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The Framing of Political NGOs in Wikipedia through Criticism Elimination

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Abstract

This paper introduces criticism elimination, a type of information removal leading to a framing effect that impairs Wikipedia's delivery of a Neutral Point of View (NPOV) and ultimately facilitates a new form of gatekeeping with political science and information technology implications. This paper demonstrates a systematic use of criticism elimination and categorizes the editors responsible into four types. We show some types use criticism elimination to dominated and manipulated articles to advocate political and ideological agendas. We suggest mitigation approaches to criticism elimination. The research is interdisciplinary and based on empirical analysis of the public edit histories.

Key words: Collaborative content, Wikipedia, public diplomacy, framing effect

Introduction

Wikipedia is the most popular information reference site on the Internet (Tancer, 2007), advertising itself as "the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit" (Wikipedia, 2008a). Through digital mass participation by "Wikipedians" (also known as "editors" or "users"), Wikipedia aims to prevent bias and provide a Neutral Point of View (NPOV) (Ayers, 2006).

Wikipedia's approach has, however, raised concerns (Lichtenstein, 2008) traditionally reserved for the mass media. For instance, the media has long acted as a gatekeeper, selecting and framing issues in what was perceived to be the public interest (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2004). The management of public discourse through framing raises significant political implications and bias from framing effects and has been researched in multiple disciplines (Goffman, 1974; Hall, 1973; Kahneman, & Tversky, 1979; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford,1986).

In this paper we discuss Wikipedia's approach to reducing bias, and introduce *criticism elimination,* an approach that creates a framing effect through information removal.[1] This approach targets a vulnerability in Wikipedia's decentralized editing process, which, when used systematically, can ultimately lead to gatekeeping (Lewin, 1947) that conflicts with Wikipedia policy. We demonstrate criticism elimination through an empirical analysis of Wikipedia change logs across sixteen similar articles. We categorize those using this approach into four types of users and show that some act as gatekeepers.

The presence of politically motivated framing (rather than the expected NPOV) as well as gatekeepers, sanctioned or de facto, has serious implications for the understanding of content production in Wikipedia. Taking into account the different types of users, we suggest

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[1] The data this analysis is based on can be accessed at: http://faculty.biu.ac.il/~steing/wikipedia/

approaches to mitigate or prevent inappropriate framing through criticism elimination. Our methodology and analysis can serve as a basis for further work to extend the academic theory on Wikipedia and its socio-political-ethical aspects. Further research on Wikipedia is needed by both political scientists and social media theorists.

Wikipedia and Digital Democracy

Wikipedia is a hypertext based electronic encyclopedia that blurs the author and reader roles. This concept was first raised by Smith in 1989, twelve years before Wikipedia launched. Authored collectively by the public, Wikipedia is the most popular educational reference site on the Internet, receiving 24.3% of visits in this category of over 3,000 sites (Tancer, 2007). It is characterized by high accessibility, a large contributor community, and an even larger readership. The English Wikipedia contained 2,172,925 articles as of January 18th 2008 (Wikipedia, 2008d), and had 158,065 contributors, 42,351 of which make more than 5 edits per month (Wikimedia, 2008). It is the 7th most popular Internet site (Alexa Internet Inc., 2008), and the site most people go to from the results of a Google search (Tancer, 2007).

Wikipedia has been praised as a significant advance in knowledge management (Benkler, 2006; Greenstein, 2007; Olleros, 2008; Zittrain, 2008). Forte & Bruckman (2008, p. 1) specifically praise it for "highly refined policies, norms…[and an architecture that] supports organizational ideals of consensus building and discussion." Co-founder Larry Sanger, however, noted in 2004 that "the dominance of difficult people, trolls, and their enablers" creates a "poisonous social or political atmosphere."

Difficult people can lead to quality problems. The journal *Nature* (Giles, 2005), however, showed that science based articles in Wikipedia have similar error rates to articles

in Britannica, as measured using peer review.[2] Richard Waters (2006) reporting this in the *Financial Times* notes that Wikipedia is "pretty good at explaining the basic facts (the focus of the Nature experiment)... [but] things start to go awry when it comes to less clear-cut issues - history, say, or politics".

The problem in subjective areas is that Wikipedia articles can be dominated. Sunstein (2006, p. 158) notes that the last editor "can appoint himself as sovereign", destroying, rather than aggregating, content. Stacy Schiff (2006) writing in *The New Yorker* noted that more frequent editors generally get their way. Articles or entire topic areas can be framed with a particular view by users with knowledge, determination, and power within the system. Environmentalist Lawrence Solomon (2008) explored this in Wikipedia articles on global warming and climate change research. Wilkinson and Huberman (2007) show a related result with an article's quality being strongly correlated to the quantity of edits it receives. Popular articles are harder to dominate.

By dominating articles and topic areas, Wikipedia can be used as a platform for political propaganda. Paul Murphy (2008) called Wikipedia "an early and illustrative warning of the collapse from informed social networking to propaganda." He explained that "sub-groups of the general community…are now using Wikipedia as a marketing tool for their viewpoints." He called it "fundamentally inappropriate in a site nominally dedicated to the provision of objective information." He raises a concern that those with an agenda will be more dedicated to getting their point across than casual users, thereby allowing them to dominate.

