Copy-Cats: Impacts of Competitor Clones on Original Wikipedia Editions

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Abstract

We propose a large-scale, longitudinal analysis of the impact of competitor clones, or "copy-cats", on the original Wikipedia editions. Our first case study centers on Ruwiki, a Russian government clone of Russian-language Wikipedia launched in June 2023. Our second case study focuses on Grokipedia, a corporate-funded, AI-edited copy of the English-language Wikipedia launched in October 2025. We will analyze the impacts of these competitor clones on four key areas of interest for the Wikipedia community: (1) encyclopedic growth, (2) encyclopedic quality, (3) editor conflict & collaboration, and (4) administrators & governance. We will employ a mix of quasi-experimental and causal inference techniques, utilizing the Wikimedia data dumps to determine impact in these four areas. Preliminary findings on the Russian-language Wikipedia suggest resilience at the aggregate level: we did not detect a significant change in editing or reverting volume, or in unique editors, in the year following the Ruwiki lunch. Recently-active articles, however, exhibit a decline in activity, suggesting that impacts might be heterogeneous and thus warrant further investigation. By examining how competitor clones might reshape growth, quality, collaboration, conflict, and governance on Wikipedia, we hope to provide a deeper understanding of the resilience and vulnerability of peer production communities.

1. Introduction

Since Wikipedia's founding in 2001, government and industry leaders have contested unfavorable coverage on the "free encyclopedia,"[1] which is editable by anyone, anywhere. In recent years, however, discontented governments and CEOs have responded by making their own "copy-cat" competitor clones of Wikipedia: (1) in 2023, the Russian government created Ruwiki, a censored clone of the Russian-language Wikipedia, and (2) in 2025, tech executive Elon Musk launched 'Grokipedia', an AI-edited copy of the English-language Wikipedia. Given the peer-produced nature of Wikipedias, which are reliant on volunteers from around the globe, we seek to understand how, if at all, competitor clones impact the original Wikipedia editions.

Case Study 1: Ruwiki – a censored, government-sanctioned clone

Ruwiki is the Russian government's solution to a long history of failed censorship requests of Wikipedia, which increased following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In the proceeding post-invasion months, Russia's Federal Service for the Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) continued to demand Wikipedia articles be removed, threatening fines and placing articles on a list of forbidden sites.[2] In June 2023, the Russian government launched a beta version of Ruwiki: a copied fork of the Russian-language Wikipedia, with sanitized coverage of the invasion and other politically sensitive topics [Corfield 2023]. In January 2024, Ruwiki moved from a beta version to a full-feature version, which mimics Wikipedia's peer-production functionality: users

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:The_Free_Encyclopedia
[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Wikipedia_pages_banned_in_Russia

can edit articles and discuss article content on talk pages.[3] As the full-feature Ruwiki has been active for over 24 months, we have a suitable time period to understand the longitudinal impacts of the government-sanctioned clone on the original edition.

Case Study 2: Grokipedia – a corporate, AI-generated clone
Launched in October 2025, Grokipedia emerged from xAI owner Elon Musk's escalating public attacks on Wikipedia, which he has long accused of bias. His criticisms intensified in early 2025 after Wikipedia's coverage of a controversial salute that Musk made at a rally for the 60th U.S. presidential inauguration [Dzieza 2025]. The self-described "First AI Encyclopedia", Grokipedia consists of AI-edited and AI-factchecked articles, initially copied over from the English-language Wikipedia. Unlike Ruwiki, Grokipedia is not a 'fork' of Wikipedia, as it does not run on MediaWiki software. Grokipedia does not allow users to directly edit articles, but offers only a suggestion form [Hart 2025]. By the time we begin work on this case study, Grokipedia will have been online for nearly 12 months, presenting another suitable time period to understand the longitudinal impacts of a competitor clone on the original edition.

1.1 Research Questions

We propose the following research questions, organized around four areas of concern for the Wikipedia community:

RQ1: Encyclopedic Growth How have the launches of the competitor clones affected the growth of the original Wikipedia editions, as measured by editing volume, new article creation, page views, and the entrance and retention of editors?

RQ2: Encyclopedic Quality How have the launches of the competitor clones affected article content quality on the original Wikipedia editions, as measured by neutrality indicators, article quality grades, and content convergence with clone counterparts?

