critics

- "interface"
- "find"
- "easy", "easier"

All Critics

- "make"
- "time"
- "should"

Personal Reasons Only

- "keep"
- "contribute"
- "great"

Everyone

- ◆"editing"
- ◆"more", "much"
- ◆"can"
- ◆"think"
- ◆"how"
- ◆"good"

Keyword Analysis Wrap-Up

Best experiences were similar for all respondents

"seeing", "adding" "knowledge", "able", "made"

Worst experiences...

- Non-critics often said "none"
- Complexity critics are trying to understand?
 - E.g.: "how", "know"
- Community critics are hinting at other users?
 - E.g.: "editor", "editors", "someone", "he", "other"
 - Frequently mentioned "removed"

Keyword Analysis Wrap-Up

Respondents wanted Wikimedia to know about:

- Everyone: "more", "much"
- Non-critics: "keep", "contribute", "great"
- Critics: "time", "should"
 - Community critics: "editors", "why", "content"
 - Complexity critics: "interface", "easy", "easier"

These keywords can be applied to find comments that represent the community's feelings.

Part III: Representative Comments

Comments that Reflect User Trends and Key Words

Best Experiences are Universal

"seeing", "knowledge", "adding", "able", "made"

"Adding a whole series of articles about related subjects that had not yet seen the light of Wikipedia day. I was able to contribute new knowledge - very exciting!"

massive encyclopedia of knowledge of all sorts available to the word today. I love learning, & i love teaching others something to better themselves."

"Seeing the information updated real-time. Adding on to the collective pool on knowledge accessible to all."

"Adding to an article, using researched facts and feeling like I had made a very small but helpful contribution."

"It was rewarding just to be able to add to the most

"I like being able to fix small typos and stuff. It's gratifying seeing changes reflected immediately and permanently."

"Going back to a page I added something to months after adding it and still seeing what I added unchanged."

"Seeing others contribute to my Wiki article to make it even better - such as adding pictures. It made me feel my contribution was valuable to the other contributor."

"It felt good to know that my knowledge or interpretation of something, in this case the book Catcher in the Rye, was able to be published for all to read. ... I felt accomplished that I could be adding to someone else's experience."

"... I had the chance to share my knowledge with the world. Wikipedia made me PROUD of myself! Thanks!"

"Seeing the photos I personally made on the site"

Most People Left For Personal Reasons Only

Worst Experience

"none"

"None."

"Absolutely none!"

"None really."

"Don't really have a bad experience."

"I didn't have any bad experiences with Wikipedia."

"Encountering vandalism is annoying sometimes, but I haven't had a truly bad experience."

"Haven't had a bad experience really. Just a couple of reverts on minor edits that the article's main contributor didn't agree with.

"I didn't really have any bad experiences. I guess the was the point that I found most cumbersome, even though I understand it is necessary!"

Wanted Wikimedia to know...

"Great job, keep up the good work. I haven't really stopped editing, I'm just too lazy to sign in. "

"Keep up the great work! I will make more of an effort to contribute in the future."

"I love Wikipedia! I **think** you are **more** relevant than ever. ... I'm just not sure what I can contribute at times. I tweak more than I write."

"I've not stopped **editing**, but **contribute** now without logging in... The process is great -- keep it up!"

"I think Wikipedia is a great idea/site and this survey has revived my desire to edit again."

"As long as the page allows anonymous editing, I tend to do that because it's quick and easy. ... all in all, you I found the strict protection over image ownership guys are doing a great job (I donate to you almost every year), I still contribute (just not under my login name), and I want you to keep being awesome."

Worst Experiences for Complexity Critics

"how", "know", "difficult", "pages"

use them. I couldn't make links which annoyed me."

"I haven't yet started contributing in earnest because I "After taking the trouble to add/correct information ... to I'll find the **time** to learn. "

so all my work was lost."

much a manner like it was his and his alone."

user friendly for **new** comers."

"The codes were so confusing and I didn't know how to "I made a change and it was deleted or edited. What's the point if some people monitor 'their' pages?"

don't know how to do more elaborate things. One day find it has been refused by some editor who doesn't **know** better. I also found it very **difficult** to post photos"

"I added information to several pages, only to have an "... The article was littered with opposing prejudices (noneditor reject them en masse, calling them 'spamming'... NPOV), and it was difficult to gain a fair assessment of his I do not understand how to appeal the editor's decision, work. I have no idea how you sort out these entanglements."