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[2] In re-examining the data collected by *Nature*, Wikipedia's errors appear qualitatively different and more serious than that of Britannica. The encyclopedias' susceptibility to myth provides a topic for future research.

Research using Wikipedia

Wikipedia provides a rich environment for research. Its privacy policy maintains that editors are identified publicly and that "all contributions made to a Project, and all publicly available information about those contributions, are irrevocably licensed and may be freely copied, quoted, reused and adapted by third parties with few restrictions" (Wikimedia, 2009).

Users are encouraged to protect their own and each other's anonymity by using pseudonyms for their identifiable usernames. Processes to change username if warranted also exist. Wikipedia provides a public database of value to researchers, requires contributors consent for third party use, and has mechanism to limit any resulting discomforts. This provides a very strong ethical basis for research using Wikipedia's public data.

Researchers have taken advantage of this data (Viegas, Wattenberg, & Dave, 2004; Viegas, Wattenberg, Kriss, & van Ham, 2007; Viegas, Wattenberg, & Mckeon, 2007). Viegas, Wattenberg, and Dave (2004, p. 579) used the data to identified five types of "vandalism" (quality reduction) including *idiosyncratic copy*, "adding text that is related to the topic of the page but which is clearly one-sided, not of general interest, or inflammatory."

Past work has also looked at Wikipedia users. Bryant, Forte, and Bruckman (2005) used an activity theory approach, focusing on "active, committed members" to show increased participation leads to a more general focus on improving quality. Their sample limitation and the exclusion of more casual editors is a research gap we address in this paper.

Background on Framing Effects

Framing research dates from the 1970s and 1980s in various fields (Goffman, 1974; Hall, 1973; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986; Tuchman 1978). The underlying concept is the frame, which Gitlin (1980, p. 7) defines as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse." We use "framing effects"

as a general term for efforts to manipulate frames.[3] In the framing versus agenda setting debate (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1989; Ghanem, 1997; Scheufele 1999) we are consistent with McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (1997), where framing is an extension of agenda setting.

Kosicki and McLeod (1990) present three dimensions of news processing: active processing, reflective integrating, and selective scanning. The most relevant to Wikipedia is *active processing* where, according to Scheufele (1990, p. 105), the audience is "seeking out additional sources based on the assumption that mass-mediated information in general is incomplete, slanted, or in other ways coloured by the intentions of the communicator." Wikipedia users are almost by definition in this active dimension of news processing.

As users alternate between roles, Wikipedia blurs the distinction between media frames (media's portrayal of a story) and audience frames (audience perception, based on their mental model of the world). This provides an interesting window into the constructivist media effects model (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). Rhee's (1997) three stage model of this process is "reception of new texts," "integration of knowledge," and "construction of a discourse model." For Wikipedia we could add "projection of discourse model," where editing reflects the audience model and may cause removal of conflicting information.

Scheufele (1999, p. 104) dismissed "research demonstrating framing effects for particular media or in specific content areas" as of "limited use to the field." However, Wikipedia's collaborative nature and dominance as an information source creates a need for new research.

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[3] Kuhberger (1998) uses "the framing effect" interchangeably with "the framing phenomena" yet notes there is no such thing as *the* framing effect. Rather, there are a range of things that lead to differing "framing effects."

Wikipedia context: Gate keeping, framing, edit wars and Neutral Point of View

Framing can occur though gatekeeping (Lewin, 1947), a theory of how items are "selected" or "rejected". In information technology gatekeeping is today primarily concerned with liability for defamation and copyright (Zittrain, 2006). It has, since conception, played a significantly different role in understanding the conventional media (Shoemaker et al., 2001). Gatekeeping is "the process by which selections are made in media work, especially decisions whether or not to admit a particular news story to pass through the 'gates' of a news medium" (McQuail, 1994, p. 213). Social responsibility theory (Peterson, 1956) saw the public as passive and easily manipulated and the media as "information gatekeepers who represented the public's interest" (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2004, p 63).

Social responsibility theory was dominant prior to the Internet revolution (Bruns, 2003). Williams and Delli Carpini (2004) suggested we face a "virtual elimination of the gatekeeping role of the mainstream press" due to the online environment. Bruns (2003) sees instead a change in the nature of the role and introduced the concept of a gatewatching paradigm. The new paradigm sees content providers acting as librarians who monitor and select news sources for their readers. They create gateway nodes rather than replacement news sources. Wikipedia follows this model by requiring all information to have a reputable source which is references, where possible, with a hyperlink. This requirement gives new emphasis to the role of the mainstream media, seen as one reputable source by Wikipedia.

Wikipedia's dominance raises concerns about its own effect, or that of dominant editors, in framing information and acting as gatekeepers. Some form of gatekeeping is unavoidable. Articles can't get too long, for instance. Without guidelines, all frames would be equal, and cultural battles would ensue. In Wikipedia, a culture (Schiff, 2006) with power structures, guidelines, and policies has developed to prevent this. These policies include

NPOV, which states articles should be "written from a neutral point of view, representing significant views fairly, proportionately, and without bias" (Wikipedia, 2008c).