RQ3: Editor Conflict & Collaboration How have the launches of the competitor clones affected conflict and collaboration dynamics on the original Wikipedia editions, as measured by edit warring, the distribution of editor workload, and deliberative coordination on talk pages?

RQ4: Administrators & Governance How have the launches of the competitor clones affected the governance on the original Wikipedia editions, as measured by the volume of conflict resolution processes and the evolution of administrative practices?

1.2 Impacts

Our research will reveal the extent to which Wikipedia is resilient to competitor clones across four areas central to the functioning of any Wikipedia edition: growth, quality, editor conflict & collaboration, and administrators & governance. By examining two Wikipedia editions facing structurally different clones—one government-sanctioned, one corporate and AI-generated—we can assess whether these impacts are consistent across contexts or vary depending on the nature of the clone and the language community it targets.

A decline in growth or quality would suggest that competitor clones siphon off the volunteer labor that Wikipedia editions fundamentally depend on. Early work offers a surprising initial observation: English Wikipedia articles with Grokipedia counterparts experienced *increased* editor activity and page views in the three weeks following the launch, suggesting a "flight to quality" in which Wikipedians intensified their efforts to maintain the original encyclopedia's standards [Leung & Strumpf 2025]. Whether this

[3] In early 2026, the Ruwiki now requires editors to complete an application for review, suggesting a move away from true peer-production, to a more closed operation.

response persists beyond the initial weeks, and whether it extends to conflict, collaboration and governance dynamics, remain open questions that our study is designed to address.

1.3 Date

We anticipate this research to be conducted over a 12-month period, from July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027. We expect the bulk of the analyses proposed here to be carried out within the first six months (personnel funds are requested for this period).

2. Related work

We review three areas of work which inform our proposal: (1) understanding quality, conflict, and collaboration on Wikipedia, (2) natural experiments and exogenous shocks on Wikipedia, and (3) emerging research on Wikipedia competitor clones.

2.1 Understanding quality, conflict, and collaboration on Wikipedia

Over the past 25 years, Wikipedia has grown from an experiment in building an online, volunteer-run encyclopedia to a core internet infrastructure [Steinsson 2023]. As Wikipedia grew, so too did scholarship on how Wikipedia functions as a peer-production system. For encyclopedic quality, researchers have developed language-agnostic models for cross-edition quality comparison [Das et al. 2024]. For encyclopedic conflict, a substantial literature has characterized edit warring through revert-based measures [Kittur et al. 2009] and mutual revert networks [Sumi et al. 2011, Yasseri et al. 2012]. For encyclopedic collaboration, scholars have examined how editors coordinate their work both stigmergically—through the distribution of content contributions [Halfaker et al. 2009], edit persistence [Adler et al. 2011], network structure [Brandes et al. 2009], and workload concentration [Zhang et al. 2017b]—and deliberatively, through talk page activity [Keegan & Fiesler 2017] and discussion structure [Laniado et al. 2011]. This existing literature informs our methodological approach to measuring how competitor clones impact the growth, quality, and editor collaboration & conflict on original Wikipedia editions.

2.2 Natural experiments and exogenous shocks on Wikipedia

A separate line of research examines how massive peer production systems like Wikipedia respond to exogenous shocks. Zhang & Zhu [2011] first exploited the Chinese government's 2005 block of Chinese-language Wikipedia as a natural experiment, finding that non-blocked contributors reduced their editing by over 40%, which the authors attributed to the social effects of a shrinking community. Zhang et al. [2017b] (co-authored by PI Budak) built upon this work to examine the same governmental block's impacts on editing volume, editor centralization, and edit warring, establishing the interrupted time series and matching-based approaches we adapt in our study. Zhang et al. [2019] (also co-authored by PI Budak) examines how new editors participate following such shocks. Our work extends the exogenous shock literature to a new phenomenon: competitor clones, created by governments and corporations alike, which might impact Wikipedia's peer production processes. The following section describes early work in this space.

2.3 Encyclopedias in Competition

2.4 Emerging research on Wikipedia competitor clones

A growing body of work examines the Wikipedia competitor clones, with a skew towards Grokipedia. Within the 33 months following the

Ruwiki launch, 3 manuscripts have been released. The first investigates the changes made in the government clone, including which articles were excluded entirely [Trokhymovych et al. 2025]; with the resulting RWFork dataset, a second paper developed a Wikipedia vandalism detector [Makovska et al. 2025]. The third paper provides a more granular analysis of how coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war differs between the two encyclopedias [Vestel & Degaetano-Ortlieb 2026]. No work has yet looked at downstream impacts of Ruwiki on the Russian-language Wikipedia.