"Contributing **new** ideas ... to certain **pages** often "beyond tweaking text it seems there is a culture I don't brought on the ire of one overly zealous Recent Changes know how to get into without lots of time/effort. I see Patroller who in my opinion treated Wikipedia in too code phrases ... based on a common sense to wikipedia people that I don't share, or know how to acquire."

"I don't feel like I fully understand the protocols... there "I found it technically very difficult to insert references." is a sense that there is an established group of editors. Some references are only held on paper... It's so who do know and expect you to understand everything technically difficult to write an article - it took me a month right away. I just don't have the **time** to learn to be ... and it seemed to me that it was deliberately made as adept with the process - its not difficult but it also isn't difficult as possible to contribute: you could easily provide a template, but no - I had to learn from scratch."

Complexity Critics Want Wikimedia to Know...

"interface", "find", "easy", "easier"

"The linking and user interface could be a bit easier for "Continue on the good work, but find a way for people to the non-tech savvy person"

NOT make entries based on falsehoods."

improve your editing interface"

"I **think** you will get many **more** new contributors if you "There **should** be a clear and **easy** way to determine who undid your work and when."

Microsoft Word 2007, which is **much easier** to me..." consuming and confusing."

"I **think** it is not **easy** to edit on Wikipedia with its "The **editing interface** is probably **easy** for geeks... For interface. I am personally used to working with older people, like me - a professional writer - it is time

me, but do not have time to take on other stuff even trusted and referenced to be added to the Wiki." when I find it while researching for something."

"I make changes in fact on stuff that is near and dear to "I love Wiki, but I need to find some facts that can be

"Not **much** has changed in the **editing interface**. Although I think I understand it most of the time, it surely is not the most easy."

"Please make uploading photos to Wikipedia easier!"

drain and makes me less interested"

"I find the process quite difficult and frustrating. I'm sure I could learn to do it without as many headaches if I had more time to put into it or if the system was easier to "A more user friendly interface would make it much use. I love the idea of Wikipedia and just wish I could be simpler to contribute/participate in the community. of more help. The thing I find hardest is creating the links Most of my time was spent learning tags and trying to ... If there was an easy way to do this, or if there were make the formula functions work... it becomes a **time** techie people who just did that part, I'd feel a lot happier about trying again."

Worst Experiences for Community Critics

"editors", "editor", "removed", "other", "someone", "he"

"Dealing with other editors. It's frustrating to change something, "... certain articles were impossible to edit because regular editors additions - especially when their... additions are untruthful."

"I spent 2 hours putting a new page together for a poetry "it became too difficult to work with other editors. I got the the rules. There were other organizations just like this one with interest groups over anything really important. " wikipages. Made no sense to me."

important to him--so he deleted it. The person removed had notable interest to the world for the work she does with the missing and exploited. Such a shame."

"Being threatened by other editors for adding info. I try and add to the Florence Italy page ... and had my entry removed and was told I would be banned if I added anything. ... Very unprofessional and hardly inviting!"

"My changes getting lost because of other editors. For example, I added a section about the lithium ion batteries, with a table "Having correct information that I'd submitted removed or again? "

only to have someone come in and change it back or edit your were ensuring that anything contrary to their biased opinion (despite evidence in support of changes) was removed."

organization. It was removed without a real explanation. It fit all distinct impression that there were wars going on amongst special

"Having my posted removed when I knew it was relevant and have "A bio ... was removed because a person deemed it not to be to wait a long time for communication with the editor responsible for removing it."

> "Repeatedly having valid information I submitted taken down by one other editor who seemed to have some sort of personal axe to grind"

> "Over-zealous editors make it an elite experience to edit with their rules. For someone with information to share it is intimidating, and frustrating to contribute to have it **deleted**."

showing how temperature and charge percentage contribute to 'corrected' (thereby making it incorrect) by a subsequent editor... I how fast the battery degrades. All cited and polished. 3 year know all about proper referencing. It's frustrating to find all sorts later, my addition was completely removed, and all that of inaccuracies in Wikipedia, and yet find that editors then remained was a brief summary of what I had written (references incorrectly fix information I've posted and have properly now missing), marked with [citation needed]. Why should I fix it referenced. It's as though it's a power game for some, and I'm not into wasting **time** playing power games."