In theory, as articles develop, changes increase neutrality. Editors negotiate and agree on neutral language. The inclusion of "significant views" reduces selection bias provided it is done fairly and in proportion to the rest of the article. Wikipedia also bans "original research" (including individual editor's opinions). It requires reliable resources such as press or academic articles to support text. These sources contain the real value of a Wikipedia article, the more high quality references an article has, the higher its information value.

In practice, however, the top 1% of posters jointly contribute about half of Wikipedia's edits (Wilson, 2008). The power of the elite gives them a default gatekeeping role. Their strength in authority, time commitment, and knowledge of Wikipedia can easily overwhelm, and thus eliminate, the contributions of others.

Conflicts, known as edit wars, are also common. They occur when "individual editors or groups of editors repeatedly revert each other's edits" (Wikipedia, 2008b) and are "from a statistical perspective, considered normal activity" (Spicuzza, 2008). Rules such as the three revert rule were created to limit edit wars, but have limited effect in long term wars, which may themselves indicate an underlying ideological or political struggle to frame articles.

The selection of NGOs as a topic to examine framing

This research focuses on framing in Wikipedia of non-government human rights organizations (NGOs) active in the Arab-Israeli conflict. This narrow focus was chosen because the conflict is an area of long term edit wars (subject to General Sanctions in Wikipedia) while the NGOs tend to be framed in the media by a halo effect (Thorndike, 1920).

The halo effect deters critical review (Johns, 2003; Niggli, P. & Rothenbuhler, 2003; Slim, 2002) and causes NGO reports to be accepted at face value by journalists, diplomats,

academics, and others (NGO Monitor, 2004; Steinberg, 2006). The reasonableness of acceptance at face value is brought into doubt by research into NGOs (Robert, 2004; Ballesteros, Restrepo, Spagat, & Vargas, 2007; Steinberg, 2007). In Wikipedia the halo effect should be countered by users *active processing* and NPOV, however, individuals or an ideological group can prevent this by influencing frame selection.[4]

Methodology

Viegas, Wattenberg, and Dave (2004) identified "mass deletion" as a form of vandalism. This paper focuses on a deletion action largely equivalent to their idiosyncratic copy. We observe not article deletion, but referenced content deletion. Through content removal, the editor alters the frame. We focus specifically on the criticism sections of articles related to NGOs, noting that such criticism, provided it is well-sourced, is in keeping with Wikipedia's NPOV policy. We also examine the role and behavior of editors, expanding on work by Bryant Forte, and Bruckman (2005) by examining users who are not "active, committed members" of the community but have influence. By focusing on information removal, we extend previous work on framing to Wikipedia, and examine an approach to framing that Wikipedia seems ill equipped to handle.

We use an in vivo experiment in the form of an observational study with predefined variables and multiple "sites" (articles in this case) making this a field study as per Basili's (1996) classification scheme for experimentation in software engineering. As Wikipedia records all interactions within the system, we use content analysis on stored data as a form of observation. Other approaches, such as psychological analysis are impractical. The analysis

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[4] One example of such an ideological group is WikiProject Palestine (Oboler, 2008) which focuses on some of the articles examined in this research.

of Wikipedia's stored data is consistent with the approach of Viegas, Wattenberg, and Dave (2004), but the addition of qualitative analysis in a field study approach adds depth (Basili, 1996).

To reduce selection bias, twenty NGOs were initially selected by experts not involved in this research. Wikipedia was then searched for articles on these NGOs, leaving sixteen NGOs with articles for this study.[5] The research proceeded in three phases: phase one was quantitative, and phases two and three were qualitative. The quantitative examination gave breadth and enabled selection for comprehensive qualitative analysis, which gave depth. This mixed method approach allows the spread of framing through deletion to be more fully measured and the nature of the changes and possible motivations explored.

Phase one began by creating an edit history document for each NGO article. It recorded the name of the NGO, the address of the article, the article's original creator and creation date, and whether the article was included in WikiProject Palestine. The entire history from article creation until the most recent edit was examined, and additions and deletions of criticism were logged in the edit history document as "significant edits" for the purpose of this research. For each significant edit, the researcher noted the user name, date of change, a link to the version comparison, general notes, the text of the change itself and whether it added, removed, or edited criticism. The editor's comment was recorded when informative. The unit of analysis is a significant edit, of which 627 were examined. A sample of the data collected in this step of the research is shown in appendix A.

The researcher next created a profile summary of descriptive statistics for each NGO article. This included: (a) the number of relevant edits examined, (b) a breakdown of the edits

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[5] The NGOs without Wikipedia articles, which were therefore excluded from the study, were Mossawa, Adalah, The Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), and The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR).

into the total number that "added criticisms," "deleted criticism," "amended criticism," or "other," and (c) a list of key editors in the article classed as either pro- or anti-retention of criticism. False negatives were avoided through a low inclusion threshold and "other" was used in a few cases when classification was not clear cut. In general, the classification was deterministic with references added to a criticism section being additions and the removal of such references being deletion.

The profile summary repeated some information compiled from the edit history for ease of use. A sample profile summary document is shown in appendix B.

The lists of key editors from all the profile summary documents were used to create a user summary document. This single document listed editors and which articles they made relevant edits to. Three categories were used: (a) prominent users adding criticism across NGOs, (b) prominent users removing criticism across NGOs, and (c) users with a low number of total edits. In this case, an editor is the unit of analysis. Examples are provided in appendix C.