Within the six months following Grokipedia's launch, no less than nine manuscripts have been released. Much of this early work investigates the differences between the clone and the original, namely on content similarity, topical coverage, political lean, and citation practices [Triedman & Mantzarlis 2025, Yasseri & Mohammadi 2025, Eibl et al. 2025, Eid 2025, Hadad et al. 2025, Ischenko 2025, Mehdizadeh & Hilbert 2025]. These studies have found that Grokipedia articles which were considerably changed from their Wikipedia counterpart exhibit a rightward political shift; in addition, Grokipedia's citations rely less on news sources and more on user-generated sources and sources which do not meet Wikipedia's reliability standards. Similar to the early Ruwiki work, these studies do not offer insights on downstream impacts on the English-language Wikipedia.

To our knowledge, Leung & Strumpf [2025] is the only study to date which examines downstream impacts of a competitor clone: English-language Wikipedia articles, which had corresponding Grokipedia entries, experienced both increased editor activity and page views in the 3-week period following the competitor launch. Such findings are hopeful, suggesting that the competitor clone might beget a "flight to quality", where Wikipedians increase their activity to maintain "the differentiation and accuracy of their platform" [Leung & Strumpf 2025]. Our study will confirm whether this increased editing behavior continues past the 3-week post-launch period. Moreover, Leung & Strumpf [2025] focuses only on encyclopedic growth and quality measures. Our proposed work will also investigate how competitor clones impact editor conflict & collaboration, as well as Wikipedia's administrative processes.

3. Data and Methods

To answer our research questions, we will conduct quantitative, longitudinal analyses of the complete revision histories of the Russian-language and English-language editions of Wikipedia.

3.1 Data collection

To collect relevant page statistics for every article on ru.wikipedia.org and en.wikipedia.org, we will work with the Wikipedia dump files, which are released on a monthly basis by the WikiMedia Foundation.[4] In our preliminary work, we employed the 02/01/2025 release of the Russian-language edition of Wikipedia, to analyze one full year following the government clone launch.[5] The entire history of these articles, in addition to the supporting Wikipedia namespaces (i.e. talk pages, user pages, etc.), totaled over 250GB in compressed bz2 file form.

Data collection timeline: For the Ruwiki case study, we will examine a window of two years before and two years after the January 15, 2024 launch of the full-scale version of Ruwiki. For the Grokipedia case study, we will examine 12 months before and 12 months after the October 27, 2025 launch.[6] We view the two cases as

[4] https://dumps.wikimedia.org/
[5] https://dumps.wikimedia.org/ruwiki/20250201/
[6] Robustness checks will be performed to confirm findings are robust to window size.

complementary, with the Ruwiki analysis capturing longer-term dynamics (i.e., editor retention and governance evolution) and the Grokipedia analysis capturing the more acute, short-term response to a competitor clone launch. Time permitting, we may also examine impacts on the Ukrainian-language Wikipedia and Serbian-language Wikipedias, where a portion of readers and editors (who are Russian-speaking) might be siphoned off to the Ruwiki government clone.

Data processing pipeline: We have existing experience and infrastructure necessary to process the Wikimedia data dumps, which are of non-trivial size. PI Budak has published multiple papers on Wikipedia using such data [Zhang et al. 2017a, Zhang et al. 2017b, Zhang et al. 2019] and Co-PI Laura Kurek has processed the entire Russian-language Wikipedia dump to extract article-level and editor-level metrics for our pilot analysis. For computing power and storage, we have access to large scale computing and storage clusters at the University of Michigan.

Data completeness.

3.2 Impact measures

We will analyze the impacts of these competitor clones across four areas of concern for the Wikipedia community: (1) encyclopedic growth, (2) encyclopedic quality, (3) editor conflict and collaboration, and (4) administrators & governance.

Encyclopedic Growth: We will measure the growth of the original Wikipedia editions via editing volume, the rate of new article creation, page views, and the entrance and retention of editors. For editor retention, we will track existing editors across various cohorts (Keegan & Tan 2020). Growth and participation metrics are widely used within Wikimedia to track platform health, but their response to external shocks requires more investigation. Our work contributes by identifying whether competitor clones lead to measurable declines, stability, or reallocation in editor activity and content production, helping distinguish short-term fluctuations from structural change. We note that user-level measures for the Russian-language Wikipedia will be incomplete due to anonymity protections. We discuss this further in the Risks section. In

Encyclopedic Quality: While prior work has developed measures of Wikipedia quality and bias, little is known about how these properties respond to external competitive pressures. By examining quality and content convergence in the presence of competitor clones, our work provides one of the first empirical assessments of whether Wikipedia's content standards remain robust under direct competition.

