qualitalk

Information on Technology and Society

Falling numbers of readers and authors in the German-language Wikipedia require new ways to preserve the medium as a reliable source of free knowledge for the future, so that media moguls and platform capitalists do not flood us with alternative facts and filters.
Stay spared from the elementary floods,

wishes

Chris Schuster

Wikipedia – Future Congress
Nuremberg, 7. to 9. June 2024

Auditorium KORN*Saal: Elisabeth Mandl, responsible for recruiting new volunteers for Wikipedia at Wikimedia Germany and Jens Ohlig, member of the executive board of Wikimedia Germany, welcomed the participants from German speaking countries Austria, Switzerland and Germany at Korn's event location in the old town of Nuremberg, Germany.

Wikipedia – where Knolwlege resides

Future Congress 2024 in Nuremberg

Panel discussion on the changing handling of knowledge by Chris Tedjasukmana, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz**.**

View of Nuremberg with the Protestant St. Lorenz Church from the conference room on the top floor.

Der Brockhaus, German equivalent to Encyclopædia Britannica, complete with 24 volumes lined up on the bookshelf, was considered the guarantor of encyclopedic knowledge in the last century. With the advance of the Internet and the use of search engines, looking up thick tomes became increasingly tedious and never complete. Written knowledge, often written by well-known authors, could not be supplemented as quickly as new developments arose.

The classic encyclopedia, as it was first printed in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1776 as the Encyclopædia Britannica with three volumes, ended in this form in 2010. This last printed edition comprised 32 volumes, costing $1,400. Its little (step) brother from the 1970s, the red dtv conversation encyclopedia in a handy paperback format, grew by one volume per month and cost less than 10 DM. During my second-to-

last move, I threw the 20 volumes in the trash.

Transferring existing encyclopedias directly to the Internet seemed neither financially nor technically promising. Creating something completely new required immense resources. That's when the idea of volunteer work on a freely accessible platform took shape in the USA. In 2003, the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation was founded, which operates Wikipedia.

Wiki – how?

Because of Wikipedia's popularity, many people believe the catchy word wiki is part of the encyclopedia's proper name. However, wiki is Hawaiian and means fast.

One of the future Wikipedia founding fathers read *WikiWiki* on a speed bus advertisement during his trip to Hawaii. In their 2001 book „*The Wiki Way: Quick Collaboration on the Web,*" Bo Leuf and Wiki co-inventor Ward

Cunningham first described what they meant by wiki and what basic characteristics a wiki should have:

✔ A wiki invites all users - not just experts - to edit any page or create new pages within the wiki, using only a standard ‚plain' web browser without additional add-ons.

✔ A wiki promotes meaningful thematic links between different pages by making the creation of page links intuitively easy and indicating whether the desired target page exists or not.

✔ A wiki is not a carefully designed website created by experts and professional writers and designed for casual visitors. Instead, it seeks to engage the typical visitor/user in an ongoing process of creation and collaboration that constantly changes the landscape of the site.
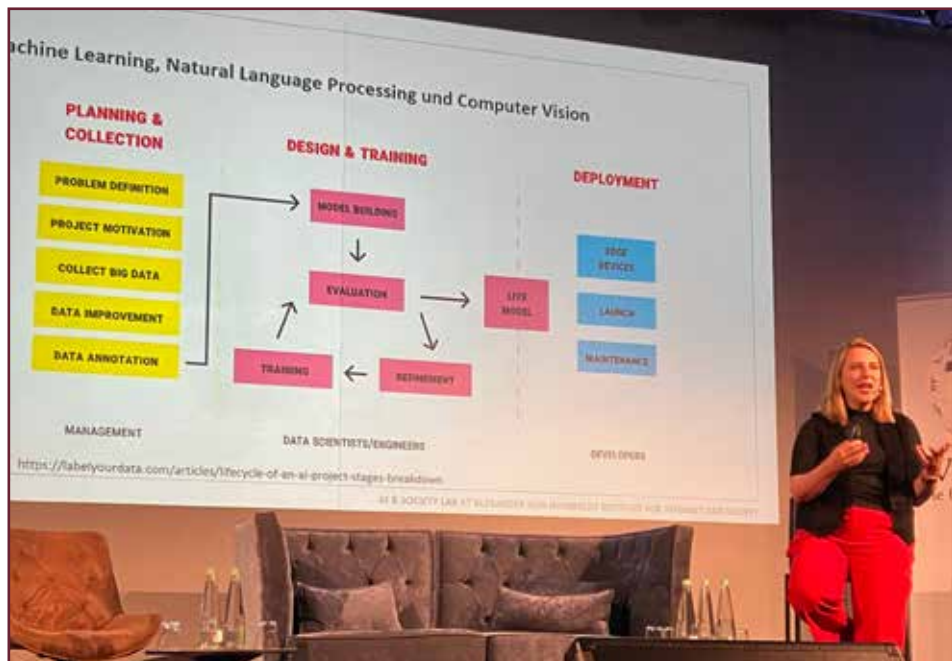
Wikimedia, German Type