In the second research phase, significant cases of interest for deeper qualitative analysis were selected. Links in the summary documents from phase one were used to access and then extract richer case study information from Wikipedia. Article histories, discussion on talk pages, and the wider contributions of some editors were examined.

The third phase focused on the classification of editors. Fifty-six users were listed in the user summary document for adding or removing criticism. In-depth research was conducted into eleven of these. The research was inductive with an initial classification, followed by more detailed examination of each user's overall contribution. The detailed examination resulted in some reclassifications when information from summaries that

suggested editing on unrelated topics was shown to be related when the articles themselves were examined.[6] The factors considered in classifying users are provided in Table 1.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

Quantitative Results

The study examined sixteen articles on NGOs (four of which never contained a criticism section); these are listed in Table 2, along with a count of relevant edits. Six hundred and twenty seven edits were recorded in the edit history documents. Nine NGOs were included in WikiProject Palestine, and their criticism sections were heavily revised to eliminate criticism.

(Insert Table 2 about here)

Four of the NGO entries examined have had sourced criticism sections in the past which have since been completely or almost entirely deleted, and at the time of this research (July 2008), had not been restored. Examples include the UK-based charity Christian Aid and the Israeli NGO Hamoked. In both cases, all discussion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was removed (twice in the case of Christian Aid).

With Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the criticism sections were expanded into new articles. The growth of sections into their own articles is normal practice

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[6] The rremoval of NGO criticism, combined with the insertion of references to that NGO's work in other articles, suggest at least an above average familiarity with the NGO or possibly some form of relationship.

in Wikipedia. In Table 2 we have combined the two Human Rights Watch articles; the main article contained 69 significant edits, and the "Criticism of Human Rights Watch" page contained a further 32 significant edits. The "Criticism of Amnesty International" page was quite new, and the edits to create it are not counted toward Amnesty's total in Table 2.

Table 3 lists single issue accounts created for a single, narrow purpose. These accounts have made few contributions to Wikipedia, and mostly focused on removing criticism from NGO articles. In one case (Hamoked), the user assumed the same name as the NGO. In a number of cases, additional edits were on related topics, including events or people associated with the NGO. Such a narrow focus suggests an editor is using Wikipedia as a public diplomacy tool, rather than editing for its own sake. It may indicate a regular contributor separating the act of criticism removal from his or her regular Wikipedia identity. As shown in Table 3, the two NGO superpowers, Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, have a significant number of single issue accounts, as does a third NGO, Sabeel. These also have the highest number of significant edits, as seen in Table 3. This suggests a relationship between criticism related editing intensity and volume of single issue accounts.

(Insert table 3 about here)

In total, 89 editors removed criticism, and 61 of these used registered user names. One hundred and fifteen editors added criticism, and 69 of these used registered user names. There are 4 prominent users removing criticism from multiple NGOs; 16 users removing criticism multiple times from one or more NGOs in addition to making revisions in other NGO entries; 26 users with low edit counts focused on NGOs; and 9 users adding criticism in more than one NGO entry.

Qualitative Results

In the following section we use case studies to illustrate different types of editing related to framing through the removal of information.

Discussion of specific NGO article case studies

Criticism of Amnesty International grew into an article in its own right in December 2007 and has since seen minimal editing. The volume of criticism from various sources made it more acceptable, as did an earlier incident in 2006 when the approach to inclusion of criticism in the article was challenged.[7]

A user editing Amnesty's page stated that, "Wikipedia is not 'a debating society', and therefore a focus on 'criticisms' doesn't seem appropriate to this article." They suggested developing a "topographical overview of the tensions" instead, a move described as "a thinly disguised attempt at moderating criticism" by another editor. A third editor stated explained policy, "It doesn't matter whether the article is about an organization that is 'good' or 'bad' and whether the criticisms are 'true' or 'false'. It is a place to report the fact of specific and well sourced criticisms that have happened." The exchange demonstrates how Wikipedia policy and guidelines can counter problems in more popular articles, leading to framing consistent with NPOV.

The Oxfam article is another example of an article with extensive criticism on various topics. Here, however, several previous criticism sections, including ones dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, have been removed. The selective nature of the removal is

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[7] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Amnesty_International#.22Articles_critical_of_AI.22 Retrieved June 14 2008

interesting as it changes the framing with respect to Oxfam and Israel while leaving other criticism of the NGO largely intact.

The article on the UK charity Christian Aid has seen the criticism section removed on two prominent occasions. In the first instance, a "Bias in Regard to Israel" section was removed entirely. In the second instance, two links criticizing Christian Aid's policy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and presenting research showing evidence of bias against Israel were removed. A criticism section currently exists, but without any mention of the intense debate over Christian Aid's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is again an example of removal of information as a way to frame the article with respect of Christian Aid and Israel.