Community Critics Want Wikimedia to Know...

"editors", "why", "content", "needs"

"Deleting **content** without a well written reason and a grace period to fix what is wrong is annoying. It **should** take 3 **editors** to delete **content**... The old wiki was **much** better."

"...inaccurate as I felt **editors** were about **content** I knew to be true, it still impressed me that had the **content** not been true or verifiable our **content** would... not have remained up."

"... something needs to be done about the regular editors who prevent anything but a one-sided opinion from showing. There are articles with a clear political bias that can not be edited for balance."

"... There **needs** to be a way to REASON with these **editors**, who ... tend to preserve the status quo... If an editor wants to undo someone's hard work, they **should** have to WORK WITH YOU to **make** at least part of your hard work usable."

"I was asked to add a side to a controversial issue by editors looking for an expert... all my contributions were vigorously opposed by laymen with an agenda, i.e. fanatics. (At this point 2 out of 4 have been banned...) Lack of support ... from other editors is primarily why I don't edit anymore."

"No not really. I understand why you rejected my content but disagree with your decision."

"Editors that don't respond to the discussion board yet remove a new editors post **should** be disciplined somehow. or the new editor **should** have an formal appeal process."

"Keep a better watch on who you block ... some of your senior **editors** have become quite elitist... you **should** scrutinize the decisions to block or accuse **more** closely."

"... Recruit qualified professional experts to oversee the **editing** of **content** in their field... While still allowing amateurs to edit, having a plurality of expert **editors** could ensure better entries on niche areas."

"I **think** it would be **good** if there was a **good** clarification of the various roles of **editors**... who **can make** which decisions or perform certain actions, as well as the process to move up the chain-of-command of **editors**."

"There needs to be a FAIRNESS doctrine... Why did we leave out aspects... which are unfavorable to pro-Western views and generally antagonistic to pro-Islamic views...? Wikipedia is on the front line in the war for the right to write history for future generations. There are those looking to complete this view and others resisting change."

"Strict editors ... should become more flexible."

Other Bad Experiences from Both Types of Critics

"time", "deleted", "made", "more", "new"

"Individuals ... made erroneous edits to my work that "It took two weeks to try to save a page from being would often go uncorrected for a long time."

"I feel frustrated because ... I don't know how to do more elaborate things. One day I'll find the time to learn."

"To be **new**... and have some self-appointed asshole flame you... because you didn't do things how they wanted them. Also I didn't have time to have a version war where those people probably don't have much else to do."

"... They started reversing or erasing every contribution I made within 2 minutes, regardless of the quality of my edit... I didn't want to get involved with childish games (unlike them, I have time constraints ...), so I opened a new account. They ... accused me of sock puppeting and reported my 'crime' to a friend of theirs, who banned me."

"...the apparent schoolboy editor had far more time ... and simply re-posted the erroneous material after I provided the correct information. This resulted in an editing war that repeatedly removed." I simply could not win due to time constraints."

"Being ticked off by a more experienced editor for making a small mistake - I was only trying to be helpful. If WP feels like a clique, new people won't want to edit."

deleted. I could have spent this time contributing."

"I made a change and it was deleted or edited. What's the point if some people monitor 'their' pages?"

"Edits made with full disclosure of affiliation are always deleted. Edits made under false pretenses aren't. Don't encourage people to lie."

"Writing a new article only to have it torn apart by ... bad words, curses and false information... Also some of my original articles and translations I made ... were deleted ... or modified a lot by vandals, ... rewriting without verifying information/presenting sources, so I would have to correct, verify or make unnecessary research."

"Contributions I made to articles ... got deleted. Especially details about the history of the gay/lesbian/transgender movement that were several times fact checked by me got

"I would have like more sparring with other previous contributors of the articles that I contributed... because I was VERY new... I would have liked a informal mailing list or an IRC to discuss some subjects."

