

"I'm comfortable with it": User stories of health information on Wikipedia

by Denise A. Smith

Abstract

Applying a critical-constructivist approach, 21 semi-structured interviews conducted from June to October 2021 were analyzed thematically. Qualitative analysis suggests that users reported that Wikipedia's health content can facilitate personal agency, is familiar and convenient to access, and that individuals' trust in Wikipedia is contextual, conditional, and framed by their personal experiences.

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Methods](#)

[Results](#)

[Discussion](#)

[Limitations](#)

[Conclusion](#)

Introduction

In 2020 the World Health Organization "joined forces with the Wikimedia Foundation to expand access to the latest and most reliable information about COVID-19" (World Health Organization, 2020). Wikipedia's key role in public health education has led members of the medical community to describe it as a "platform for the global medical knowledge database" (Heilman, *et al.*, 2011). Wikipedia's medical content was estimated to have had 6.5 billion views across all language editions in 2013 (Heilman and West, 2015), but despite widespread use, little is known about how or why individuals use Wikipedia's health-related pages.

Wikipedia is accessed with greater frequency than consumer health Web sites, sites designed to provide health information to the general layperson (Laurent and Vickers, 2009), and its popularity is perpetuated by partnerships with external organizations such as Cochrane and Cancer UK (Shafee, *et al.*, 2017) and its interdependent relationship with Google (McMahon, *et al.*, 2017). People typically look for health information online (Fox, 2014) and they tend to go online first (Cocco, *et al.*, 2018; Eysenbach and Kohler, 2003; Kummervold, *et al.*, 2008). Further, Wikipedia trends heavily in the top results of online searches (Netimperative, 2019). When news media reports on health events, relevant Wikipedia articles have documented peaks in pageviews (Smith, 2023).

Scholarship about Wikipedia as a source of health information continues to grow (Mostafa, 2022; Smith, 2020), focusing on Wikipedia's utility as a teaching tool in health and medical education; as an information resource for patients, students, and professionals; and as a novel tool in health related research, such as epidemiology and public health surveillance (Smith, 2020). Questions about quality and the suitability of Wikipedia's health pages for public use have dominated the conversation (Candelario, *et al.*, 2017; Clauson, *et al.*, 2008; Hasty, *et al.*, 2014; Yaari, *et al.*, 2011). These concerns emerge from Wikipedia's self-governed process of content production, which provides little opportunity for traditional oversight typical in encyclopedic publications (Hartzler and Huh, 2016).

Specific investigations into why or how people access health articles on Wikipedia are limited (Smith, 2022). Guided by the question, "What are the experiences of individuals who access Wikipedia's health information?" I sought to learn why people visit Wikipedia, how they encounter its health pages; whether they trust the information they encounter; any perceived benefits or concerns around having access to health information in Wikipedia, and whether, or how, they used the information found.



Methods

Study design

A critical-constructivist approach (Bogna, *et al.*, 2020) was employed in the design of this study. This approach aims to give voice to people's lived experiences (Waller, *et al.*, 2016) and is framed by the acknowledgment that unequal power structures in society can influence individuals information practices or behaviors (Waller, *et al.*, 2016). The goal is to share the experiences of those who participated in this study with an understanding that the study design, data collection methods, and interpretation of results can be influenced by the lived experiences of researchers. A researcher with a different experience may pose different questions, or approach this study differently. This study was conducted by a neurodiverse, White, cis-gendered, British-Canadian first generation immigrant, working as an academic librarian. I have had training in qualitative research methods, with expertise in consumer health information behavior (how or why people seek out, use or encounter health information) as well as experience contributing to Wikipedia, using Wikipedia as a teaching tool in undergraduate education, and investigating Wikipedia's position in the landscape of health information (Smith, 2022, 2020).

Although the purpose of this study was not to test it, Longo's Expanded Conceptual Model of Health Information Seeking Behaviours (Longo, 2005; Longo, *et al.*, 2010) includes a comprehensive list of possible personal and contextual variables that can influence active and passive consumer health information behavior (CHIB). Given that information seeking is individualistic and contextual (Lambert and Loiselle, 2007), Longo's model was applied to the construction of an interview guide. I adhered to the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) checklist to report the findings of this study (O'Brien, *et al.*, 2014). This study was reviewed and approved by the Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board (HiREB) under project #13392.

