Extended: Open Knowledge for a new generation – Youth-led co-creation with GLAMs in transregional contexts.

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Abstract

This study examines how youth-led Wikimedia campaigns co-designed with cultural institutions can enhance both platform relevance for younger generations and improve knowledge equity.

Through participatory interventions with museums and libraries in Asia and Europe, this research explores alternative pathways to youth engagement. The research foregrounds a co-creation approach because it invites youth to shape the terms of participation. By investigating how youth conceptualize credible knowledge, or prioritize knowledge formats, the role they imagine Wiki-content playing in their digital hangouts and so on - we will develop adaptable frameworks that support Wikimedia's Multigenerational Strategy.

The results of the study will inform strategies and possible models that center youth agency in (open) knowledge production across the Wiki communities and projects.

Key definitions:
Youth: For this study, individuals aged 16-24 who are digitally connected but not necessarily active Wikimedia contributors.

Wiki platforms that we will focus on: Wikipedia, WikiCommons and WikiSource

Introduction

Relevance for Youth : While Wikimedia platforms like Commons and Wikipedia remain foundational to digital knowledge, preliminary observations suggest they may not occupy "top of mind" status among digital natives who engage with information through different modalities. This potential gap between youth digital preferences and Wikimedia's youth engagement models requires investigation to ensure continued relevance in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Regional disparity & knowledge equity:
This relevance gap is compounded by highly uneven educational and infrastructural conditions across countries and communities (Lemmerich et al., 2019). Current youth participation—primarily through classroom assignments—varies across regions, with stronger adoption in Western educational contexts but limited engagement in certain regions (like India), where educators often discourage Wikipedia use. The quality, quantity, and scope of youth contributions reflect these asymmetries, resulting in persistent representation gaps—in geography, language, culture, and topic diversity—that content campaigns alone cannot address.

Exploring alternative models:
There is little evidence to understand if fundamentally shifting the grounds of youth participation can also enhance the relevance of Wikimedia platforms while simultaneously improving knowledge equity. Current approaches, primarily classroom-based assignments, rarely take into account youth digital preferences or their unique perspectives on knowledge creation. This research takes a co-creation approach to understand how youth themselves would shape the terms of participation in open knowledge platforms.

Institutional Partnerships:
Cultural institutions (museums and libraries) stand uniquely positioned as trusted mediators between institutional knowledge and youth digital culture. At the same time, persistent regional and structural barriers—including policy constraints, infrastructural limitations, and capacity issues—continue to affect knowledge representation (in institutional partnerships).
Through youth co-creation initiatives, these institutions can potentially highlight low-barrier, alternative models for institutional engagement that resonate with next-generation digital habits while addressing representation gaps even in regions with limited Wikimedia engagement.

This research specifically addresses the Multigenerational Strategy and investigates how youth-led Wikimedia campaigns, co-designed with cultural institutions, can create new pathways to relevance for both youth participants and underrepresented knowledge in an evolving digital landscape. Our findings will provide actionable frameworks for Wikimedia communities to redesign youth engagement initiatives across diverse contexts.

Our research questions are aimed at understanding:

- How do youth conceptualize "credible knowledge" in digital spaces, and what implications does this have for Wikimedia's presentation and validation mechanisms?
- Which formats of knowledge production better align with youth digital habits and increase participation? And what role do they imagine Wiki-content playing, in their “digital hangouts”
- What specific barriers (technical, cultural, perceptual) prevent youth from viewing Wikimedia platforms as relevant to their information needs?
- What platform behaviour/digital interaction patterns do youth prioritize when engaging with knowledge platforms and how might these inform the strategies of open knowledge participation?
- How can cultural institutions effectively bridge the gap between institutional knowledge and youth digital engagement patterns?

Date: We aim to start the project on August 15, 2025 and conclude by May 15, 2027.

Related work

Current landscape - Youth and Wikimedia projects:

Several studies have documented the effectiveness of Wikipedia assignments in university and secondary education, in building digital literacy and critical thinking skills. These educational interventions successfully develop editing competencies and subject knowledge among participants (Azar, 2023; Brailas et al., 2015; Christensen, 2015; Foster-Kaufman, 2019;

Freire & Li, 2014). However, they predominantly position youth as *executors* of predefined tasks rather than *co-designers* of knowledge initiatives.

