TACKLING DISINFORMATION ONLINE WITH MEDIA LITERACY BY DESIGN AND COMMUNITY-CENTRED PLATFORM REGULATION: THE WIKIPEDIA MODEL

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Abstract:

This paper examines Wikipedia's participatory governance model as a framework for informing European digital public sphere development. Through analysis of Wikipedia's two-decade experience with community-driven content moderation, reliable source verification, and decentralized decision-making, the study demonstrates how public-interest platforms can maintain information quality while fostering democratic participation. Drawing on Henry Jenkins' participatory culture theory, the research shows how Wikipedia's collaborative editing processes naturally develop users' media literacy competencies through active engagement rather than passive consumption. The paper analyses Wikipedia's recent regulatory experiences under the EU Digital Services Act and European Media Freedom Act, highlighting both compliance challenges and opportunities for policy learning. The findings suggest that adapting Wikipedia's model could inform the design of a European digital public sphere that prioritizes information quality, user empowerment, and democratic discourse over commercial engagement metrics.

Keywords: platform governance, digital public sphere, media literacy, participatory culture, information integrity

This paper examines Wikipedia's unique position in the digital landscape as a resilient, decentralized community-governed information platform that has endured for over two decades while many commercial social media platforms have faltered. Conceived as a free, collaborative online encyclopaedia from the very beginning, it contains almost 65 million articles in more than 300 languages[1]

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[1] Wikipedia:Statistics. en.wikipedia.org. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Statistics [visited on May 26, 2025]

which makes it the largest single resource for open and free knowledge in the world.

The research analyses Wikipedia's participatory governance model, highlighting how its commitment to verifiability and reliable sources creates a self-regulatory mechanism that enhances information quality and combats disinformation. Drawing on Henry Jenkins' framework of participatory culture, the study demonstrates how Wikipedia fosters critical media literacy skills through its transparent editorial processes.

Taking into account the significance of the official acknowledgment of Wikipedia as a digital public good by the Digital Public Goods Alliance[2], this analysis has particular relevance for European policymakers seeking to develop digital public sphere alternatives to commercial social media platforms. As the EU implements new platform regulations through the Digital Services Act and European Media Freedom Act, Wikipedia's two-decade experience offers concrete insights into how community-driven governance can maintain information quality while fostering democratic participation in knowledge creation.[3]

1. Philosophy, Structure, and Governance of Wikipedia

Launched on January 15, 2001, Wikipedia has been present for longer than any modern global online platform, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. From its inception, Wikipedia has distinguished itself from centralized, commercial platforms driven by corporate interests. Unlike these platforms, Wikipedia operates as a non-profit entity with the mission to provide free access and a direct gateway to the world's knowledge. This vision was articulated by Wikipedia's co-founder Jimmy Wales, who emphasized creating a global resource that is open and accessible to all[4], without the influence of commercial advertising or profit motives.

The Wikimedia Foundation (WMF) – the nonprofit organization that hosts Wikipedia and other free knowledge projects, provides infrastructure, tools and resources but does not directly control content[5], allowing for a more democratic and open form of knowledge sharing. The access to all Wikimedia projects is free, registration is not required to edit articles on most Wikimedia projects[6], and personal data used to register an account is minimal.

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[2] EU Policy Team (2025), *Wikipedia recognized as a digital public good*, Wikimedia Europe. https://wikimedia.brussels/wikipedia-recognized-as-a-digital-public-good [visited on May 26, 2025]

[3] The Economist (2021), Wikipedia is 20, and its reputation has never been higher. [visited on May 26, 2025]

[4] Wales, J. (2012), Wikipedia edit by User:Jimbo Wales, 22:49, 14 October 2012 (UTC). https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=User_talk:Jimbo_Wales&diff=prev&oldid=517818454 [visited on May 26, 2025]; Wikipedia:Prime objective https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Prime_objective

[5] WMF does not take an editorial role and the users are responsible for your own actions as stated at Wikimedia Foundation Terms of Use: https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/Policy:Terms_of_Use/en#1._Our_Services

[6] Registration is mandatory for editing the Portuguese Wikipedia (pt.wikipedia.org). Since 2020, edits from unregistered users (IP addresses) on are no longer allowed. A community vote in 2020 implemented this change https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipédia:Votações/Necessidade_de_registo_para_editar_a_Wikipédia_lusófona