Another example of a criticism section being removed is the article on Hamoked. A section which cited a reliable source on the Israeli conflict was completely removed by user BassXXX.[8] In this instance, the same user has undertaken similar cleanup work on other articles, including the removal of a criticism sections from the article on Khalid Yasin,[9] a controversial American Islamic leader (Crittenden & Yasin, 2003), and the removal of cited praise[10] from Daniel Pipes, a Middle East scholar and commentator, in an article on Ibn Warraq, a secularist Muslim intellectual (Crittenden & Warraq, 2001). This user has made only 21 edits on Wikipedia, after an initial 7 innocent edits, the rest indicating a narrow focus on these issues. This shows how frames supporting the same agenda can be advanced by information removal of both praise and criticism.

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[8] See http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hamoked&diff=191253879&oldid=156393268

[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Khalid_Yasin&diff=prev&oldid=193141782

[10] http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ibn_Warraq&diff=prev&oldid=208576034

Framing can also alter criticism without entirely removing it. The criticism section on Machsom Watch (an Israeli NGO) was significantly changed on a number of occasions[11] to remove discussion of the Erez Checkpoint incident. The Machsom Watch article sourced criticism has been removed, and several criticisms have been reworded repeatedly. In one example, a statement that Machsom Watch members "disrupt the work of soldiers at checkpoints" was repeatedly removed by users Zero0000 and Odonian. In one comment, Zero0000 justifies this removal by falsely claiming that he or she "removed unsourced attacks." In a later edit, user Odonian removed not text but some of the references, claiming inadmissibility as "all of there [sic] were rightwing, non-objective." The references were to news media, including Israel's MSN News. The attempt to remove, dismiss, and discredit sources that run counter the editor's political opinions is another example of information removal in order to change the frame.

These examples illustrate some of the ways framing occurs in Wikipedia through information removal. The removal of criticism published by reliable sources is against Wikipedia policy, yet occurs regularly. This indicates that framing is an issue in Wikipedia, despite policy. In the next section, we examine the types of users contributing to this problem.

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[11] See http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Machsom_Watch&diff=prev&oldid=52119676, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Machsom_Watch&diff=next&oldid=52198146, and http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Machsom_Watch&diff=next&oldid=55394845

The Four Types of Users

Inductive analysis of the data identifies four main types of users who remove criticism: campaigners, advocates, lobbyists and casual editors. Each differs based on the size of their contribution to Wikipedia and the distribution of their edits. Two further types, anti-vandal editors and balancers work toward undoing the removal of referenced material. Because this article focuses on framing through information removal, the latter two types are not examined in depth, however they seem to be a minority with high levels of activity.

Campaigners

A campaigner is a Wikipedia editor working towards a larger goal. They edit across a range of NGO articles and other articles. In the NGO articles examined here, they usually removed sourced criticism. Some campaigners are members of WikiProject Palestine. Others appear to edit articles in the project without being members.

Case study: user Alberuni.

Alberuni was banned for 13 months in January 2005, then permanently in 2006. He used "sock puppets" (additional accounts) to try avoid penalties for involvement in edit wars and personal attacks. Alberuni was the user's main account with over 2500 edits.

Alberuni removed criticism from Machsom Watch, Amnesty International, and Al Mezan. He had an anti-Jewish goal. Alberuni replaced the word "Jewish" with "Zionist" in articles, and repeatedly called another editor a "Zionist censor." Alberuni wrote in a comment that the Islamist view of a one state solution is that "Zionists will have to go or die."[12]

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[12] See http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=One-state_solution&diff=prev&oldid=8351489

Alberuni's campaigning use of Wikipedia is documented in a page created by Jayjg. It lists 24 general sock puppets and 28 sock puppets with specific characteristics. The later include: three Islamist sock puppets, three female sock puppets, four straw man sock puppets (pretending to be Israeli), one sock puppet with an abusive name, 13 with names attacking Jews (including "WikiJewsSuk", "CoolHitlerFan" and "Jewshit"), and four accounts attacking specific editors. The overall campaign is one of racism, specifically antisemitism.[13]

Not all campaigners are racist. Zero0000, the creator of the Machsom Watch article, is a campaigner active across a range of topics on the Arab-Israeli conflict; editing both Machsom Watch and B'Tselem. Deodar (editing Hamoked and Sabeel), Abu Ali (ICAHD and Sabeel), and 72.88.218.235 (B'Tselem, ICAHD) are further examples of campaigners. All of these editors took a particular interest in editing other articles on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Advocates

An advocate editor is concerned almost entirely with one page or a very limited topic. In the case of our research, the focus would be a particular NGO. One hypothesis is that advocates may be members, supporters, or staff of the NGO. These editors are using Wikipedia for a purpose unrelated to the advancement of the encyclopedia and instead remove criticism in order to frame their target in the best possible light.

One type of advocate is the single issue account previously introduced. Most are used in a single block of time. New single issue accounts can be created on an as-needed basis. Advocates editing over a sustained period are rare. Evelyn727 in the case study below is one such case. Examples of edits by the more common single issue accounts follow.

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[13] The list of sock puppets can be seen at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Jayjg/Alberuni

Case study: user Evelyn727.

The user Evelyn727 has made 18 edits during a one year history.[14] The edits can be divided into seven blocks of time, yet all involve the NGO War on Want. In some cases Evelyn727 adds criticism to other organizations and events, citing War on Want research. In the case of War on Want itself, Evelyn727 reframes the article to remove criticism and rewrites content in a defensive manner.