Editor Conflict & Collaboration: We will assess conflict by measuring reverts per edit [Kittur et al. 2009], mutual reverts [Sumi et al. 2011, Yasseri et al. 2012], revert network structure [Brandes et al. 2009] and toxicity of language in talk page threads [Smirnov & Strohmaier 2023]. We will assess collaboration dynamics by examining 1) stigmergic coordination (how work manifests on the article page) and 2) deliberative coordination (how work is coordinated on talk pages). Stigmergic coordination will be measured through edit concentration and inequality (using gini coefficient as in Zhang et al. 2017b), distribution of content attributable to a given editor [Halfaker et al. 2009], and distribution of edit persistence across editors [Adler et al. 2011]. Deliberative coordination will be measured through talk page activity volume [Keegan & Fiesler 2017] and the discussion depth and structure on talk pages [Laniado et al. 2011].

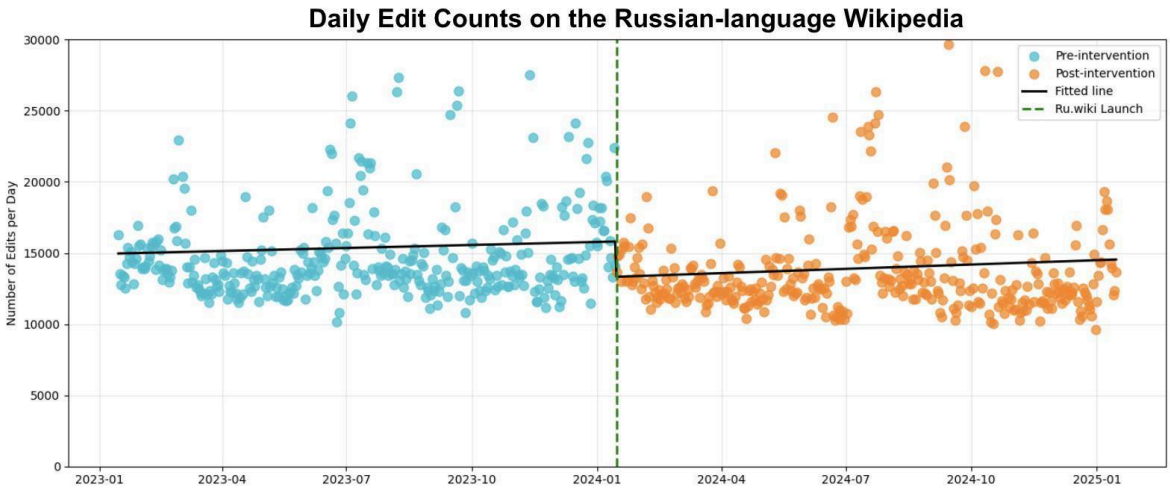


Figure 1: Encyclopedia-wide interrupted time series for daily edit counts on Russian-language Wikipedia Neither the level change nor the trend change is statistically significant.

Much like the growth and quality measures, these characteristics are commonly studied in the literature but not as well understood during times of shock. Our past work shows that departure of editors due to country level Wikipedia bans lead to a reduction in conflict and varying levels of impact on work centralization [Zhang et al. 2017b]. Our proposed case studies will elucidate how these findings generalize to competition driven shocks.

Administrators & Governance: To measure the evolution of administrative processes, our approach will be qualitative in nature, drawing on a review of Wikipedia policies, guidelines, and informational essays.

Finally,

3.3 Study Design

To identify the impact of competitor clones on Wikipedia, we employ a combination of interrupted time series (ITS) and matching-based quasi-experimental designs, complemented by heterogeneity analyses at both the article and editor levels.

Interrupted time series. For all outcome measures (Section 3.2), we begin with ITS analyses, leveraging the launches of Ruwiki and Grokipedia as exogenous shocks. Below, in Section 3.4, we present preliminary ITS results for case study 1.

