Wikipedia is actually driving people to scholarly literature and therefore it is a top 10 referrer to all scholarly articles online: Jake Orlowitz

Jake Orlowitz is a Wikipedian, blogger, entrepreneur, writer, speaker and an institution builder. He is the founder of The Wikipedia Library of Wikimedia Foundation which provides library and reference services to the editors and readers of Wikipedia. He recently left the Wikimedia Foundation and currently heading his own consulting company called Blueprint Advising. He works with a variety of open knowledge organisations like archives, open access publishers and digital repositories. A creative entrepreneur who loves to help empower online communities and organizations to achieve their goals. He is also passionate about projects that offer novel benefits to people in a way that is simple, clever, and effective.

Santosh C. Hulagabali interviews *Jake Orlowitz* for *Open Interview* with the aim to showcase how Wikipedia Library brought ripples of change in the open knowledge domain. Academics and researchers have varied perceptions about Wikipedia content. However, the efforts, content creation practices and usage pattern show promising trends of knowledge creation, dissemination and achieving open culture. Therefore, Wikipedia negates the perception that it provides free content only, in fact, it drives readers to scholarly literature in a big way.

● **First of all, on behalf of the readers of Wikipedia, The Wikipedia Library (TWL) and Open Interview I appreciate you for founding the TWL and your contributions in promoting open access culture.**

That's so kind. It's really been an honor and a pleasure working on open knowledge with the Wikipedia community. When I started TWL I wanted to "arm editors" with all the reliable sources they needed to write great articles. I think I've helped do that. Also, Wikipedia gave me a place to direct my passions--it gave me a calling. I am forever grateful for that.

• You left TWL recently. You are passionate about projects that synthesize challenging ideas and benefits people in a way that is simple, clever, and effective. What are your present engagements and how you are placed yourself in the similar cause?

I recently left the Wikimedia Foundation where I ran TWL for 6 years. It was bittersweet to go, but I had to move on to the next phase of my journey and projects. I am currently an independent open knowledge contractor with my own consulting company called *Blueprint Advising*. I am working with a variety of open knowledge organizations like archives, open access publishers and digital repositories. My "clients" are looking to expand the reach of research, improve discovery and usage of open sources, and engage and integrate with open projects like Wikipedia.

• Please tell us how TWL was conceived and became an important part to build the strong team of Wikipedians?

It's a neat story. I was just a volunteer working on a single biography, and was driven to find every possible source about this public figure. I remembered a database I had used in school called HighBeam, and they offered a 2-week free trial. Through my searching on their platform I nearly doubled the number of sources I could use for the biography. When the trial ended I felt a loss--why should my future articles not have the same boost of sources? But HighBeam's annual subscription cost was nearly $200. I had no income at that time, so that just wouldn't work. And I strongly believed that Wikipedia volunteers, who give so much time and energy, shouldn't have to pay for it.

So, I made a bold decision to call HighBeam and just ask for free access. Out of the blue, I dialed customer service number and made a proposal. I said, "I'm a Wikipedia editor and I'd like free access to HighBeam for writing articles, and maybe a few accounts for some of my editing friends." HighBeam's response was immediate and overwhelming. They said, "How about 1,000?" That was the beginning of TWL. It was then I realised that Wikipedia's reach and reputation could open doors.

• What were the initial challenges and how were those addressed?

Initially, the biggest challenge was figuring out how to distribute 1000 accounts. As there was no infrastructure for sign up, I had to create all the on-wiki pages and processes to facilitate applications, tracking, and giving out access. I used very simple manual tools like spreadsheets and sending out individual emails with account codes to hundreds of editors. It took a lot of time and didn't scale well. But I was so excited that I barely noticed these initial challenges.

• Many would be curious to know how TWL serves the editors of such mega encyclopedia in the world. How many editors are using the TWL resources and how their demand to access paywalled and open resources is met?

Currently, The Wikipedia Library Card Platform (wikipedialibrarycard.org) offers access to 80,000 different journals from 60 different publishers. There is a minimum requirement of a 6 month-old account with 500 edits, which means that across all Wikipedia projects about 25,000 editors qualify. Not all of them have signed up of course (that number is around three thousand, through nine thousand grants of access). The goal in the next years is to make access much more widely used, since we have it to give out!

• How far Wikipedia has achieved its quality as TWL is playing a vital role as facilitator?

Wikipedia is a dramatically important website: the top 5 most accessed on the entire internet and the only non-profit in the top 10. The site gets half-a-billion monthly visitors and is viewed thousands of times per second. What we learned over time is that Wikipedia is actually driving people to scholarly literature. CrossRef, which tracks referrals to academic papers found that Wikipedia is a top 10 referrer to all scholarly articles online.

There are over 30 million citations on English Wikipedia alone, and those citations improve the quality of reader research. Many of the Wikipedia Library partners have seen 200% to 600% increases in the number of citations to their resources on Wikipedia. Moreover, many of our partners have seen incoming traffic rise as much as 200% as readers click citations on live Wikipedia articles. That means Wikipedia's readers are being exposed to more and better citations, and actually going on to dig deeper into the citations after reading the article.