In one change, a research finding stating that War on Want was "accused of making political use of 'Holocaust and anti-Semitic themes'" was revised by Evelyn727 to state the NGO was accused of being "involved in international lobbying to isolate Israel." Without removing the reference, Evelyn727 switches the focus to a point that (a) may not be considered negative by War on Want supporters, and (b) deflects the charge of possible racism into a discussion of politics, substantially defusing this criticism.

Another edit replaced information stating that "the UK Charity Commission has investigated War on Want a number of times and warned them about their political activities which may breach their charitable status" with a statement seeking to vindicate War on Want. The original statement was supported by references to the press (Paul, 2006), a law journal (Lee, 1984), and a political science journal (Burt, 1998). These were all removed.[15] The new statement read: "Though complaints about War on Want are sometimes filed with the Charity Commission, no complaint has ever been upheld"; no source was provided.

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[14] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Contributions/Evelyn727 Retrieved July 3 2008

[15] See http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=War_on_Want&diff=106858317&oldid=106391605

Edits by single issue accounts.

An extreme case of a single issue account is RachaelO who has only one edit. The comment gives away the advocate nature of her account, reading, "A lot of quotes from similar organizations can't make B'Tselem's painstakingly careful statistics inaccurate. Rmvd [sic] some quotes, added some clarifications." RachaelO has removed text criticizing B'Tselem for "using outdated sources for reports on highly charged political topics," and attacked the source which she introduced as "a watchdog group that accuses organizations such as Amnesty International of anti-Israel bias."

RachaelO's edit also replaced a statement that "the organization has also been assailed for its casualty statistics," leaving a much weaker claim that "some critics have voiced concern that B'Tselem classifies casualties into military versus civilian rather than combatant versus non-combatant." An explanation of the classification problem, namely that it can "mislead others into thinking that the 'civilian' casualties were all innocents," has been replaced with text reiterating B'Tselem's position.

The reframing by RachaelO alters the entire tone of the criticism section. The resulting section could best be named "unjustifiable criticism." This user's single edit introduced bias that lasted months. Tewfik eventually added a reference to an academic journal noting that B'tselem has been "criticised for defining as 'civilian' Palestinians killed while engaged in attacks on Israelis." Tewfik comments that he is fixing a lack of NPOV; he appears unaware that the problem results from deliberate re-framing by the last editor. Although an edit history is available, it is not always referred to.

A list of other advocates (of the single issue account type) is presented in Table 3.

Lobbyist

The lobbyists are editors who work within a broad remit across Wikipedia, yet focus on only one NGO. They differ from advocates because they contribute in other places and

from campaigners because their actions do not appear to be part of a general campaign. These editors may attempt to remove or reduce criticism or set very high standards for the inclusions of criticism. As they become more involved in Wikipedia, their use of Wikipedia's internal policies and guidelines to achieve their goals become more sophisticated.

Case study: user Tiamut.

Tiamut is active on topics related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and in the Sabeel article, but not other NGOs. The user profile lists Tiamut as a member of project Palestine, project Israel, the project to counter systematic bias, and the project against discrimination.

Tiamut has been involved in a number of minor edit wars over the Sabeel article. Framing can be seen in his efforts to mute criticism or explicitly attribute all included criticism to "pro-Israel" sources. The desire to attribute criticism to "pro-Israel" sources (rather than simply naming the sources and letting people draw their own conclusions) has been described as "poisoning the well." This frames the subsequent criticism in a way that may prevent readers from giving the arguments themselves proper consideration.

Other lobbyists include PalestineRemembered, who edits the Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolitions article, and YoYoDa1, who edits Human Rights Watch. Both users edit on the topic of the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Casual editors

Casual editors are visitors to Wikipedia who only edit articles on occasion. Spread across many topics, their edits show no unified agenda. Their attention is divided and, very often, thinly spread. These users may remove information that conflicts with their conceptual model on the justification that it is out of place.

Case study: user Corington.

Corington has edited "War on Want" several times, mostly to improve it and add details. This user's other interests stretch from poached eggs to the Phoenix Cinema, thus revealing a lack of a unified agenda that defines casual users. Corington is not involved with other NGO articles, nor with Arab-Israeli conflict articles.

Corington removed criticism of the 2006 War on Want Christmas cards. The cards – showing a pregnant woman, identified as Mary, on a donkey being searched at an Israeli checkpoint outside "Bethlehem" – caused criticism for their "echoes [of] the anti-Semitic blood libel of deicide… by explicitly connecting the suffering of Palestinians with that of Jesus" (NGO Monitor, 2007). Corington's comment, "incorrect info (card image did not depict Jesus)," is original research rejecting published analysis, which is a violation of policy.

Corington also furthered the work of Evelyn727 (mentioned previously) by removing negative references to investigations by the Charities Commission.[16] A Commission quote in the *Jerusalem Post*, "the Charity Commission has taken these concerns very seriously and we have addressed these issues with the trustees of War on Want," was replaced with original text, "War on Want's campaigns on Palestine were linked to its charitable objects, making them perfectly legitimate under charity law," and a citation to a *Jewish Chronicle* article. The *Jewish Chronicle* article refers to a specific complaint, not as the citation implies, to *all* War on Want's campaigns. This is a sophisticated edit that alters the public record in Wikipedia through selection and misrepresentation of an alternative source. In the process, past criticisms are further buried.