This community-led, rules-based approach ensures that Wikipedia – funded primarily through a donation-based model managed by WMF – remains true to its mission to be a neutral and reliable source of information contrasting sharply with the top-down governance typical of commercial platforms.[7]

Wikipedia's distinctiveness, endurance and success are deeply rooted in the sociotechnical dynamics that define its ecosystem and the collective action of its communities. They shape not only the content but also the governance and culture of the platform. The majority of the Wikipedians primarily edit articles and/or negotiate over content-related issues, but if interested in other aspects beyond that they are also allowed to participate in decision-making, software development, and the formulation and enforcement of strategies, policies, and guidelines.

Unlike traditional content production models, Wikipedia's community is self-organized, with decisions about content and policies made through consensus rather than hierarchical control.[8] This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership among contributors and ensures that Wikipedia remains a dynamic and evolving environment.

The platform operates on a model of commons-based peer production, where a decentralized group of volunteers contributes to the creation and curation of knowledge. Even small communities can thrive, be innovative and progressive, demonstrating the ability to apply the Wikipedia governance model effectively.

Building a regulatory system that monitors and controls behaviour following clearly spelled out rules that are applied consistently is one of the most challenging goals of every online community. Wikipedia's governance model can be compared with certain caveats more to that of Reddit than those of platforms such as Facebook, YouTube or X, though significant differences remain in content focus and governance flexibility. Reddit is not an encyclopaedia, but a forum-like social sharing and news aggregation online platform with decentralized moderation. Wikipedia, on the other hand, is strictly a knowledge repository comparable to a library that discourages socialization unrelated to content creation and is highly structured content-wise.

The social fabric of Wikipedia is defined not only by content creation but also by positive social interactions and ties building over time between contributors. That fosters a sense of good faith collaboration and belonging within the community which encourages sustained participation.

However, research by Morgan and Halfaker identified concerning trends: a decline in active contributors since 2007, partly attributed to increasing hostility

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[7] Wikimedia Foundation (2023), *Wikimedia Foundation contribution to the Global Digital Compact*, Un.org. https://w.wiki/84dn

[8] Reagle J. (2010), *Good Faith Collaboration: The Culture of Wikipedia*, MIT Press, p.52

toward well-intentioned newcomers, resulting in reduced retention rates for sincere new editors.[9]

To address this challenge, the so-called Growth team was formed in July 2018 with the goal to help wikis exhibit healthy characteristics, such as being supportive and non-confrontational environments, where contributors can learn and edit in a diverse and inclusive way[10]. Growth features were developed and introduced, i.e. newcomer tasks and a set of tools to match newcomers looking for advice with experienced editors ready to help[11]. Scaling the onboarding of new Wikipedia volunteers with guided mentorship found its place in the just published Wikipedia's AI strategy as well.[12]

2. Content creation, evaluation and moderation on Wikipedia

Understanding how Wikipedia creates and maintains content quality requires examining three interconnected elements: the collaborative creation process, the enforcement of source reliability standards, and the power dynamics that shape community governance. Each of these components reinforces the others to create Wikipedia's distinctive approach to information validation.

Wikipedia's content creation and review process demonstrates these principles in practice through its collaborative editing model and transparent revision system. The platform operates on reputation-based assessment, where experienced editors evaluate others' ability to follow rules and make meaningful contributions. Registered users who have the so-called patroller rights are empowered to monitor and review content more easily.

It could be argued that this is the role that most closely fits the general definition of a content moderator and moderation, but it is important to understand that anyone can make the changes that users with such rights make, including returning other users' edits. This mechanism has proven to work, insofar as it prevents abuse of rights, while at the same time encouraging users to prove themselves as bona fide and capable.