Data collection

Participants were recruited using paper and electronic recruitment posters. Paper posters were posted in community-based settings, such as local coffee shops or community centers. Electronic posters were distributed by e-mail, through large-scale listservs such as Wikipedia's community listserv, and via social media.

I received 82 expressions of interest by e-mail and potential participants were screened for eligibility. Participants had to have accessed Wikipedia for health information within the previous year and be at least 18 years old. Forty-three potential participants did not meet the inclusion criteria. Of the remaining 39

eligible participants, 28 completed both the survey and the interview between June and October 2021. After interviewing, seven additional participants did not meet inclusion criteria, leaving 21 participants for inclusion. Purposive sampling resulted in analysis of all 21 participants.

Characteristics of participants ([Table 1](#)) were collected using a secure online survey tool, followed by semi-structured online interviews employing videoconferencing software. Interviews ranged in duration from 13 minutes to 60 minutes. Participants were asked to share a time that they used Wikipedia’s health or medical information for themselves or someone they know. Participants shared personal stories about their health or the health of someone they know and their experiences using Wikipedia. I employed respondent validation to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and understanding of participant statements throughout interviews (Waller, *et al.*, 2016).

Interviews were audio recorded and manually transcribed verbatim, with filler words excluded. Transcripts were uploaded to nVivo for coding and analysis.

Table 1: Characteristics of participants.			
	Characteristic	Number	Percent
Age range			
	18–25	8	38.1
	26–30	7	33.3
	31–35	2	9.5
	36–40	3	14.3
	56–60	1	4.8
Frequency of Wikipedia use			
	Occasionally	6	28.6
	Regularly (1–2 times/ month)	7	33.3
	Often (more than 3 times/month)	8	38.1
Country of residence			
	Canada	5	23.8
	China	2	9.5
	Germany	1	4.8
	Kenya	1	4.8
	Morocco	1	4.8
	United Kingdom	7	33.3
	United States	4	19.0
Education			

	More than one college or undergraduate university degree	1	4.8
	Master's degree	9	42.9
	College diploma or undergraduate university degree	7	33.3
	Currently a college or undergraduate university student	2	9.5
	Ph.D.	1	4.8
	Advanced professional degree (<i>e.g.</i> , LLB, MD)	1	4.8
Gender expression			
	I am a woman	8	38.1
	I am a man	12	57.1
	I am nonbinary	1	4.8
Sexuality			
	Asexual	4	19.0
	Bisexual	1	4.8
	Heterosexual	14	66.7
	Queer	2	9.5
Race			
	Arabic	1	4.8
	Asian	2	9.5
	Black	8	38.1
	Hispanic or Latinx	2	9.5
	South Asian	1	4.8
	Southeast Asian	1	4.8
	West Asian	1	4.8
	White	5	23.8
Employment status			
	Part-time,		

	contract or limited term	7	33.3
	Full-time, contract or limited term	3	14.3
	Full-time, permanent	6	28.6
	Part-time, permanent	3	14.3
	Unemployed	2	9.5
Employer provided health coverage			
	Yes	13	61.9
	No	7	33.3
	I don't know	1	4.8

Data analysis

During the interview process and subsequent analysis, I paid close attention to how my previous work situating Wikipedia as a key health information resource and knowledge of the resource could impact an interpretation of comments by participants. Transcripts were coded in three cycles.

The first cycle employed descriptive and *in vivo* coding to identify patterns in transcripts. Saturation was reached after analysis of 18 interview transcripts, but all 21 were included in analysis for a purposive sample. In the second cycle, first cycle codes were collapsed into broader categories to identify early themes that emerged from conversations with participants. Finally, in third-cycle coding, second-cycle codes were collapsed into three broad categories.



Results

Three categories emerged to describe conversation with study participants: Wikipedia could be used to facilitate acts of personal agency; familiarity and convenience were determinants of Wikipedia use; and Wikipedia was trusted ... to an extent ([Table 2](#)).