Exploiting within-clone variation. Instead, we exploit variation in the intensity of clone competition. We compare Wikipedia articles that are substantially altered in Ruwiki and Grokipedia to similar articles that are copied with minimal change, matching on pre-launch characteristics such as topic and editing activity levels. Articles will be linked between the original and clone editions via article title. We will also examine variation across topic areas that are more or less likely to be affected by state-driven editorial intervention (e.g., politically sensitive vs. non-sensitive domains). These designs allow us to identify heterogeneous effects even when clone coverage is nearly universal.

Cross-edition falsification check. s

Editor-level analyses and heterogeneity. We extend our analysis to the editor level to examine how competitor clones affect contributor behavior. We will compare editors with greater exposure to clone competition (e.g., those contributing to highly altered or sensitive articles) to similar editors with less exposure. We will analyze heterogeneity across editor characteristics, including activity level, tenure, and topical focus. For the Russian-language case study, we will also explore variation across editor contexts where possible (e.g., editors active in geopolitically sensitive topics versus others), while acknowledging limitations in user-level data due to anonymization practices.

Across both case studies, we will systematically examine heterogeneous effects across article types (e.g., topic, activity level, recency) and editor groups. This enables us to move beyond average treatment effects and identify where competitor clones exert the strongest influence. By combining ITS with matching-based comparisons and heterogeneity analyses, our approach allows us to distinguish general platform-wide trends from clone-specific effects and to uncover the mechanisms through which competitor clones reshape Wikipedia.

3.4 Preliminary Findings

For case study 1, our analysis of impacts to the Russian-language Wikipedia is already underway. Using interrupted time series models, we did not detect significant changes in encyclopedia-wide daily editing volume, revert rate per 1,000 edits, or unique active editors following the Ruwiki launch, neither as a level change or a trend change. See Figure 1 for encyclopedia-wide ITS results of daily edit counts. Looking closer at editor activity, editors who remained active on the Russian-language Wikipedia maintained stable editing volumes and did not exhibit increases in conflict behavior, whether measured as reverting others or being reverted. We further tightened our filter to active editors (5+ edits per month), and these patterns remained stable.

Recently-active articles, however, displayed a sharper decline in editing activity, suggesting that impacts may be heterogeneous across the encyclopedia. These findings motivate our proposed matching-based designs, which will allow us to isolate effects across article and editor subgroups where clone competition may be most acute.

4. Wikimedia communities involvement

While we do not have official commitments yet, we have several avenues for collaboration with Wikipedia Movement communities.

First, the PIs have prior experience engaging with Wikipedia editors and admins, given their experience recruiting 13 Wikipedians for their interview study [Kurek et al. 2025]. For Case Study 2, we will consult the Wikipedia admins from our prior interview study (whose roles afford visibility beyond the Russia-Ukraine topic area) for feedback on our measures and perceived changes following the Grokipedia launch. For Case Study 1, we have a connection with a previous Russian-language Wikipedia editor, who would potentially connect us with active Russian-language Wikipedia editors.

Second, the PIs have existing connections with the Wikimedia Research community. Co-PI Laura Kurek has presented at the annual WikiWorkshops, and reviewed submissions for the conference since 2024. She also presented at two Wikimedia Ukraine events in 2025, sharing our research in Wikipedia in Wartime to Ukrainian Wikipedians and academics. As such, we have an existing connection with the

Programs Coordinator at Wikimedia Ukraine,[7] which will be especially valuable if we extend our analysis to other regional language editions impacted by the Ruwiki clone. Given these existing Wikimedia Research connections, we plan to share our initial findings to gather additional feedback.

Third, the PIs understand the norms and expectations around Wikipedia research. We understand the importance of anonymity for many Wikipedians, many of whom do not disclose demographic information. As in our prior work, we will reach out to Wikipedians who signal they are amenable to being contacted–by either including the "Email this user" link or text welcoming correspondence on their User page. In addition, we plan to create a Meta-Wiki Research page to announce our work to the Wikipedia community, as we did for our previous interview study.[8]

5. Expected output

We expect several distinct outputs from our competitor clones research targeted at several distinct audiences. First, we will produce two reports for the Wikimedia Foundation, one for each of the case studies. We anticipate the reports to both summarize our observational findings as well as offer concrete recommendations on how the Wikipedia communities might best respond to competitor clones. In addition, we plan to present our work at the annual Wiki Workshop, as well as organize additional presentations for specific Wikimedia communities, if there is interest.