An overview of moderation in online communities by James Grimmelmann suggests a framework based on the following techniques: excluding, pricing, organizing, and norm-setting, and on three goals whose achievement demonstrates

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[9] Morgan, J. and Halfaker, A. (2018), *Evaluating the impact of the Wikipedia Teahouse on newcomer socialization and retention.* In Proceedings of The 14th International Symposium on Open Collaboration (OpenSym '18).
ACM, New York, NY, USA, 7 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/3233391.3233544 https://www.opensym.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/OpenSym2018_paper_15-1.pdf

[10] MediaWiki. https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Growth

[11] MediaWiki. https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Growth/Results

[12] Albon, C., & Zia, L. (2025), *Our new AI strategy puts Wikipedia's humans first*, Wikimedia Foundation. https://wikimediafoundation.org/news/2025/04/30/our-new-ai-strategy-puts-wikipedias-humans-first/ [visited on May 26, 2025]

that an online community is well moderated: productivity, increased access (openness) and minimal maintenance costs. By moderation Grimmelmann means the governance mechanisms that structure participation in a community to facilitate cooperation and prevent abuse.

Wikipedia's content moderation stands out due to its reliance on distributed organization, as opposed to concentrating moderation in a small group, and community-enforced norms, constantly re-articulated and reinforced through community interaction.[13] At the same time, Wikipedia's lack of reliance on advertising revenue reduces the incentive for clickbait and sensationalized content[14] and its commitment to open access aligns with its emphasis on transparency and verifiability.

While some platforms have implemented fact-checking initiatives and policies against harmful content, the volume of user-generated content uploaded and shared often make it difficult to effectively moderate for reliability.[15]

Wikipedia's commitment to reliable sources is enshrined in its Verifiability policy, which mandates that articles draw from trustworthy, independent, published materials known for rigorous fact-checking and precision.[16, 17] This policy, first articulated in August 2003, establishes that accuracy depends on verification. The detailed Reliable Sources guideline, developed since 2005 with over 4,000 revisions from more than 1,400 editors, provides comprehensive guidance on source evaluation.

Each language version can establish its own reliability criteria and unreliable source lists. Bulgarian Wikipedia, for example, maintains a source filter list containing 588 sites assessed as unreliable, with changes made through consensus decisions.[18] It also extensively implements the reliability principles, with nearly 1,700 main namespace pages and over 15,200 talk pages linking to Reliable sources guidance.

When disputes arise over pieces of content on Wikipedia, editors use article talk pages to share perspectives publicly and reach agreements that fairly represent all valid viewpoints. The platform's transparency allows anyone to view page histories to assess the number and perspectives of contributors to

[13] Grimmelmann, J. (2015) *The Virtues of Moderation*, 17 Yale Journal of Law & Technology 42

[14] McDowell, Z.J., & Vetter, M.A. (2021), *Wikipedia and the Representation of Reality* (1st ed.), Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003094081

[15] McDowell, Z. J., & Vetter, M. A. (2020), *It Takes a Village to Combat a Fake News Army: Wikipedia's Community and Policies for Information Literacy*. Social Media + Society, 6(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120937309

[16] *Wikipedia:Verifiability*. Wikipedia in English. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability

[17] *Wikipedia:Verifiability. Reliable Sources*. Wikipedia in English. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability#Reliable_sources

[18] Уикипедия: Патрульори/СФИН. bg.wikipedia.org https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Уикипедия:Патрульори/СФИН [visited on May 26, 2025]

any article. This is important for anyone who reads Wikipedia, even if they never write a line, because it allows them to compare and evaluate content.

Wikipedia's community-driven approach to reliable sources operates within complex power structures that can both strengthen and potentially undermine the platform's information quality goals. While some communities, like English Wikipedia, appear to be remarkably resistant to coordinated influence campaigns, this resistance is not universal.

Through qualitative comparison of the Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, and Serbo-Croatian Wikipedia, Kharazian, Starbird and Hill investigate the case with the Croatian Wikipedia, framed as an example of „governance capture in a self-governing community".[19] Their findings illustrate that online community governing infrastructures can play a crucial role in systematic disinformation campaigns.

The authors propose that the convergence of three features set the conditions for governance capture: seen as valuable to control by potential information operations, limited early bureaucratic openness, and a preference for personalistic, informal forms of organization over formal ones. Their research shows how self-governed communities built on the same underlying software, situated in a common sociolinguistic environment, diverge in outcomes based on differences in organizational and institutional design.