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[16] See http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=War_on_Want&diff=next&oldid=220582843

Another example of a casual editor is GrahamN who has edited the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights.

Other types of users

There were two other types observed in this research: *Anti-vandals,* who undo large deletions, and *balancers,* who work to ensure praise and criticism is properly provided on notable topics. These two types of users work against selective framing effects by promoting a NPOV. Both may react strongly against vandalism of sourced criticism, sometimes engaging in "edit wars." This work is not entirely effective, as demonstrated by the amount of sourced criticism that has been removed and not restored.

Implications and Recommendations

The use of framing in Wikipedia through information removal is clearly demonstrated by this research. The traditional gatekeeping function of the media appears particularly influential in Wikipedia, but it is extended by a second stage of gatekeeping that eliminates sources, either legitimately, based on their providence, or through efforts to reshape the frame. As a result of framing, Wikipedia cannot be a consistently reliable source on politically contentious topics. Less popular, seemingly non-political areas of Wikipedia can be dominated forcing users to question their reliability.

The unique policy, technology, and political structures of the Wikipedia domain encourage framing from a NPOV. Additions that break this frame are easy to spot and are reviewed each time an article is read. Deletions have a much lower visibility but play a significant role in framing in a non-NPOV manner.

The reduction in quality from advocate editors, as highlighted in this paper, can be easily reduced. Wikipedia already uses its own gatekeeping approaches to prevent vandalism in high risk articles. Such gatekeeping could be routinely added to high risk parts of articles

(such as criticism sections) to prevent editing by anonymous users and accounts with limited history.

A small number of editors make a disproportionate effort to revert the removal of criticism. Despite such efforts, many references are removed and not replaced. Content deletion is a framing approach that requires the lowest investment to make and the highest investment to discover. This makes it a topic worthy of further research when considering framing in Wikipedia. More awareness of the usefulness of reviewing edit history and new tools based on this history could reduce the impact of information elimination framing.

As Wikipedia policy, such as NPOV, already supports the inclusion of published criticism, ignorance of the appropriateness of criticism is an educational rather than a policy matter. Wikipedia can clarify the desirability of sourced criticism, prevent NPOV framing, and encourage the restoration of sourced criticism if needed. Automated systems could be used to transfer deleted sources to the talk page (or a new type of page) for later consideration by editors. Another approach would be to make deletions visible to logged-in users in their default view using a revision viewing system, similar to that in Microsoft Word for example.

Conclusions

This research presented criticism elimination, a type of information removal that can introduce framing in community created content. The examination of 627 edits spread over sixteen Wikipedia articles demonstrates systematic removal of criticism published by reliable sources, despite policy. This leads framing running counter to the NPOV policy and highlights a weakness, open to exploitation, in the current Wikipedia model.

We have shown that criticism elimination can have a gatekeeping effect allowing parts of Wikipedia to be dominated by those with an agenda. The presence of politically motivated framing and de facto gatekeepers runs counter to the Wikipedia model of

knowledge generation. It has implications for both article quality and trust, particularly on contentious topics. Further research on gatekeeping in Wikipedia is needed.

We have classified, into four groups, the editors using criticism elimination to achieve a framing effect. We have suggested prevention and harm minimization approaches appropriate to different classifications of editors using criticism elimination. Fine grain editing restrictions may prevent some problem while new tools to increase the visibility of removed references could make it easier to spot and undo the rest.

This research, including the methodology, can be useful to Wikipedia model developers and others examining the Wikipedia system. Wikipedia as an environment provides a rich field of data for future political science research. For now, criticism elimination means at least some parts of Wikipedia are susceptible to unexpected, systematic framing, and gatekeeper do indeed exist. This limits Wikipedia's ability to improve in quality and must likewise limit our faith in what we read there, especially on contentious topics.

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Appendix A

It should be noted that only edits with explicit criticism of the NGO being examined were counted. Other edits were recorded in the edit history where they could be expected to have an impact on point of view similar to criticism or the removal of criticism (but based on reader interpretation). In the Christian Aid summary, about half the edits are in this category. A section of the *edit history document* for Christian Aid follows.

Christian Aid:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Aid

Date examined: 20/05/2008

Project Palestine: NO

Date Topic Added: 18/12/2004

Author: Robroyaus

Link:

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Christian_Aid&diff=212838949&oldid=8563812

History of revisions:

ADD 17:20, 19/10/2006, by The Tuna: Added "Bias in Regard to Israel" section:

According to NGO Monitor, Christian Aid promotes organizations and events that advance a clear political agenda, consistently blaming Israel for the ongoing conflict and ignoring Palestinian terror and rejectionism. Its publications erase Palestinian responsibility, ignore terrorism and demonize Israel.

Christian Aid Officials have joined extremist political campaigns and have close links with the main proponents of divestment. Christian Aid's stated mission is to "strive for a new world transformed by an end to poverty and [to] campaign to change the rules that keep people poor." It is unclear how pursuing political campaigns that place the

blame for the conflict entirely on Israel as an aggressor state, and remove any Palestinian responsibility for improvement, will achieve this end.