While youth-*targeted* digital initiatives are well-documented, significant gaps exist in understanding youth-*directed* knowledge production models :

1. Frameworks for meaningful youth participation that position young people as knowledge architects rather than merely contributors
2. Scalable and sustainable models for youth-institution partnerships in open knowledge contexts
3. Evidence-based approaches for addressing barriers specific to youth from underrepresented communities

Current landscape: GLAMs & Wiki

GLAMs have been identified as 'important Commons stakeholders' , with research examining barriers to their participation in the open knowledge movement.
Furthermore, the Institute for Museum Research in Berlin is currently investigating Wikimedia's integration into museum workflows and objectives (e.g collection availability and visibility on Commons), representing a growing interest in this intersection.
However :

- These studies have generally not delved into participatory intervention methods as pathways for sustainable partnerships.
- The potential of youth-centered collaboration between cultural institutions and open knowledge platforms remains largely unexplored.

The proposed research builds on a significant foundation of work at the intersection of cultural institutions, open knowledge platforms, and digital engagement—positioning our team uniquely to address the identified research gaps.

a. The Institute for Museum Research, as a nationwide research institute of the National Museums in Berlin - Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, brings institutional credibility and established networks to this project. Dedicated to museum innovation and adaptation in a changing society, the Institute serves as a crucial nexus between traditional knowledge institutions and emerging digital practices. Its role as an incubator for innovative research topics provides an ideal institutional context for investigating youth engagement with open knowledge platforms.

This proposal extends the Institute's ongoing work with the Wikimedia community, on "data donations" from museums to Wikimedia Commons. This existing initiative ensures well-maintained, verified object information and quality images become available to broader publics under open licenses—creating a foundation upon which youth-led engagement models can be built.

b. The team brings complementary expertise in **participatory design and digital engagement.**

- Dr. Patricia Rahemipour and Dr. Kathrin Grotz previously led the innovative "It's About Time 4.0" project (2021), which transformed a physical museum experience into virtual space. This project incorporated stakeholder and audience perspectives into design and prototyping processes—methodological expertise directly applicable to our proposed youth co-creation approach. Their work has contributed to theoretical understandings of how virtual museums can redefine the "museum experience" in both global and local contexts.

- Complementing this institutional knowledge, the author (Medhavi Gandhi) brings practical experience in Wiki projects, youth engagement with open knowledge and GLAMs. Having facilitated two iterations of an Open Knowledge Fellowship (supported by the Wikimedia Foundation's Rapid Grants) that targeted emerging researchers, the author is currently partnering with Wikimedia UK and five GLAMs to investigate emerging young researchers' use of new multimedia formats while centering South Asian voices.
  This research also extends **the author's previous work and studies** on participatory engagement in digital cultural heritage contexts– *how participatory methods can transform traditional audience-institution relationships.* While the prior work established the value of co-creation in cultural heritage settings, this project specifically addresses youth engagement in open knowledge platforms like Wikimedia.

By addressing research gaps, and building on our individual strands of work, this research will contribute to understanding how Wikimedia platforms can evolve to remain relevant to digitally native generations while simultaneously addressing persistent knowledge equity challenges. Our findings will inform both theoretical understanding of youth digital knowledge practices and practical models for institutional partnerships that center youth agency—creating pathways for more inclusive and sustainable open knowledge ecosystems.

This study also has the potential to add a dimension to the growing body of scholarship about shaping youth participation and engagement with digital platforms.

Methods

This research deliberately seeks perspectives from youth outside existing Wiki communities to understand the broader barriers to engagement and to capture fresh insights.

This research employs a mixed-method, participatory action research design. As we might be working with minors, we will consider consent processes, data protection, and so on. Institutional partners will be nudged to prioritize the inclusion of youth from underrepresented groups.

Contextual Analysis of Selected Youth-Wiki Initiatives: analysis of Wikimedia-affiliated youth programs, campaigns, and GLAM-Wiki collaborations that have documented outcomes or lessons relevant to this study (e.g., WikiClubs, WikiVibrance, WikiAfrica Education, youth edit-a-thons, zine-making workshops, etc.). Type of intervention, documented outcomes, success factors and challenges will be reviewed.