Tendencies of power concentration and bureaucratization have been observed by researchers as Butler, Joyce[20], and others who described an increase in the number and complexity of formal rules as Wikipedia expanded. Based on extensive interviews, Rijshouwer, Uitermark and De Koster determined that both those who are more involved in the implementation of the rules and average collaborators are aware of these issues and actively try to intervene, though bureaucratization often emerges as an unintended consequence of efforts to increase democratic accountability.[21]

3. Enhancing Participatory Culture and media literacy through Wikipedia

The informal mentorship structures characteristic of Wikipedia creates optimal conditions for knowledge transfer from experienced members to novices. This creates healthier communication environments where learning and growth

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[19] Kharazian, Z, et al (2024), *Governance Capture in a Self-Governing Community: A Qualitative Comparison of the Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, and Serbo-Croatian Wikipedias*. Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact. 8, CSCW1 https://doi.org/10.1145/3637338

[20] Butler, B.; Joyce, E.; and Pike, J. (2008*), Don't Look Now,but We've Created a Bureaucracy: The Nature and Roles of Policies and Rules in Wikipedia*. InProc. CHI 2008, 1101-1110.

[21] Rijshouwer, E. et al (2023), *Wikipedia: a self-organizing bureaucracy, Information, Communication & Society*, 26:7, 1285-1302, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2021.1994633

are embedded in the social fabric, reducing hierarchical barriers and promoting collective intelligence. It also exemplifies participatory culture theory in practice, demonstrating its concrete application in digital knowledge creation.

Henry Jenkins' participatory culture framework provides valuable insight into Wikipedia's role as a community-led knowledge repository. Jenkins defines participatory culture as having low barriers to expression, strong support for content creation and sharing, informal mentorship, and members' belief that their contributions matter while feeling socially connected.[22]

As early as 2007, Jenkins examined the Wikipedian movement as „one space where young people could acquire the kinds of social skills and cultural competencies necessary to meaningfully participate in the new media landscape".[23] He emphasized how Wikipedia's transparent standards and protocols enable users to evaluate information quality, making even passive readers more active and critical consumers who question factual claims, evidence, and sources. In short, making them more media literate and aware of the importance of verifiability and objectivity of the information they encounter, distribute and co-create.

Among core activities students might perform examining Wikipedia are systematically comparing how topics get dealt with within traditional and emergent reference works, flagging the selection process in text production, and questioning what information is not included and why.

Jenkins suggested how some of the core media education questions that people should be taught to ask themselves and turn into reflexes executed as they interact with media content and information of all kinds could be revised and rethought in relation to the Wikipedia-specific context of media production, circulation, and consumption (see table 1). He identified four key media literacy skills enhanced through Wikipedia engagement:

- **Collective Intelligence** – the ability to pool knowledge toward common goals
- **Judgment** – the ability to evaluate source reliability and credibility
- **Networking** – the ability to search, synthesize, and disseminate information
- **Negotiation** – the ability to navigate diverse communities and respect multiple perspectives

Jenkins' theoretical framework becomes concrete when applied to Wikipedia's specific features and practices. The platform's design naturally cultivates the media literacy competencies that Jenkins identified as essential for participatory culture. Table 1 demonstrates how Wikipedia's structural elements directly correspond to key media literacy skills, showing both Jenkins' original insights and additional competencies that emerge from Wikipedia's unique collaborative environment.

[22] Jenkins, H., Ito, N. and Boyd, D. (2015), *Participatory culture in a networked era : a conversation on youth, learning, commerce, and politics*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA, ISBN 9780745660714

[23] Jenkins, H. (2007), *What Wikipedia can teach us about the new media literacies* (part two), henryjenkins. org http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/06/what_wikipedia_can_teach_us_ab_1.html

Table 1. Wikipedia-tailored general media literacy questions

General media literacy questions	Wikipedia-tailored questions as suggested by Jenkins	Wikipedia-tailored questions as suggested by the author
Who made this message, and for what purpose (e.g. sponsored by whom)?	Understand the incentives and stimulus for content creation and dissemination from the perspective not of someone who is consuming media produced elsewhere but of someone who is invited to actively participate in the production and circulation of media content	and • Understand the instructing and constructive role Wikipedia's policies, rules and principles for creating encyclopaedic articles with precise citation and reference to reliable sources, and the nuances in their enforcement across language communities from contributing volunteers shape content and play a specific role% • Understand how Wikipedia's fundamental infrastructure features and principles like transparency-and-traceability by-design, verifiability, notability, proportionality and consensus seeking differentiate its environment, mechanics and output from other platforms and media
Who is the target audience, and how is the message specifically tailored to them?	Examine, identify and consider the sets of norms and shared ideologies that are shaping the Wikipedia movement	and Compare and assess how, in different language projects and even on different topics, same overarching rules and norms can be applied differently depending on different cultural, social and political contexts, focusing on the specificities of the local media environment and the degree of (dis)trust in media, institutions, science and between people
What are the different techniques used to inform, persuade, entertain, and attract attention?	Examine, identify and consider the rhetorical tools which establish credibility or motivate participation	and Explore and master the multimodal nature of Wikipedia content and the added value of open access, ever-changing state of the articles, dual hypertextuality with internal and internal references, datafication of everything, references and notes lists, live registers of edits and talk-pages accompanying all pages

