

Quali-quantitative analysis on the perceptions from academic users on the Wikimedia projects. Contributions to encourage participation and retention

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Abstract

We seek to obtain a full profile of our target audience in order to design activities that will achieve better strategies that will allow us to: spread the word about the Wikimedia movement and projects, improve user retention rates, establish alliances with different key people across the scientific system, such as students, scholarship recipients, researchers, etc.

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1 Introduction

As Wikimedians of the Universidad Nacional de La Plata, we improve academic contents on the Wikimedia projects through the lens of gender and from the Global South, and we work along with GLAM institutions (museums, archives and libraries). We seek, through two Wikimedia Community Funds (2023 and 2024), to deepen Open Science (OS) initiatives in Argentina and other Latin American countries. With this goal in mind, we created the Wikimedians for Open Science Network, gathering regional academic institutions across

multiple disciplines within the *National Science, Technology and Innovation System (SNCTI)*¹ in Argentina. At the same time, we established alliances with other individuals and groups.

We noticed through our activities that academic users' paths differ from the ones from other users when it comes to approaching and retention rates in the Wikimedia projects. This leads to natural questions to improve the activities we carry out, as well as the link between Wikimedia and Open Science:

- How can we characterize the academic user and their trajectory across the Wikimedia projects?
- What is the perception of the Wikimedia projects among the SNCTI participants? What are their demands, needs and reluctance?

Facing these questions also contributes to deepen the link between the scientific community, Wikimedians, and society at large. This relationship is founded upon the conception that Wikimedia projects are an effective way for the development of Open Science and its Public Communication. Diagnosing this relationship could help in:

- better recognizing the perception of the scientific community,
- improve user support and user retention strategies,
- encourage the use of Wikimedia projects within Open Science,
- solidify alliances between the scientific community and the Wikimedia projects.

We will pursue a quali-quantitative analysis, through surveys and interviews with SNCTI members, in order to portrait the academic user's profile and thus propose better interventions. The research will be conducted between July 2023 and March 2025.

2 Related Work

The 2020 pandemic boosted the discussion on open research, science communication and the ways to access knowledge in the Wikimedia projects ([Deltell and Claes 2021](#); [Gozzi et al. 2020](#)). The use of Wikimedia in higher education is also more frequent due to the advantages it presents ([Archuby, Béguelin, and Lorente 2020](#)).

Although Wikipedia has faced resistance among the scientific community ([Jemielniak and Aibar 2016](#)), research has confirmed its effectiveness as a public channel for science communication ([Aibar 2016](#)), its scientific accuracy ([Giles 2005](#); [Rumbo-Prieto 2019](#)), and its usage of up-to-date specialized bibliography ([Teplitskiy, Lu, and Duede 2016](#)). However, we've noticed a gap on research about the perception of the Wikimedia projects in Latin America, as well as on the links between Wikimedia and Open Science from the point of view of the researchers themselves. Qualitative or mixed research on the academic perception around Wikimedia is still nascent and hardly developed around the world ([Rivoir, Escuder, and Rodriguez Hormaechea 2017](#)).

¹ N.T.: After its initials in the original Spanish.

3 Methods

We propose a mixed strategy with a higher proportion of qualitative research ([Bellotti 2014](#); [Hesse-Biber 2010](#); [Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner 2007](#)). Grounded Theory ([Bonilla-García and López-Suárez 2016](#); [Glaser and Strauss 2017](#)) is operative for initial research projects like the present one, and allows theory to emerge through the generation and linking of categories, and sampling related to theoretical saturation.

Data will be obtained through two main ways:

- A minimum of 100 surveys to SNCTI members, regardless of their experience in Wikimedia projects, and
- At least 10 in-depth interviews on a subset of the surveyed population.

The surveys will gather demographic and thematic variables, perception on Wikimedia projects, Open Science, interest and potential for collaboration. These will be applied to different actors of SNCTI (students, scholarship recipients, researchers, etc.), in order to build several profiles according to their roles and specialties, so as to gather raw data that can be analyzed in a descriptive way.

The interviews will focus on a deeper exploration on the topics addressed in the surveys. For instance, they will inquire on [users'] trajectories, difficulties, and perceived benefits. These narratives will be analyzed through the generation of categories based on iterative strategies ([Agar 2006](#)).

4 Expected output

We wish to end up with a diagnosis that will improve the relationship between the academic community, academic users, and the Wikimedia movement. To this end, we intend to:

- Synthesize our most relevant findings in a report aimed at the Wikimedia and academic communities, so as to aid in decision-making processes,
- Communicate the research process and results on Wikimedia [communications] channels, adding to the work on GLAM-, University- and Scientific-related initiatives,
- Communicate on scientific events and journals specialized in Open Access, preferably in a daily basis ([Monti 2019](#)),
- Communicate through social media, focused on the production of meaning around science as a social institution, as well as the reflection on the academic world ([Alcíbar 2015](#)),
- Upload the data to the UNLP Research Data Repository, according to the FAIR principles GO FAIR ([2023](#)).

5 Risks

- That the survey sample is not diverse enough in disciplines and academic trajectories represented (can be solved with a larger sample),
- That the responses are biased due to the current socio-political context,
- That the [end] product does not meet the needs.²

6 Community impact plan

The end product will enrich the current knowledge on the recruitment and retention of Spanish-speaking academic users. We hope that this will aid in the increase of recruitment rates in the area, and the generation of projects that encourage the use of Wikimedia projects.

7 Evaluation

The project results can be evaluated on the analysis of the sampled population, the conclusions it reaches, and the production of texts and published materials as outlined in the *Expected output* section.

8 Budget

- One computer and computing supplies (USD 1,500);³
- Fees for research tasks (USD 2,000)
- Interview transcription (USD 200)
- Interview-support merchandising (USD 500)
- Attendance to specialized meetings (USD 2,000)
- Administrative expenses (USD 310)

9 Prior contributions

Since 2020, we've organized a number of edit-a-thons and other activities related to the academic landscape; we've also created the *Red de Wikimedistas en Ciencia Abierta*⁴, as well as taking part in scientific events and publications (see https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedistas_de_la_Universidad_Nacional_de_La_Plata/Publicaciones)

² N.T.: It's not specified whose needs.

³ N.T.: converted to list form to aid readability.

⁴ N.T.: Wikimedians for Open Science Network.

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