Second, we anticipate writing one to two academic manuscripts, which we will submit for peer-review at leading computational social science and social computing venues (e.g. ICWSM, CSCW, CHI). The academic manuscript will contain the core findings included with our Wikimedia reports, as well as provide additional details on methods and analysis for researchers who might seek to conduct similar large-scale, observational studies on Wikipedia.

Third, we aim to write a general-audience article for an outlet such as *The Conversation*[9] to increase general public awareness of changes to the online information environment. In such an article, we will explore questions such as: what does the rise of competitor clones mean for readers of Wikipedia, and how might they contribute to keeping Wikipedia communities vibrant?

Fourth, we anticipate sharing our code base. This will allow future researchers to study the impact of other competitor-clones and other exogenous shocks on Wikipedia.

6. Risks

We acknowledge the following risks with our proposed research on Wikipedia competitor clones:

Casual attribution: We cannot attribute all observed changes to the clone launches alone, as confounding factors may influence our outcome measures. We will mitigate this risk in two ways. First, we will be cautious in our causal language, framing findings as associations rather than definitive effects where appropriate. Second, we will employ within-Wikipedia comparison strategies: for Ruwiki, comparing articles that were substantially altered in the clone to articles with minimal change, and for Grokipedia, matching articles with clone counterparts to similar articles without them. This will allow us to distinguish clone-specific effects from platform-wide trends.

[7] https://ua.wikimedia.org/wiki/Вікімедіа_Україна
[8] https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Research:Index
[9] https://theconversation.com

Asymmetry in observation windows: The Grokipedia case study has a shorter observation window than Ruwiki, which may limit our ability to detect slower-moving effects such as editor retention shifts. We will use the Ruwiki case study's longer window to identify which metrics show delayed effects, and will conduct robustness checks examining how results change with observation window length.

'Erased editors' on the Russian-language Wikipedia: For our editor-level measures, we note that the Russian-language Wikipedia 'erases' editors' names from articles on politically sensitive topics.[10] This anonymization is to protect the identity of Wikipedia editors contributing to politically-sensitive topic areas. Given this, our editor-level measures will be partially incomplete, as we will be unable to fully track editor retention and editor centralization across all articles. We will clearly document which results are affected by this limitation and conduct robustness checks that include and exclude articles subject to editor anonymization.

7. Community impact plan

We aim to produce findings that are actionable for Wikipedia communities, especially those most affected by competitor clones. As we describe in the Wikipedia Communities Involvement section, we plan to solicit feedback on our impact measures from active editors on both English and Russian editions. As we describe in the Expected Output section, we plan to compile summary reports for the Wikimedia Foundation with concrete recommendations on how to respond to competitor clones; this will include a granular analysis of which article topic areas, editor types, or administrative processes are most vulnerable to competitor disruption.

In a broader sense, our research will expand understanding of how Wikipedia reacts to exogenous shocks. While our two proposed case studies are focused on existing competitor clones, our metrics and analytical framework can be applied to other exogenous shocks, be it another clone or other future disruption. With the Wikipedia Research Fund, we would be able to conduct this important work, and ultimately make our tools and findings openly available. In this way, we might help equip both researchers and Wikipedia communities with the resources to respond to future threats to the world's free encyclopedia.

8. Evaluation

For evaluation in the short-term, the Research Fund chairs might evaluate the completion of our proposed analysis: receival of two Wikipedia reports (one for each case study), submission of one to two academic manuscripts for peer review, release of an open-source codebase, and the publication of a general-audience article. Beyond completion-focused measures, the Research Fund chairs might evaluate the quality of our work: assessing whether the Wikimedia Foundation found our recommendations novel and helpful (i.e., insights not already known) and whether our codebase is well-adopted by other researchers (i.e., as measured by GitHub stars, forks, and academic citations).

In the longer-term, the Research Fund chairs might track citations of our academic manuscripts and whether other Wikipedia researchers build upon our competitor clone analysis framework. Perhaps the starkest measure of success will be whether, in the face of some yet-unknown future shock to Wikipedia, the community reaches for a copy of

[10] If you navigate to the article history of the Russian Wikipedia page for Vladimir Putin, you see that each edit has on it ~~(имя автора стёрто)~~ or "Author's name redacted)

our report “Copy-Cats: Impacts of Competitor Clones on Original Wikipedia Editions.”

9. Budget

Please find our proposed budget at the following link: [Wikimedia_Research Fund Budget]

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