Bridging the Gender Gap

A research study on Indian Language Wikimedia Communities

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ABSTRACT

This research report is a compilation on the analysis of gender bias in Indian language Wikimedia communities. Wikimedia defines 'gender bias' on its platforms as the fact "that Wikipedia contributors are mostly male, the fact that relatively few biographies on Wikipedia are about women and the concept that topics of interest to women are less well-covered." [1] Comprising observations drawn from interviews with women contributors across diverse Wikimedia projects in Indian languages, this study hopes to present some learnings and reflections on the problem of gender gap in Indian context, as well as potential strategies and recommendations to address the same.

Research Questions

This study focussed on three thematic areas:

- Online participation, including content created by women, content about women, and their online engagement with communities.
- Offline participation by women across various Indian language communities.
- Strategies to remove barriers to sustained participation of women contributors g(including challenges with retention and infrastructural issues), and mapping the diversity of Wikimedia projects women are involved with, with the aim to encourage participation across more projects.

There have been efforts taken since 2011 by various Wikimedia communities to address the gender gap. This includes the initiatives/programs like Women In Red, Art+Feminism, Wiki Loves Women, Wiki Women for Women Wellbeing, Gender Gap Task Force (a WikiProject which addresses bias in content on women and documents problems faced by women in Wikipedia), Wikimedia projects and initiatives to improve content on several topics such as women artists, feminism, women's history, women in technology, women scientists among others. Women Wikimedians from India have also been part of organising committees for global events such as Wiki Loves Folklore and Wiki Loves Love 2019.

The study had 15 interviewees from 13 different Indian Language Wikimedia and also two Focussed Group Discussions. The observations made from these interviews and FGDs were analysed and the findings are as follows:

1. Sustainable participation of women participants by identifying and addressing the gaps in access, awareness and visibility of contributions needs to be foregrounded in community initiatives.

2. Accessibility and technical knowledge building among women groups who would be interested in understanding and contributing to the technical projects on Wikimedia.

3. Power structures within the women's contributors need to be organised by educating them on why power structures are essential in sustaining women contributors in their community.

CONCEPTS/METHODS USED

In this study we had 15 respondents from 13 Indian language Wikimedia communities (which includes English). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants in the following languages, English, Hindi, and Tamil. Two extensive Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with students at two colleges in Tamil Nadu. These interviews and FGDs were conducted as in-person conversations and audio/video calls. The FGDs were conducted with the support of A2K, and broadly on gender gap initiatives and projects in the global context.[2] The FGDs consisted mostly of student communities from two colleges and we had a discussion on the challenges faced by them with regard to the gender bias at home and how this impacts their participation in the digital world. We also discussed the impacts of institutional challenges with respect to the support for infrastructure to continue contributions in Wikimedia projects. [3]

KEYWORDS

Gender gap, Indian Language Wikimedia communities, gender bias, bridging the gender gap, women.

1. Observation and analysis

1.1 Online participation and Challenges

Online based contributions on Indian language Wikimedia is the most common way how the communities engage in the Wikimedia projects. The virtual based engagements is not just for activities like editing or writing articles on Wikimedia but also it is effective for

communications and outreach. However, women face challenges as this mode of engagement needs more standardisation of how it must work and also access to the internet and other required infrastructure. The online contributions have been an unavoidable option in the time of the pandemic where many members in the community utilised the opportunity for virtual training and discussions. More efforts on training for online engagement, practicing safe and friendly policies can make it more inclusive for women contributors to participate at their ease.

1.2 Offline participation and Challenges

The offline based events and engagements are very popular among our respondents and their communities. Logistical and infrastructural support needs are to be satisfied by the event organisers for eligible women participants. On the other hand, for women participants who have to make their time for the events or contributions on top of their primary responsibilities is a challenge. The face to face and in-person gatherings are helpful when there is awareness on the friendly space policies by the participants and make the event an effective space to welcome women participants and sustain their participation.

1.3 Achieving sustainable participation

In this research we considered various parameters to understand what causes the women to leave or reduce their contributions and thereby what actually affects women to be part of a sustainable Wikimedia contributor. For understanding the gender diversity on Wikimedia projects there needs to be a standard practice to capture the data in a better method. This analysis will help in broadly understanding the participation and engagement of the contributors and device out useful ways to ensure there is gender diversity and inclusion. For bringing more participants into the Wikimedia community the key essential is awareness and peer sharing. The existing communities (a subsection of which were represented by the respondents) must have a broader vision to build a system to drive and motivate new comers(women) and walk them through the activities of the community and involve them in the same. There have been some efforts taken by community members and individual contributors to make a toolkit for Community Health.[4] Yet more focus on making these policies and making it work for

the local communities and also in sensitive areas of gender diversity and recognize marginalized groups is very essential.

Recommendations:

A set of recommendations emerged from this research and from the understanding of the expectation of community engagement where there was a scope for more women participation.

1. Formulating the localised policies which can work for the Indian language Wikimedia projects
2. Friendly space policies for online based contributions and training
3. Planning smoothly the shift in power and also welcoming the new women participants with proper guidance
4. Recognising the outputs
5. Advance technical/ skill training and outreach
6. Building Self Help Groups
7. Focus more on outreach and Community Health
8. Bridging the Wikimedia contributors and Wiki Research activities

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