Table 2: Emergent themes in the use of health information on Wikipedia.		
	Theme mentions (n=)	Percent of participants who mentioned theme

1. Wikipedia can facilitate acts of personal agency		
To learn more (<i>e.g.</i> , about a health condition)	50	81%
To inform decision-making (<i>e.g.</i> , about interventions)	23	57%
For self-advocacy (<i>e.g.</i> , asking questions)	16	14%
2. Familiarity and convenience are determinants of use		
Wikipedia is familiar (<i>e.g.</i> , used it before)	35	90%
Wikipedia is convenient (<i>e.g.</i> , it's just there)	45	76%
3. Wikipedia is trusted ... to an extent		
Trust with qualifier (<i>e.g.</i> , "I trust it to an extent")	28	76%
Trust in context (<i>e.g.</i> , "first port of call")	37	76%
Conditional trust — Checking (<i>e.g.</i> , references)	19	76%
Conditional trust — Confirming (<i>e.g.</i> , against other sources)	38	81%

“It helped me”: Wikipedia can facilitate acts of personal agency

Keene and Boyd (2021) conceptualized personal agency in behavioral health as “an individuals’ perceived control to achieve a desired health outcome”. Situating Wikipedia as a facilitator of their own personal agency, participants talked about using Wikipedia to learn more, for self-advocacy, and to support informed decision-making. Here are some of their stories.

Learning

Wikipedia, described as “a big world library for different health information” (P19), is a place to learn. Participants shared that they accessed Wikipedia “in an attempt to learn something more” (P02). When facing a surgical procedure on a facial gland, P01 recounted:

P01: I just want to know, like, where is this in my face. It’s a pretty risky surgery, why is it risky? What all is like wrapped around that gland? That's the kind of information I was looking

for and the doctors weren't really telling me that. Maybe they were trying not to freak me out. I went to an ear nose and throat specialist and he was really excellent, but like he does this all the time. This surgery is pretty routine for him, I think. I felt a little brushed off when I expressed some of my concern.

After feeling "brushed off", P01 shared that "Wikipedia just helped me to learn about that body part and about what it does and what could like go wrong with the surgery and what could go right with it" (P01).

Similarly, a wife felt compelled "to take matters into our own hands" (P14) after her husband, during a telephone consultation, "didn't get a satisfactory answer" (P14) to questions about a recent diagnosis. In this story, the husband returned to Wikipedia when he experienced an unexpected side effect from his prescription, "I didn't know the side effects about the medicine, and it was helpful for me" (P22). In these examples, Wikipedia filled a knowledge gap. It was described by P07 as judgment-free space to learn about less urgent concerns before seeking health care, "I found it wise to first of all go to Wikipedia and have a hint of what might be wrong" (P07).

For an adult child of immigrant parents, the plain language used to define medical terms aided translation, "Although I can speak [language] I'm not completely fluent so there is a barrier for me as well. So, I use Wikipedia to ease that translation process" (P17). As a patient themselves, P01 learned medical vocabulary from Wikipedia "so that I can have a little bit of language with me when I talk to my doctor" (P01). Medical terminology is notoriously difficult. A scholar described going to Wikipedia when "I have new terms, health terms, I don't know and I need a definition for example, or if I want to get a first overview" (P16).

In the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which was in full-swing during the interviews, Wikipedia was used to learn more about COVID-19, vaccines, case numbers, the economy, and public health guidance. As reporting on the approval and availability of vaccines gained momentum, P13 shared, "I've never been concerned to know how they [vaccines] work or what have they. So, I just searched on Wikipedia for 'vaccine'. To know how they work, how they are developed" (P13). Wikipedia's real-time updates as COVID-19 knowledge evolved also offered the opportunity "to gain more information about what is going on. Not just within the community, but worldwide" (P19).

Informed decision-making

Gathering information using Wikipedia, along with other information resources (*e.g.*, health care professionals) helped to inform decision-making. For one participant who experienced persistent plantar fasciitis, and for whom options for effective treatment were dwindling, Wikipedia's information on a costly alternative treatment helped them "to form a judgment whether, if I wanted that treatment, how likely it is to be effective" (P18). Although they had learned of this alternative intervention from a podiatrist, the participant visited Wikipedia to get a sense of its efficacy and value for dollars spent. In this case, Wikipedia was the preferred online resource because "you can't type plantar fasciitis into Google and get useful results ... You just get the same 10,000 articles telling you what it is in general and selling you various devices to support your feet" (P18). For those looking to make informed decisions, Wikipedia can provide "just factual" (P01) information.

Discussions about using Wikipedia to self-diagnose or treat health concerns were relatively innocuous. Participants generally demonstrated a high aptitude for recognizing when using Wikipedia to self-manage a health concern may or may not be appropriate, indicating that the "Internet is fast and efficient for simple minor things" (P08). Wikipedia's Treatments section was used to identify low-risk interventions where a visit with the local pharmacist might be more suitable, or preferred, than a visit to a clinic. Using online information as "the first thing to consult" to "save on time" (P28) allowed some participants to decide whether to pursue in-person medical consultations with health professionals, where to access health advice, or to decide if they could manage their health concern at home.