General media literacy questions	Wikipedia-tailored questions as suggested by Jenkins	Wikipedia-tailored questions as suggested by the author
What messages are communicated (and/or implied) about certain people, places, events, behaviours, lifestyles, etc.?	Have in mind the different kinds of expertise that different participants in the Wikipedia movement bring to the project, looking at the ways that these diverse perspectives get negotiated through the production of any given article	and Identify the influences exerted on them depending on the media environment and agenda, historical context, language and cultural norms, community health measured quantitatively and qualitatively in intensity, diversity and civility of interactions between project participants, civic activism, political and educational systems in the states and regions the main contingent of contributors are based/coming from
How current, accurate, and credible is the information in this message?	Focus attention on the devices which make the research process more transparent and the ways to deploy them to test the reliability of the information	then, • Assess the overall structure and writing quality of the article • Evaluate the comprehensiveness and scope of coverage • Check for neutral point of view in the writing style • Look for potential gaps or biases in the information presentedwhich are not always obvious when utilizing these transparency devices (inline citations and references checked by lateral reading, the presence of meaningful discussions resulting in consensus, the stability of the content through edit history and the date of the last change)
What is left out of this message that might be important to know?	Reflect on the systemic biases of the project and how they emerge from the participation gap and from other obstacles which limit individuals' ability to access technologies and participate within networked culture	and Understand why the present content guidelines exist, how they developed and evolved in time, and what Wikipedia is not (e.g. a repository of links, images, or media files, a dictionary, a newspaper, or a scientific journal)

These competencies develop organically through Wikipedia participation because the platform's governance structure makes media literacy practices essential for effective contribution. Users cannot successfully edit Wikipedia without learning to evaluate sources, negotiate with diverse perspectives, and understand how information is constructed and validated.

The Wikimedia Foundation's Brand Health Tracker identified knowledge gaps as primary editing barriers: users do not know how or feel they lack necessary skills.[24] Addressing this gap through media literacy initiatives benefits both Wikipedia and internet users by developing critical information competencies.

The Foundation invests in educational initiatives and free learning resources and defines the implementation of educational components and tools in its projects, led by Wikipedia, as part of its long-term work.[25] The project (Wikipedia) itself, with its philosophy, infrastructure and huge build-up over the 20+ years of its existence in parallel with the evolution of web and the convergence of media, offers a natural environment for learning and developing skills, even just by helping users understand how it works and what its greatest merits and vulnerabilities are. And how the rational use of information and the recognition of the incentives and objectives of the one behind a given piece of information - whether in push or pull mode, requires purposefully and constantly improving skills while taming one's own biases and attitude.

The Reading Wikipedia in the Classroom Program (RWiC) represents WMF's flagship teacher training initiative. Targeting secondary school teachers, the program has been implemented in Bolivia, Morocco, Philippines, and Nigeria, with materials translated into over a dozen languages including English, Spanish, Ukrainian, Arabic, and Bulgarian.

The program aligns with UNESCO's media and information literacy definition as „a set of competencies that empowers citizens to access, retrieve, understand, evaluate and use, to create as well as share information and media content in all formats". During the 2020 COVID-19 pilot implementation, over 7,000 teachers viewed training sessions, 580 actively participated, and 169 earned completion certificates.[26]

Initial teacher surveys revealed scepticism: 44% disagreed that Wikipedia was valuable, and 43% opposed classroom use. However, post-training results showed dramatic attitude shifts, with approximately 90% strongly agreeing that Wikipedia is valuable and should be used in schools. Teachers reported improved understanding of digital platforms and enhanced critical thinking skills.