More recent data shows that TWL access is driving the creation of *50 thousand citations* each year to high quality sources. That's a remarkable number. And the #1Lib1Ref campaign, which engages librarians to add citations brings in over 10 thousand new references each year as well.

• In the research world, citing Wikipedia content is still considered 'not so good practice'. What do you say about this?

There are a few reasons you wouldn't cite Wikipedia in the research world. The first is that Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, a tertiary source far removed from the original research. As a 'summary of summaries' it's more rigorous to site the secondary source which Wikipedia cites instead. This is why we often tell readers to cite what Wikipedia cites rather than Wikipedia itself. The second reason not citing Wikipedia is that it is always changing. The version you look at could look different in a week or a minute--so which version are you referring to? Also, you could be looking at a recently vandalized version, and in that case it's wise to check the article history for recent changes to that part of the text. In either case, if you do cite Wikipedia, you should cite a specific time-stamped version in the history and not the live article link. All of that said, Wikipedia has been cited by top scholars, doctors, and lawyers--even the Supreme Court of the U.S.! The most common reason they cite Wikipedia is because it reflects 'common knowledge' or 'current terminology' as it is understood by the public. So definitions are actually a good thing to cite from Wikipedia if you're trying to establish a framework of popular understanding. Finally, you should cite where you actually got your information, so if you did get it from a Wikipedia article, you should say so!

● Resources, discovery, and access differ for readers, librarians and publishers. What issues and challenges Wikipedia experiences to face these parameters with the said categories of users? How does Wikipedia strategically manage this?

The landscape of publishing is a moral tragedy and a real complicated mess. Most of humanity's knowledge is locked behind paywalls, with only a privileged few being able to read it. That has disastrous impacts on scientific research, public health, and civic engagement. To add insult to this situation, much of that research is funded by taxpayers themselves, so they are paying to *do* the research and then paying again to read it!

Wikipedia is of course an open website with a radical Creative Commons copyright that permits free access and reuse but the sources upon which Wikipedia is based are still often under copyright. And there are many more sources editors could use if they could access them. In this world, libraries are a real beacon for knowledge, because they are "free-zones" for the public who would otherwise not be able to access so much good information. At the same time, libraries pay a lot for that access and it's not a fair or sustainable model. It's also not achievable for so many parts of the world and their institutions which are less well-funded.

Access to knowledge should not depend on your budget, but in this world it sadly still is. With the open access movement, that is gradually changing, but there's a long way to go!

● Wikipedia needs to collaborate with many publishers including the traditional publishers. How difficult is to collaborate with the publishers as Wikipedia shares openly whatever it gets from them. So how this collaboration still keeps moving?

To be honest, it's a good deal for publishers. It costs them basically nothing to give free access to a fraction of their total subscribers, and in return they are cited more on a tremendously popular website. That's a win-win arrangement that most publishers have been easily persuaded by. The bigger challenge was convincing publishers that their prestigious journals should be associated with the crowd-sourced open encyclopedia. But Wikipedia's reputation for reliability has improved drastically over the last 10 years, publishers now want to be associated with it. They want the public to find their content, and readers go first to Wikipedia.

● You were closely associated with the library professionals across the world. What are your impressions about the community?

Wow, the library community is wonderful (and at times fierce, too). Librarians are some of the most dedicated and passionate people I've ever encountered, and they are motivated by a deep sense of mission and equity. They believe in the power of knowledge, informed citizens, and the protection of civil liberties for all people. Yet, many librarians are underpaid and overworked, and their institutions are chronically underfunded (if they exist at all in poorer parts of the world). The only challenge I faced with librarians is in their protectiveness of their profession and their intense commitment to social justice. I sometimes too casually used language that offended professionals; I didn't fully acknowledge how undervalued librarians

already are. When you're asking already overworked people to contribute to Wikipedia for free, it can seem like you're not appreciating them and their struggles. I had to learn to be more considerate in my approach. Librarianship is such an important profession, and librarians are rightly proud of it--while being all too aware of the battles they face for funding, influence, and legitimacy.

● **May we know what is the status of involvement of Indian editors and publishers in using or building TWL?**

India has really been a leader in advancing TWL programme. Indian editors arranged two partnerships with publishers *Economic and Political Weekly* and *Kinige*. That was because of the initiative of community members, who developed the partnerships themselves and brought them to us! In fact, the first ever Wikipedia Library Conference was held in India. That was a countrywide event that brought together editors, librarians, and experts--and it had never been done before anywhere. India has such a rich mix of diverse cultures, and editors managed to organize across dozens of different languages for the benefit of the encyclopedia. I was deeply impressed with their commitment and their dedication to promoting free knowledge.

● **What is your greatest learning from TWL?**

I learned that with time and teamwork, anything is possible. You can change minds. You can help people grow. You can develop not only your own skills, but also the potential and capacity of others around you. While The Wikipedia Library now lives on without my involvement, it was proof for me that I could make a difference--that with an idea and the passion to pursue it, there is no limit on what you can accomplish.

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Note ● *All the answers/ opinions expressed in this interview/document are of the interviewee.*

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