

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/wikipedia:wikipedians](#)

Wikipedians, Meet *PT*

JUST WHO IS creating and updating the thousands of entries on Wikipedia? We gathered research on these ghostwriters and posted the info in the site's entry for "Wikipedians." Here's what we learned—and how a few anonymous editors tweaked our words. —*Michele Lent Hirsch*

[Read](#) | [Edit](#) | [View History](#)

Personality

Wikipedia members are more likely than nonmembers to feel more comfortable expressing their "real" selves online than off. [1] This corresponds with more general findings that Internet communities attract users who are introverted offline but open up and feel empowered on the Web. [2][3] A gender difference was found in extraversion: Whereas female Wikipedians were more introverted than female nonmembers, male Wikipedians were just as extraverted as males in the control group. [4]

Wikipedians have also been found to be less agreeable, less open, and less conscientious than nonmembers. [5] Studies have shown that lower agreeableness and openness are correlated with egocentric behaviors such as self-confidence building.

Motivations for Contributing

Although members may initially contribute to the site for pleasure, they are motivated primarily by an internal drive to feel efficacious and self-confident. [6] Wikipedians are not primarily motivated by recognition or reputation. [7] While a sense of community may be a motivator for some, only the internal drive to build confidence in one's knowledge was found to be a key motivator.

Revisions To This Entry

October 7, 3:33 P.M.: *Psychology Today* posts content in "[Wikipedia:Wikipedians](#)" entry

October 12, 3:48 P.M.: Contributor from IP address [99.69.146.138](#) inserts: "*Motivations for contributing, having a small penis and compensating online*"

October 12, 3:48 P.M.: Seconds later, user [Kgasso](#) reverts edit

October 12, 9:30 P.M.: Contributor from IP address [75.74.96.83](#) inserts: "*This is just some dumb ass sh*t see i can even edit it and this sh*t is boring.*"

October 12, 9:36 P.M.: User [Rodhullandemu](#) reverts edit

[1] Amichai-Hamburger, Y. et al. "Personality Characteristics of Wikipedia Members." *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, Vol. 11, No. 6 (2008). [2] Amichai-Hamburger, Y., Wainapel G., Fox S. "On the Internet no one knows I'm an introvert: extroversion, neuroticism and Internet interaction." *CyberPsychology & Behavior* (2002). [3] Amichai-Hamburger, Y., McKenna, K., Tal, S. "E-empowerment: Empowerment by the Internet." *Computers in Human Behavior* 24 (2008). [4] Amichai-Hamburger, 2008. [5] *ibid.* [6] Yang, H. and Lai, C. "Motivations of Wikipedia content contributors." *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 26 (2010). [7] *ibid.*

Introverted women are apt to tap online communities like Wikipedia for support, research notes. That may be why more introverted women are editing the site.

There's no way to know whether Wikipedia draws surly users or the process makes Wikipedians unpleasant. Surprised they're not super-conscientious? Individual levels vary: "Some see a problematic entry and spend hours reading outside sources to make sure they edit it correctly," Heng-Li Yang says. "Others immediately change the entry based on their knowledge—even if that knowledge is, frankly, wrong."

"The Wikipedians we studied were mid-20s, 86 percent male, and all extreme users—those who contribute for hours each day," says Yair Amichai-Hamburger. The site's anonymity, plus the active community of like-minded people, help Wikipedians feel as if they can open up.

"Wikipedia is the perfect platform to show off or try out one's capabilities without embarrassment," Yang says.