The program helped teachers learn to incorporate Wikipedia as a learning tool into lesson planning and evaluate student use of Wikipedia to access information. These pedagogical outcomes are especially relevant for teachers following certain programs and standards with limited room for manoeuvre.

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[24] Wikimedia Foundation, *Motivating factors for users to contribute to content on the internet* in The Wikimedia Brand Health Tracker. https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_Foundation/Communications/Research/Brand_Health_Tracker#Motivating_factors_for_users_to_contribute_to_content_on_the_internet

[25] Wikimedia Foundation, (2023), *Wikimedia in Education*. https://wikimediafoundation.org/our-work/education /

[26] Wikimedia Education, (2021), *Reading Wikipedia in the Classroom. Final Report*. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/af/Reading_Wikipedia_Final_Report.pdf

In 2023, an online edition was conducted for Ukrainian teachers in partnership with Prometheus, a major regional online learning platform. The Bulgarian translation was promoted by the Media Literacy Coalition, addressing local needs given Wikipedia's high visibility as one of the most visited websites globally and in Bulgaria.

4. Wikipedia's Model: Potential for improving existing and future online platforms

Wikipedia's theoretical advantages and practical successes in community governance become particularly relevant when examining how these principles might inform broader platform policy. The platform's recent experiences with EU regulation provide concrete examples of how public-interest platforms can adapt to new regulatory frameworks while maintaining their core values, offering a roadmap for developing European digital public sphere alternatives.

Examining Wikipedia's specific advantages reveals three key principles that could inform European platform development.

First, Wikipedia's non-profit structure eliminates financial incentives to prioritize engagement over accuracy, allowing focus on reliable information without personalization algorithms that can promote disinformation.

Second, Wikipedia's community-mediated policies ensure information quality through verifiability, neutral point of view, and notability standards developed and enforced through social processes. By participating in these processes, contributors develop transferable skills for recognizing these characteristics.

Third, Wikipedia's transparency and verifiable source requirements make it valuable for media and information literacy development. Citation tools and projects like WikiProject Reliability, which works to achieve the goals of the verifiability and no original research policies[27], encourage critical information engagement.

A public-interest platform modelled on Wikipedia's governance and communitydriven ethos can more effectively cultivate media and information literacy by turning passive consumers into active participants under clear, enforceable rules.

The theoretical advantages of Wikipedia's model become practical design principles when considering how to build alternative platforms that prioritize public interest over commercial engagement. Table 2 outlines specific mechanisms through which a Wikipedia-inspired platform could more effectively cultivate media literacy than current commercial alternatives.

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[27] *Wikipedia:WikiProject Reliability*. Wikipedia in English https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Reliability [visited on May 26, 2025]

Table 2. Arguments for a Wikipedia-inspired public-interest platform

Community-mediated governance	Participants jointly develop and enforce content and conduct policies, learning the „why" behind each rule as they help shape it. This consensus-based model embeds media-literacy principles - like sourcing and neutrality - into everyday editorial practice, rather than treating them as abstract guidelines.
Embedded verifiability requirements	By mandating that every factual claim be backed by reliable, published sources, contributors internalize source-evaluation skills. Actively seeking, assessing, and citing verifiable references teaches critical judgment more effectively than passive consumption of curated feeds
Transparent revision histories	Open access to every edit and discussion thread exposes users to the process of fact-checking, dispute resolution, and collaborative improvement. Observing and participating in these debates develops an understanding of how information quality is negotiated and upheld in real time
Reputation-based incentives	A system of badges, patrol flags, and community recognition rewards contributors for adherence to standards. Earning trust within the community reinforces correct application of content rules and discourages superficial or malicious edits, aligning personal motivation with media-literacy outcomes
Non-profit, public-interest focus	Freed from advertising or engagement-maximization algorithms, the platform can prioritize accuracy and depth over sensationalism. This structural choice models ethical information practices and reduces exposure to clickbait or filter-bubble effects that undermine critical thinking
Localized subsidiarity	Allowing regional or language communities to tailor reliability criteria fosters contextual understanding of source credibility. Contributors learn how cultural and linguistic factors influence information standards, broadening their literacy skills beyond a single media environment
Dedicated educational integrations	Embedding structured programs - akin to Reading Wikipedia in the Classroom - into the platform's onboarding and outreach can guide new users through media literacy competencies. Empirical studies show Wikipedia assignments improve students' critical thinking, research abilities, and source evaluation skills[28]
Anti-disinformation toolkits	Providing community-developed resources (e.g., deprecated-source lists, AI-powered vandalism detectors) offers hands-on training in spotting and countering falsehoods. Contributors practicing with these tools gain practical insight into disinformation strategies and defence mechanisms