P09 used Wikipedia to learn more about natural remedies, “there are certain herbs that my local people use in treatment and so I went to Wikipedia to find information on these” (P09). Other examples varied from looking after a family member, “I check a lot about blood pressure and how to handle my Dad” (P03), to confirming information received from health experts, “I was told Astra-Zeneca [vaccine] would work well for me ... So, I hopped onto Wikipedia” (P19). When it comes to making informed choices, participants found value in consulting Wikipedia as part of the information gathering process.

Self-advocacy

Participants shared anecdotes of improved confidence in health care interactions after consulting Wikipedia. They reported having confidence or feeling more prepared to ask questions during or after a health care visit, or in explaining their symptoms, after using Wikipedia. For some participants, Wikipedia’s health information offered the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue with a physician or other health care professional. For others, it meant a referral to a specialist or for diagnostic tests.

After a participant’s spouse was diagnosed with pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), it was recommended that the participant “have some tests” (P04). The participant described agreeing to return for testing but, under the impression that they would be tested for PID, expressed confusion, “I’ve got to know that if this can affect men directly, since I doubt men have ovaries. I was surprised that the doctor said I should come back for those tests, being a man” (P04). Once the participant read about PID on Wikipedia and learned they couldn’t have the condition, they shared feeling increased confidence in asking the physician what tests would be ordered and why.

Another participant shared that Wikipedia’s information on endometriosis provided them with language to describe their symptoms better: “Instead of just saying ‘Hey, I’m having cramps’” (P01), they could “arm myself with vocabulary” (P01). With the goal of referral to a gynecologist, they “made a list of ‘okay this could be endometriosis, this could be a fibroid, this could be ...’, just ... a list of things that kind of aligned with my symptoms that I could express to my doctor, and it did get me a referral” (P01).

Advocating to get a referral, or to better understand a physician’s recommendations, were two ways participants expressed agency over their health care. Having the knowledge to know which questions to ask, or what vocabulary to use when describing symptoms or expressing concern has the potential to affect an individual’s health outcome. Wikipedia’s plain language, easy-to-read content can assist patients with self-advocacy.

“I’m comfortable with it”: Familiarity and convenience as determinants of use

Wikipedia was described by participants as a convenient and familiar starting point for finding health information online. Familiarity with Wikipedia was attributed to previous use of the resource for, “Generally all kinds of information. Be it health, the COVID-19 you were talking about, everything, anything.” (P20). Familiarity was also interpreted from participant claims that “I’ve used it several times” (P15) and “I’m comfortable with it” (P09). This contributed to some participants’ explicit preference for Wikipedia, expressing, “I might just type the search term I’m after and then ‘Wikipedia’ at the end. So that the browser that I’m searching will just bring it up” (P11). However, most participants indicated they would run a search in their preferred search engine and select Wikipedia from search results.

Three participants indicated they had experience contributing to Wikipedia and identified themselves as Wikipedians. Their “expert inside knowledge of how Wikipedia works” (P18) enhanced their familiarity with the resource. Other participants referenced their education, with one participant indicating that learning about Wikipedia during graduate school familiarized them with the resource, “I had a professor that really broke down how Wikipedia editing works that has led me to see Wikipedia in a more positive light” (P02). However, familiarity alone did not necessarily persuade participants to select Wikipedia from a set of search engine results.

Wikipedia is also convenient: “If Wikipedia appears at the top, or at the first three top results or something like that, then I most of the time use Wikipedia” (P16). Although seven participants, three of them Wikipedians, described intentionally starting at Wikipedia, for others it is not necessarily valued more highly than other resources, “if Wikipedia wasn’t in the top results, I’d probably pick something else” (P01). Participants cited high visibility in search engine results as determinant of using Wikipedia, “It comes down to what I first see in Google” (P02). One participant addressed this explicitly, “When I Google something Wikipedia is in the top, like three, so it really is just ease of access because it’s presented to me” (P24).

While convenience and familiarity may be determinants for using Wikipedia, participants also discussed evaluating an article’s completeness, the ease of reading and comprehending the content, navigation features of Wikipedia, references, and their knowledge of how editing Wikipedia articles works. Familiarity with these attributes contributed to individual decisions to trust Wikipedia.