Provides sources.

Link:

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Christian_Aid&diff=next&oldid=81986943

REMOVE 16:13, 24/10/2006, by Kazandy: Removed "Bias in Regard to Israel section".

Does not state reason

Link:

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Christian_Aid&diff=next&oldid=82594406

(Some data omitted at this point, data continues…)

REMOVE 16:50, 31/07/2007, by 84.51.136.194: "Libelous information"- removed Criticism of Christian Aid section, including links.

Link:

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Christian_Aid&diff=148303440&oldid=143926257

ADD 18:19, 27/12/2007, by NBeale: Added new criticism. Lacks criticism of Christian Aid's policy in the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Link:

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Christian_Aid&diff=180458552&oldid=178548105

Currently: There is a criticism section, however, it does not deal with Christian Aid's policy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Appendix B

This appendix provides a sample of an *NGO Profile document*.

Christian Aid:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Aid

Date examined: 20/05/2008

Project Palestine: NO

Date Topic Added: 18/12/2004

Author: Robroyaus

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Christian_Aid&diff=212838949&oldid=8563812

Total Edits Recorded: 11

Total Number of Revisions Adding Criticism: 3

Total Number of Revisions Removing Criticism: 2

Total Number of Revisions Editing Criticism: -

Total Number of Other Edits: 6

Users Adding Criticism: 75.84.97.215, NBeale, The Tuna

Users Removing Criticism: 84.51.136.194, Kazandy

Users Amending Criticism: -

Users Making Other Edits: Dean Sayers, 135.196.109.101, Ken Gallager,

Summary: The Criticism section on this page has been tampered with on two prominent occasions. In the first, a Bias in Regard to Israel section was removed. In the second instance, two links attacking Christian Aid's policy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their bias against Israel were removed. Currently, there exists a criticism section, however it lacks discussion on Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Appendix C

This appendix provides a selection of entries from the User Profile document.

<u>Prominent users removing criticism across NGO entries.</u>

Eleland- B'Tselem, ICAHD

Mostlyharmless- Oxfam, HRW

<u>Users removing criticism on more than one occasion in at least one NGO entry, in</u>
<u> addition to making revisions in other NGO entries:</u>

Abu Ali- ICAHD, Sabeel

Corington- Revised solely in War on Want, however he edited numerous times, and
removed significant amount of criticism.

YoYoDa1- Revised solely in HRW, however he edited numerous times. Additionally,
he edited various entries related to Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

<u>Users appearing in "Users Adding Criticism" Section in more than one NGO entry:</u>

The Tuna- Christian Aid, Hamoked, Sabeel, ICAHD, B'Tselem

Jayjg- Al Mezan, Sabeel, ICAHD, B'Tselem, Human Rights Watch, AI

Zeq¬- Machsom Watch

<u>Users with low edits focused on NGOs</u>

Shumtie- Oxfam (7 edits).

Vicaroak- Sabeel (7 of 9 edits are on Sabeel).

69.210.13.102- Criticism of HRW (6 edits).

Table 1

User Case Study Attributes

Descriptor	Description
NGOs edited	A list of the NGOs this user has edited
Number of edits	A count if the number is below 50, otherwise 50+
Justification of edits	Viewed in Wikipedia edit summaries and talk pages
Significant edits	Extracted from the edit history documents
Number of NGO article edits	Where there are few edits, a count of the number of NGO article edits
Interests	A description of related interests

Table 2
Count of Examined Edits by NGO

Non Government Organization	Significant Edits	Project Palestine
Association for Civil Rights is Israel (ACRI)	0	No
Alternative Information Center (AIC)	0	Yes
Al Mezan Center for Human Rights	62	Yes
Alternatives (Canada)	0	No
Amnesty International (AI)	82	No
B'Tselem	73	Yes
Christian Aid	11	No
Hamoked	10	Yes
Human Rights Watch (HRW)	101	Yes
Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD)	45	Yes
Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights (LAW)	8	Yes
LDH: French League of Human Rights (Ligue francaise des droits de l'Homme et du citoyen)	0	No
Machsom Watch	60	Yes
Oxfam	44	No
Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center	107	Yes
War on Want (WoW)	21	No

Table 3
Single Issue Accounts

User name / IP address	NGO	Edits
Kazandy	Christian Aid	2
Shumtie	Oxfam	7
Hamoked	Hamoked	1
207.173.201.108	Sabeel	9 of 12
207.173.201.221	Sabeel	2
65.95.159.30	Sabeel	2 of 3
Finetoothcomb	Sabeel	2
Vicaroak	Sabeel	7 of 9
Faith2006	Sabeel	2 of 3
CJCurrie	Sabeel	many
68.163.184.56	Sabeel	3 of 6
Emek12345	B'Tselem	7
RachaelO	B'Tselem	1
69.210.13.102	Criticism of HRW	6
Wildwolfdogg	HRW	2
Waqbi	HRW	14
67.9.103.64	HRW	2
68.251.97.137	HRW	3
68.249.127.64	HRW	3 of 7
81.133.211.144	AI	14
81.134.1.130	AI	10 of 13
81.133.191.250	AI	1
Sligahan	AI	5 of 6
78.149.187.252	AI	12