[28] See the Zachary McDowell Research report from 2017 and *Research project on effectiveness of Wikipedia in education as a platform of improving the cognitive ability among students* https://meta. wikimedia.org/ wiki/Research_project_on_effectiveness_of_Wikipedia_in_education_as_a_platform_of_improving_ the_cognitive_ability_among_students#Final_Report; some researchers even see Wikipedia as a leader in digital and media literacy and education, i.e. Dr Amanda Lawrence (RMIT University) https:// meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Research:Reliable_sources_and_public_policy_issues_ on_Wikipedia

Clear behavioural standards	Strict policies on civility and edit-wars reduce hostile interactions that deter newcomers. A supportive environment encourages sustained engagement, giving learners time and space to master media-literacy tasks without fear of harassment
Scaffolded participation pathways	Tiered editing roles[29] - from casual reader to experienced editor - allow users to progress as their skills grow. Each level introduces more complex media-literacy challenges, ensuring learning remains aligned with actual contribution activities

These design choices represent a fundamental shift from consumption-based to participation-based media literacy development. Rather than teaching users to be better consumers of information, a Wikipedia-inspired platform would make critical evaluation and collaborative knowledge construction the basic requirements for platform participation.

Together, these design choices transform users into critical navigators of information. By making media-literacy practices the very mechanisms of content creation and community governance, a Wikipedia-inspired public-interest platform can not only disseminate reliable knowledge but also leave participants with enduring, transferable skills for evaluating and producing information across digital environments.

Wikipedia's Experience with the Digital Services Act

Notwithstanding Wikipedia's specific profile as a space for interaction between Internet users and hosting user-generated content that does not have a commercial entity behind it, Wikipedia fits the definition of an online intermediary and is subject to platform regulation. The European Commission has designated Wikipedia as a „Very Large Online Platform" (VLOP) under Article 33 (4) of Digital Services Act (DSA), placing it under greater regulatory scrutiny due to its large EU readership (more than one hundred million monthly active EU users)[30].

As of May 2025, it is one of 23 platforms with this designation. This classification subjects Wikipedia to stringent transparency requirements, including mandated risk assessments and detailed reporting on content moderation practices[31].

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[29] Wikipedia: Wikipedians. *User permissions.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedians#User_permissions

[30] Wikimedia Foundation (2024), *EU Digital Services Act information.* https://wikimediafoundation.org/about/transparency/2023-2/eu-digital-services-act-information/

[31] Bradley-Schmieg, P. (2023), *Wikipedia is now a Very Large Online Platform (VLOP) under new European Union rules: Here's what that means for Wikimedians and readers.* Diff. https://diff.wikimedia.org/2023/05/04/wikipedia-is-now-a-very-large-online-platform-vlop-under-new-european-union-rules-heres-what-that-means-for-wikimedians-and-readers/; Wikimedia Foundation. (2025). *EU Digital Services Act information.* https://wikimediafoundation.org/about/transparency/2024-2/eu-digital-services-act-information/ [visited on May 26, 2025]

Since Wikipedia became subject to DSA regulatory rules for VLOPs,[32] its assessment is focused on areas like electoral disinformation and the safety of young people online.

During 2024's EU electoral cycles, Wikipedia's volunteer editors successfully maintained information integrity against disinformation threats. Their provision of verified, multilingual content on candidates and electoral matters to millions of readers exemplifies the convergence between Wikipedia's public service mission and the DSA's goals for societal benefit.[33]

Unlike commercial platforms, Wikipedia's compliance strategy emphasizes preserving its community-led governance model while meeting DSA obligations. The Wikimedia Foundation implemented enhanced transparency reporting mechanisms but upheld the position that existing initiatives and community empowerment will help address these risks[34] and maintained its principle of minimal data collection, protecting editor anonymity even while disclosing moderation statistics[35].