By 2030, Wikimedia wants to create the largest knowledge structure in the world. Then the orientation should be more diverse, participatory and equal than before - that's the strategic plan. The Future Congress from June 7th to 9th, 2024 in Nuremberg, which I was able to attend, was supposed to set the course and strengthen the Wikipedia community. The conference venue, Korn's, was on the Kornmarkt, a modern building near the historic city center. The large, comfortably furnished terrace was a pleasant meeting place between lectures.

Of the 100 registered participants, 80 actually arrived. „That's a good rate," said the Wikipedians in the conference office, „considering the adverse circumstances." Railway lines were still closed due to the catastroph-

ic flooding, so that at one point even cancellation of the congress was considered.

I was able to confirm the disrup-

tion, as my train via Stuttgart was also cancelled at short notice. The alternative connection offered with the delayed Austrian Federal Railways train from Vienna would have reached Nuremberg four minutes earlier than the originally booked journey. Nevertheless, I arrived at my destination station in Nuremberg 90 minutes late. Not really worth mentioning, because on the return journey from the conference on Sunday afternoon I didn't arrive until after midnight the next day.

Survival Strategy

To get the participants in the mood for the topic of „Future and Wikipedia," Elisabeth Mandl and Jens Ohlig, who led the event for the next three days, had some sad news for them. Looking out from the year 2035, they reported with a sad expression

Theresa Züger vom Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society explained the stages of machine learning.

that Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, had just stopped publishing. An awkward silence reigned in the room. Is such a demise conceivable within a decade?

The moderators asked the participants to stand up. They should sit down if they believed that Wikipedia would end in five years. Nobody sat down. In ten years? Two people believe that Wikipedia will end in ten

Daniel Sigge, *Cultural scientist at the University of Hildesheim, presented his theses on community and customer loyalty for discussion.*

years. In 15, 20, 30, 50 years perhaps? Most of the people in the room remained standing. The confidence that Wikipedia will continue to exist was overwhelming, but the action was shocking. It was clear to everyone that social change already requires a brilliant survival strategy.

Just as the Internet was described as the nail in the coffin for the printed Encyclopædia Britannica, AI, artificial intelligence, could undermine Wikipedia. In the future, a quick, concise AI answer to a verbal question will be enough for the user, instead of having to search through Wikipedia's wide range of knowledge.

Economy of Attention

Users no longer go directly to Wikipedia, but instead rely on messy knowledge practices that have covertly sucked the answer out of Wikipedia. Such platforms use the reputable Wikipedia treasure trove of words and images to train their search engines, but give nothing back. But in this case, the user's attention was only briefly taken up - and he is then free to click again. The methodology is based on the Large Language Model (LLM), which is used for speech recognition and reproduction in AI tasks. LLM learns „relationships" between words and text blocks and puts them together according to the degree of probability for the given arrangement. For example, there is a greater connection between the words dog and cat than with the word mathematics. LLM searches through the data in several strands and is able to put the next word together to form a suitable sentence with a high degree of accuracy.

On average, over a billion pages are accessed per month. The German-language Wikipedia is the most visited knowledge platform after the English version, it was said. However, the number of hits on the German Wikipedia is lower compared to the English, French and Spanish versions. German is less relevant because it is less widely used, even if the precise language structure offers added value.