Comment Wrap-Up

People love Wikipedia for similar reasons

- Adding their knowledge
- Seeing if they are able to make lasting additions
- Seeing how others interact with their knowledge and craft articles around it

Half of people leave solely for personal reasons

- A few mild criticisms, but no real bad experiences
- Will contribute once they find time, or if they can think of an article that interests them
- Want Wikimedia to keep up the great work

Comment Wrap-Up

Many editors left in part due to complexity

- Didn't know how to use specialized functions
 - E.g.: Difficult to post photos, make references, format...
- Didn't know how to fit in with Wikipedia culture
 - E.g.: Difficult to understand jargon, community processes...
- Interface should make it easier to contribute, interact, learn...

Many editors left in part due to community

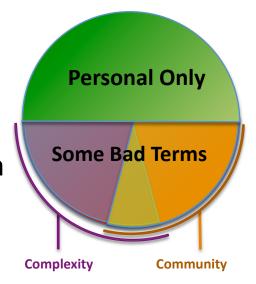
- Hate it when other editors block or remove changes to content
 - Contributions get lost for many reasons (bias, strictness, sloppiness)
 - More frustration if no one properly explained why
- Behaviors need to change among certain editors
- Wikimedia needs to address editors who are biased or stubborn
- Wikimedia needs to address editors who limit/avoid discussion

Part IV: Summary and Recommendations

What should Wikimedia learn, and what can Wikimedia do?

Build Good Experiences

- Around half of editors will leave solely for personal reasons
 - Want to contribute again once they find time,
 or if they think of an article that interests them
- The ideal Wikipedia experience is noticeably consistent among all editors:
 - Adding their knowledge, and seeing results



Recommendations to Wikimedia

- 1. Don't break what works. Don't get lured into trade-offs.
- 2. Economize time! Improve the interface for tedious tasks
- 3. Steer editors towards good experiences
 - Lead them to articles/sections where their work will matter
 - E.g.: match articles based on interest, experience level, etc.

Overcome Complexity Barriers



Profile of a Complexity Critic...

- Low or mid level of activity and experience
- Nearly half found the interface for editing difficult
 - Between ¼ to ⅓ likelihood of confusion for other activities
- Comments mainly wanted to know how to do difficult tasks
 - Also felt other editors expected them to know too much right away
- Wanted interface to make tasks easier, less time to learn and use

Recommendations to Wikimedia

- 1. "WYSIWYG" editing is a start, but other tasks need attention
 - Improve interface for photos, referencing, community processes, etc.
- Add tooltips and contextual help for jargon (e.g.: "NPOV")
- 3. Demarcate new users (< 100 edits) to reduce accidental "bites"

Overcome Community Barriers



Profile of a Community Critic...

- Mid or high level of activity and experience
- Around ½ found other editors stubborn, biased, reckless, etc.
- Almost ½ saw their contributions reverted or removed over time
- Described bad experiences due to other editors, removed work, or both
- More frustration if no one properly explained why

Recommendations to Wikimedia

- To help *low*-to-*mid* experience editors...
 - 1. Demarcate new and "mid" users (10-99 edits) to reduce accidental "bites"
 - 2. Design quick comment tool, to message peers without leaving the edit screen
- To help all editors...
 - 3. Improve dispute resolution processes (and help newer users access them)
 - 4. Allow users to monitor sections of articles for revisions
- Can't set behavioral policy... but can set goals to influence the community

Further Research for Wikimedia

Understand where and why reverts happen

- Calculate probability of getting reverted based on:
 - article category; editor's experience; size/type of change; etc.
- Why do some editors fit in where others are rejected?
 - Can use this info to steer editors towards good experiences

Understand which volunteer tasks take the most time

- Referencing? Research? Formatting? Photos? Other processes?
 - Better tools can boost editor output, and reduce editor burnout

Survey more experienced editors

- Evidence of burn-out from administrators and other key figures
- Need a larger sample size to draw firmer conclusions

...and look through individual comments for unique and powerful ideas!

(Not) The End

This survey revealed a lot of great data. Wikimedia can always do more to measure editor activity and gain volunteer feedback. But whatever conclusions we find, they will probably lead us to the same overall solutions for community health. So let's work together to turn our strategy into action!