This dual approach demonstrates how public interest platforms can adapt to platform regulation without compromising core values.

Implications
of the European Media Freedom Act

The European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) creates new interfaces between Wikipedia's policies and EU media regulation. Since Article 18 of the EMFA specifically targets VLOPs and their relationships with media service providers, Wikipedia would fall within their scope as a platform operator.[36] Furthermore, Article 19 establishes provisions for structured dialogue between providers of VLOPs, representatives of media service providers and representatives of civil society.

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[32] The DSA's general date of applicability is 17 February 2024. However, the DSA has applied to Wikipedia since August 2023 - four months following the Commission's notification of the decision designating 17 online platforms as VLOPs.

[33] EU Policy Team (2024, September 11). *Wikipedia and the Digital Services Act: Lessons on the strength of community and the future of internet regulation,* Wikimedia Europe. https://wikimedia.brussels/ wikipedia-and-the-digital-services-act-lessons-on-the-strength-of-community-and-the-future-of-internet-regulation /

[34] see note 33, Bradley-Schmieg, P. (2023)

[35] Wikimedia Foundation. *Transparency report - July to December 2024. EU Digital Services Act information.* https://wikimediafoundation.org/about/transparency/2024-2/eu-digital-services-act-information/

[36] Allioui, S. (2024) *EU Media Freedom Act: the convolutions of the new legislation.* EU Law Analysis http:/ /eulawanalysis.blogspot.com/2024/06/eu-media-freedom-act-convolutions-of.html
Failla, M. (2023), *European Media Freedom Act: some reflections from Wikimedia Europe.* Wikimedia Europe. https://wikimedia.brussels/european-media-freedom-act-some-reflections-from-wikimedia-europe

Wikipedia's source verification protocols align with EMFA objectives to enhance media transparency. The platform's Anti-Disinformation Repository[37] and source reliability guidelines demonstrate community-developed solutions to disinformation challenges that both the DSA and EMFA seek to address through legislation. This presents Wikipedia as both a regulatory challenge and potential model for EMFA implementation, particularly in demonstrating how decentralized communities can maintain information quality without centralized editorial control.

Wikipedia's regulatory engagements underline how community-driven platforms can inform the shaping of a robust European digital public sphere. Lessons from its designation as a Very Large Online Platform under the Digital Services Act and interactions with the European Media Freedom Act offer concrete policy guidance for fostering resilient, public-interest–oriented online environments.

Building on this foundation, European policymakers can adapt this model to establish platforms that empower volunteer moderation through clear, consensus-based policies rather than centralized, opaque algorithms and encourage subsidiarity by allowing language or regional editions to adapt reliability criteria to local contexts, as seen with Bulgarian Wikipedia's source-filter list of almost 600 unreliable digital press publishers.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Wikipedia's participatory governance model offers more than just an alternative to commercial platforms - it provides a proven framework for building resilient digital public spheres. Through its decentralized community structure and commitment to reliable sources, Wikipedia has maintained information quality and democratic participation for over two decades, even while adapting to new regulatory requirements under the EU's Digital Services Act.

The platform's success in fostering critical media literacy through active participation, rather than passive consumption, offers concrete guidance for European policymakers seeking to develop public-interest digital infrastructure. Wikipedia's experience shows that community-driven platforms can maintain information quality without relying on opaque algorithms or commercial incentives, while simultaneously developing users' critical evaluation skills through collaborative knowledge construction.

As Europe grapples with the limitations of commercial social media platforms and seeks to build more democratic digital spaces, Wikipedia's governance principles provide a tested foundation. The platform's ability to combine transpa-

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[37] Wikimedia Foundation. *Anti-Disinformation Repository.* https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Anti-Disinformation_Repository [visited on May 26, 2025]

rency, accountability, and user empowerment while meeting regulatory compliance requirements demonstrates the viability of public-interest platform models.

Future European digital public sphere development should incorporate Wikipedia's key insights: the importance of clear, community-enforced standards; the value of transparent processes that enable user learning; and the necessity of governance structures that prioritize information quality over engagement metrics.

By adapting these principles to new contexts, European policymakers can foster digital environments that serve democratic discourse rather than commercial extraction, creating lasting alternatives to the current platform ecosystem dominated by profit-driven corporations.

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