The German Wikipedia cannot be transferred to the more popular English version, however, because it is tied to the German way of thinking. For the world of encyclopedic knowledge, this means that the English texts, which are more relevant in purely numerical terms, are primarily used to train LLMs. The answer is translat-

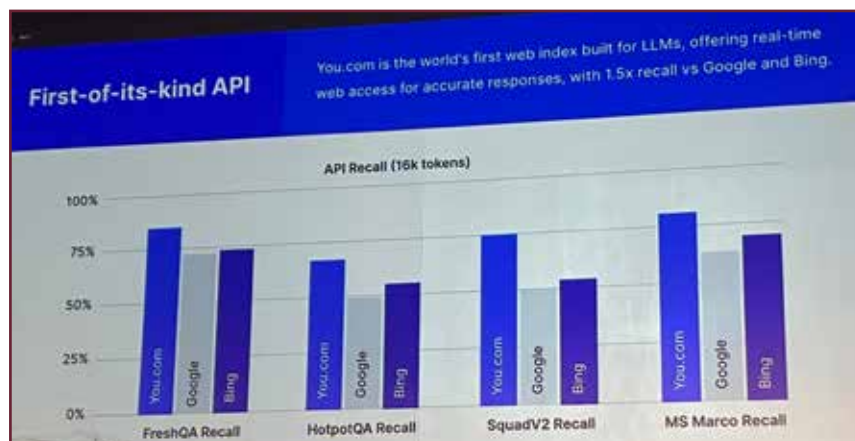ed for the German user. He receives a result through English glasses, so to speak.

World Wide Vision Wikipedia

Richard Socher was supposed to present visions for Wikipedia in the introductory lecture. The computer scientist, born in Dresden in 1983, is considered a child prodigy in artificial intelligence (AI) research. With 144,922 citations since 2019, he is the most cited author in this field. The fact that Socher grew up as the „son of two scientists in the GDR" according to Wikipedia is part of the miracle. Now connected live from California, he looked like a boy who had rushed to the computer from skateboarding: hair tousled, beard fluffy and his T-shirt faded. He spoke German erratically - every two to three seconds he said: „Um." He often scratched his hair and folded his arms behind his head, so that I involuntarily looked for sweat stains on his T-shirt. During the presentation from Silicon Valley, his own view was displayed in postage stamp format at the top right next to the text and diagram. He used mostly small print text material and screenshots in white on black. Although I was sitting in the front row, I could hardly read most of the charts. However, I did understand that in a comparison of different LLMs, his company you.com had performed best and the results were superior.

His search engine you.com could also generate the result as a graphic. For input, said Richard Socher, the written form would be less important in the future than the ability to dictate quickly and precisely.

Since Socher's statements regarding visions for Wikipedia left me rather

perplexed, I listened to his lecture „The Eureka Machine - How AI Will Accelerate Scientific Discovery". He had given the 90-minute lecture in English in Dresden - on the occasion of receiving an honorary doctorate on April 26, 2024 from the Faculty of

Richard Socher: *His You.com is the best in direct comparison.*

Computer Science at the Technical University. The content was similar to his lecture in Nuremberg, but was easier to understand thanks to the English subtitles than the German statements in Nuremberg.

Comment on the Dresden lecture on YouTube:

I just took the transscript, threw it in gemini 1.5 and summarized the whole talk in 5mins. You can get a summary in bullet points and then let it elaborate and quote on portions you like to know more about (...) this is a very interesting glimpse of what we, the general public, will be capable very soon. ❐

The Nuremberg Trials

Courtroom 600

The national flags of the four Allies who tried the accused fly in front of the Palace of Justice on Bärenschanzstrasse.

Courtroom 600, as it was converted by the Americans for the war crimes trials.

Names like Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dachau and many others are tarnished by Nazi atrocities. I associate Nuremberg primarily with the war crimes trials, the Nuremberg Laws for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor and the Nazi Party Rallies, then with Albrecht Dürer and Nuremberg Bratwurst. So I wanted to visit Courtroom 600, where the International Military Tribunal sentenced the major war criminals to death in 1946, after the congress.

The Palace of Justice had survived World War II almost unscathed. Because of its proximity to the prison, the largest courtroom in Bavaria was chosen by the Americans and converted to accommodate the largest possible public with stands for the press, space for stenographers, simultaneous interpreters and cameramen. The hall was later restored to its original state from 1909 and used as a normal courtroom - that's how it looks now. An extensive exhibition with disturbing film material shows not only this war crimes trial but also the subsequent trials up to 1949.

However the Nuremberg trials led to the creation of the International Criminal Court in The Hague to punish genocide. ❑

Chris Schuth

© *Chris Schuth*