“Not 100%, but to some extent”: Wikipedia is trusted ... to an extent

All participants had at least partial awareness of Wikipedia’s open collaborative framework for content production. The Wikipedians, specifically, considered it a benefit: “I have a lot of faith in Wikipedia, despite the fact that I know things can be wrong” (P18). Participants with only basic knowledge of Wikipedia practices were more cautious, “being that anyone can edit information you cannot trust the site 100 percent. You must be careful.” (P08).

The perceived trustworthiness of an individual article was also grounded in specific contexts, “it help[s] me take care of my Dad” (P03) and, “when it comes to something that is not severe or major” (P14). When contextualized as a “landing page” (P02) or “first port-of-call” (P11) participants generally trusted Wikipedia, but frequently qualified expressed their trust in the resource using qualifying statements: “To some extent I trust” (P03); “80% I trust it” (P08); “Not 100%, but to some extent I trust Wikipedia” (P14); “If there is a certain article that is part of like a Wikimedicine project, that would make me feel more comfortable” (P24). To assess the trustworthiness of a Wikipedia article, participants reported checking and confirming the information that they read.

Verification included assessing an article’s references list for quantity, quality, or both. Some took the reference list at face value, “Well I don’t really access the references, but I read it because, you know, it’s right there” (P14), while others assessed the quality of sources cited in the article, “I usually scroll to the bottom and see where they are listed and make sure those are credible sources” (P02). The highly visible and accessible references lists emerged as a key condition for trusting a Wikipedia article. Three participants (a graduate student, a dermatologist, and an academic) each cited specific sources that would strengthen their assessment of credibility, such as the World Health Organization, Primary Care Dermatology Society, and cancer research organizations). Articles with an extensive list of references or references from reputable sources were considered more trustworthy, but participants did not specify how many references would make a given article credible.

Participants also confirmed the information in the Wikipedia article before trusting the content. One participant described this process, “If I’m uncertain about an article, I’ll cross-reference with other resources and see where the commonalities are and that will also help to see: is this Wikipedia article accurate or reliable?” (P17). Beyond other search results and the references lists, cross-checking also employed clinical databases, “sometimes I use PubMed” (P14), consultations with health professionals, “I might get information from Wikipedia but I always call my doctor” (P08), the personal experiences of others, “I talked to my family: my father, my mother, my wife” (P22) and social media for “testimonials from people” (P19).

Overall participants chose to trust, but verify, Wikipedia articles. The degree of trust varied with individual familiarity (personal experience) with Wikipedia’s knowledge production methods, why Wikipedia was being used (context), and the outcomes of checking and confirming (conditions).

Discussion

The experiences shared in this study demonstrated that despite concern about its information quality, Wikipedia's health information has value. Participants corroborated the assertion that Wikipedia plays "a limited role in the health management and decision-making practices" (Huisman, *et al.*, 2021). While used to inform decision-making, it is not the sole resource consulted. Further, the use of Wikipedia content to facilitate acts of personal agency suggests that Wikipedia's value as a health information resource is more complex than what is currently understood.

It is tempting to interpret personal agency expressed by participants as demonstrative of an outcome of "empowerment" or a strong "locus of control" (Longo, *et al.*, 2010). I interpreted the theme of personal agency as a potential indicator of a pre-existing internal locus of control or sense of empowerment. In this interpretation, Wikipedia's health information can be considered a *facilitator of personal agency in action*: a tool to help individuals exercise agency before, after, or during health care interactions. Individuals with a high internal locus of control tend to believe that their health outcomes are related to their own choices and actions (Härkäpää, *et al.*, 1991). Acknowledging that many individual variables can contribute to one's locus of control in health care (Náfrádi, *et al.*, 2017; Roberts, 1999; Schreitmüller and Loerbroks, 2020), I approached the findings that participants who accessed Wikipedia's health content because they wanted to learn more, to get language to use in their health care visits for self advocacy, or to make an informed decision, might have done so because their lived experiences positioned them to do so.

It's probable that using Wikipedia's health information to facilitate personal agency in action is also the case for any consumer health information Web site. What separates Wikipedia from other resources is its crowd-sourced method of content production, transparent editorial processes, and broad coverage, beyond health topics. Being situated as a top-tier result in Google search results, the finding that participants predominately choose Wikipedia because it's convenient aligns with what is currently known about health information behavior, in that the "accessibility of sources is often a key determinant of their use" (Bates, 2005). Earlier experiences using Wikipedia in other Web searches and familiarity with its user interface also influenced the choice to use Wikipedia. These conversations with participants aligned with the *principle of least effort* (Zipf, 1949), where an individual seeking information will choose convenience, the source requiring the least amount of effort, to access (Fisher, *et al.*, 2005). Although convenience and familiarity might be determinants of Wikipedia use, participants demonstrated healthy skepticism by grounding their decisions to trust Wikipedia within specific contexts and conditions.