Preliminary Youth Survey (n = 100-120): A short survey will gather input from youth on:
-current engagement with digital knowledge platforms
-barriers to participation in knowledge production
-preferred content creation modalities
-attitudes toward Wikimedia projects
and so on.

Youth Selection and Orientation: A cohort of 15–20 young participants in each region will be selected with the help of 6 museum partners in Europe and Asia based on interest and demographic diversity.

Pre-Pilot Survey and Interviews: We will conduct a detailed baseline assessment with participants who will also be enabled to identify criteria to make their participation in open-knowledge meaningful.

Participatory Design Sessions [3]: Youth and museum staff will co-develop Wikimedia-based interventions tailored to their local contexts informed by cultural / historical collections.

Post-Pilot Survey and Focus Groups: Youth will reflect on their experiences in terms of learning, confidence, peer support, motivation to continue contributing, and perceptions of Wikimedia platforms.

Community Showcases / Roundtables: knowledge-sharing events will bring together youth, museum staff, Wikimedia affiliates, Wiki Researchers who have related expertise (e.g Wiki in Education), and policy stakeholders.

Analysis of Contributions and Campaigns: We will review Wikimedia project metrics as well as qualitative indicators and the engagement with each youth-led campaign.

Expected output

1. Research Paper and Recommendation Report which includes:
    a. an adaptable framework for implementing youth co-creation projects in open knowledge contexts
    b. suggestions for making Wikimedia platforms more responsive to youth digital interaction patterns.

2. Case Studies and Blog articles by partnering institutions and youth-groups.

Target audience :

- Wikimedia Research Team
- Affiliates & Partner institutions working with youth (e.g EduWiki)
- Educators using Wikipedia or other platforms in the classroom
- Cultural institutions and those interested in researching civic-tech participation.

These will be shared via:

1. a presentation at GLAM-Wiki, and Wikimania, to benefit the larger community.
2. Presentations via Institute for Museum Research's Salon and other industry conferences (especially in Asia - e.g National Museum Educators Meet, India) to enable GLAMs to adopt similar pathways of engagement.
3. Presentations at leading Digital Humanities educational meetups to share the study with educators at school and university level.
4. Presentation at the Creative Commons Monthly meet and other similar networks (for example, I have shared about my work in building participatory practices at the Restoration Toolbox conference by Platoniq; Europeana Conference and at similar spaces, where I am invited, this study will be shared).
5. A public facing report disseminated via Institute for Museum Research and its partners. The publication will also be disseminated via the GLAM Wiki newsletter.
6. Blog articles [case studies on each intervention] on The Heritage Lab published under a CC license and reaches 85000 unique readers monthly, 70% based in Asia.

Risks

Digital literacy and prior exposure to Wikimedia platforms:
Not all youth participants will be familiar with open knowledge, editing or contributing to Wikimedia. *To mitigate this, a mentorship layer will be added — either through peer mentors (e.g., from local Wiki communities) or training by facilitators.*

Partner - staff capacity problems: A participating partner institution might not have the capacity to regularly engage with selected youth. *The project will specifically seek partnerships with museums already active in youth programming. Partnership criteria will also include capacity. A small honorarium will be shared to support project-related costs.*

Uneven resource distribution: There might be varying access to resources for youth and depth of participation may vary.
We recognize that not all pilots will look the same; therefore, we will place emphasis on local relevance, youth-led direction, and reflective engagement. The research design recognizes and values different forms of participation and output.

Community impact plan

We plan to work with GLAM-stakeholders for the pilot interventions and possibly selected Wiki Affiliates for mentorship.
For further impact, we would like to invite Wiki affiliates working on education and youth based campaigns (EduWiki, WikiCEEHub and the youth group) to our roundtable and showcase events to create a platform for exchange of ideas.
Additionally, participating youth will be supported to share their experiences through blog posts / videos and on social media which will be included in the final report.

Evaluation

We would hope for the proposal to be evaluated for its:

Strategic Relevance and original approach

- Alignment with the strategy https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Strategy/multigenerational# and advancement of youth engagement priorities.
- Potential to inform implementable recommendations for a youth-friendly evolution of Wikimedia platforms as well as applicability across socio-cultural contexts.

Ability to impact youth perception of the open knowledge movement/

We will evaluate our work on parameters such as participant diversity, the reach and engagement of our findings (effective dissemination and community discourse),

Budget

2025 Research Fund Budget Template

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