Expressions of using Wikipedia as "a landing page" or "first port of call" support claims that Wikipedia forms a useful starting point for health information and should not be used as a sole source (Clauson, *et al.*, 2008; Heilman, *et al.*, 2011). The practices of *checking and confirming* the content accessed in Wikipedia, illustrate how participants "actively weave their own information web" and use this to establish trustworthiness of Wikipedia's health and medical article (Longo, *et al.*, 2010). It has been suggested that Wikipedia users "should be made aware that the information found may not be accurate and easy to read" (Epstein, 2022). However, the public may have informal searching skills that allow them to discern whether they trust the information they find. All participants had at least some knowledge of Wikipedia's content production methods, which encouraged them to be more discerning when evaluating and consuming content on Wikipedia's health pages. This substantiates Laurent and Vickers' position that, "While consumers rarely check the source and quality of the information they find online, at least with a well-known brand like Wikipedia, they know they should remain skeptical" (Laurent and Vickers, 2009). Further, article-level assessments of trustworthiness suggest that users were aware that "Wikipedia is sometimes the most reliable publication ever created — and other times not so at all. *It depends on the article.*" (Bruckman, 2022).

Of course, such skills are acquired, either through practice or formal training, or both. Considering Bodie

and Dutta's (2008) reflection on the digital divide and their focus on the socio-economic determinants of health literacy, the results of this study inspire more questions. How does one's lived experiences influence interactions with health information on Wikipedia? Do individuals without at least a university or college education measure trust differently than the participants in this study, who were all educated? Access to the Internet, and by extension Wikipedia, does not guarantee equitable access to information. Plain language may enhance reading ease, but comprehension depends on external variables as well. Although all participants in this study had at least some post-secondary education, which could have influenced their information practices, the practices shared here might support future public education goals to foster a culture where all individuals can learn skills associated with a trust, but verify, approach to information.

Overall, the findings of this study offer detailed experiences of research participants' interactions with Wikipedia's health and medical information. These findings support existing conversations about Wikipedia and health information behaviour. The stories shared here supply insight into how Wikipedia use can facilitate acts of personal agency, the draw of its familiarity and convenience, and the specific contexts and conditions for trusting it. For Wikipedia scholars, public health experts, and health care practitioners, gaining insight into the experiences of people who use Wikipedia's health and medical content can provide additional perspectives to the quantitative usage data openly available from Wikipedia.


Limitations

With 21 interviews, this study is rich in qualitative findings and specifically explores the experiences of those using Wikipedia's health information. The goal of this study was to learn more about user experiences by listening to their stories. That objective was achieved. However, more research is necessary to be able to understand the influence of socioeconomic variables on the themes that emerged in this study. For example, all participants had at least some post-secondary education where, it is assumed, they would have been exposed to conversations around assessing the quality or reliability of information. Further research is needed for insight into the relationship between socio-economic variables, lived experiences and how they might affect user experiences with Wikipedia's health information.

Additionally, conversations about user trust in Wikipedia's health information would benefit from in-depth investigation in future studies. The subjectivity of trust, what we believe to be true, and the influence of our own belief-systems, knowledge, and familiarity with subjects, can all influence the establishment of trust. This study scratches the surface on how or why a user might choose to trust content in a Wikipedia article, but it does not explore those stories through this lens. This is an opportunity for future exploration.

Conclusion

Through the telling of personal stories, this study offers the Wikipedia community, health professionals, and library information specialists insights into user experiences with health information found in Wikipedia. Wikipedia can facilitate acts of personal agency. Its familiarity and convenience contribute to decisions to consult Wikipedia's health and medical content. Trust in Wikipedia is earned, not assumed, often conditional, contextual, and grounded in firsthand experiences of users.

To understand the influence of power structures and lived experiences on these experiences, further research is needed. More qualitative studies are necessary to develop a comprehensive and holistic understanding of Wikipedia's health information usage among diverse populations. 

About the author

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"I'm comfortable with it": User stories of health information on Wikipedia
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