

## **Perceptions of Wikipedia by Public Relations Professionals: A Comparison of 2012 and 2013 Surveys**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Wikipedia has arguably become a staple in society. In fact, of all the information sources available on the Internet, Wikipedia is one of the most widely used. The problem that public relations professionals face is what Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales calls a “bright line’ rule.” This rule requires public relations professionals to use the Talk pages to request changes to the Wikipedia articles for their company or client instead of directly editing the content. To examine the effectiveness of this rule and explore current Wikipedia experiences, this study reports the results of a survey conducted in 2013. Comparisons to a similar 2012 study are also noted.

### **BACKGROUND**

Wikipedia has undoubtedly become an influential source of information for the public and for professionals on many subjects including companies. In fact, of all the information sources available on the Internet, Wikipedia is one of the most widely used. As one of the top websites in the world, Wikipedia articles are typically top in search results.

What makes Wikipedia unique is its ability to be frequently updated by anyone. The problem with the openly edited encyclopedia is that at any time, articles may contain incorrect content. If the process works, then someone should come along and correct the erroneous content. Accuracy of content is especially important due to how frequently it is used. Therefore, it is often suggested that people “read Wikipedia cautiously and amend it enthusiastically” as Nature advised (2005, p. 590).

Unfortunately, due to the ‘bright line’ rule or conflict of interest policy, public relations and communications professionals are prohibited from directly contributing to the Wikipedia articles for their company or clients. While there is not a function that blocks people in public relations from editing, the best way to handle Wikipedia currently is to follow the ‘bright line’ rule and make requests using the Talk pages.

Since the beginning of January 2012, efforts have gone into trying to understand, clarify and even change Wikipedia’s stance against public relations/communications professionals and the editing of Wikipedia articles for their company or clients. These efforts include a Corporate Representatives for Ethical Wikipedia Engagement (CREWE) Facebook group created by Phil Gomes, Senior VP, Edelman Digital.

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In this group, public relations/communications professionals and Wikipedians discuss the editing issues and created a CREWE Wikipedia Engagement Flowchart in an effort to “harmonize the disparate policies, guidelines, admonitions and whatnot that exist in several different places around Wikipedia” (Ocassi, 2012, para 17).

In June 2012, the Chartered Institute for Public Relations (CIPR) in the UK issued *Wikipedia best practice guidance for public relations professionals*. These guidelines, created collaboratively with input from public relations professionals and Wikipedians, follow the ‘bright line’ rule. Specifically, it states, “PR professionals should not edit articles about their clients, their employer, related brands and issues, or competing organisations and associated brands” (p. 7). A step-by-step guide is provided and public relations /communications professionals are advised to use the Talk pages with “kindness” (p. 10).

While it appears that past negative actions from public relations professionals have lead the industry to this point, how to best proceed has yet to be determined. Research is needed to fully understand the Wikipedia issues and needs of public relations/communications professionals. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to build from the previous Wikipedia and public relations study (DiStaso, 2012) to review issues like factual errors a bit more while identifying changes in the public relations/communications-Wikipedia relationship.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ISSUES**

### **Popularity of Wikipedia**

Wikipedia is a “multilingual, web-based, free-content encyclopedia project operated by the Wikimedia Foundation and based on an openly edited model” (Wikipedia:About, 2013, para 1). Since its founding in 2001 by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger, Wikipedia has developed into one of the most popular websites in the world. It is currently the sixth most popular website following Google, Facebook, YouTube, Yahoo!, and Baidu.com (Alexa.com, 2013).

Based on the wiki concept (meaning “quick” in Hawaiian), Wikipedia allows “anyone with Internet access” to contribute content to any page on the website (Wikipedia:About, 2013, para 2). Over time, this concept has helped to increase the credibility and usability of the site, distinguishing it from traditional encyclopedias like Encyclopedia Britannica, which includes content written by experts. In fact, in its first year of operation, Wikipedia proved to be so successful that over 20,000 articles were created (History of Wikipedia, 2013). Wikipedia has since continued to flourish.

Attracting approximately 476 million unique visitors (Wikimedia Report Card, 2012), Wikipedia is constantly changing. Currently, there are more than 77,000 active contributors working on over 22 million articles across 285 languages (Wikipedia:About, 2013, para 4).

Unlike traditional encyclopedias, the frequent editing of Wikipedia articles allows them to contain up-to-the-minute content, resulting in Wikipedia being used in times of crisis. In fact, a U.S. News & World Report article discussed how Wikipedia may be better for breaking news than Twitter and updated within seconds (Koebler, 2013). While not frequently used as a source in the media, Messner and South (2008) found that Wikipedia was framed as credible and accurate in traditional news media coverage in the United States.

## **Accuracy of Wikipedia**

A number of research studies have sought to measure the accuracy of Wikipedia articles. The most commonly cited study is in the journal *Nature* (see Giles, 2005). This study compared the accuracy of 50 natural science articles in Wikipedia to those in the online version of Encyclopaedia Britannica. Experts in the field reviewed the articles, and on average identified four inaccuracies in the Wikipedia articles, compared to three inaccuracies in the Britannica articles. Based on this finding, many have claimed that Wikipedia is nearly as accurate as Britannica; a claim that Britannica has strongly contested (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2006). What influences the quality of Wikipedia articles has also received attention. Some studies have found that articles with the most editors are of the highest quality (Wilkinson & Huberman 2007), while others have indicated that article quality depends on who contributes (Stein & Hess, 2007). More specifically, Kittur and Kraut (2008) found that article content was of higher quality when the editors coordinated their efforts. Ehmann, Large, and Beheshti (2008) found that it is the creator of an article who has the greatest influence on quality because the articles they studied retained about 90% of original article content over time. They also identified that subsequent article quality was dependent on the quality of the contributions not the quantity of them. Furthermore, Lih (2004) concluded that article quality improves after an article has been cited in the press.

## **Credibility of Wikipedia**

While research on source credibility dates back many years (see Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953), research on the credibility of traditional versus Internet information sources has not produced consistent findings (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). When it comes to online content, Callister (2000) argued that standard conventions of determining credibility break down in cyberspace.

Most studies consider two primary dimensions of credibility: trustworthiness and expertise (Hovland et al. 1953; Rieh & Danielson, 2007). Both are difficult to measure in Wikipedia since much content is contributed anonymously and few users look into a page to see who contributed to it. Trustworthiness is also confounded with the questionable reputation about content quality.

The limited research into the credibility of Wikipedia has led to conflicting findings. Flanagin and Metzger (2011) conducted large-scale surveys of the US population and discovered that recognition of Wikipedia was universal among children (age 11-18) and adults. However, 22% of children and 32% of adults did not know that Wikipedia allows anyone to generate content. They found that the context of information was influential. This led to the finding that Wikipedia was perceived as more credible when it was presented on an Encyclopaedia Britannica style page. In other words, "perceptions of credibility are strongly anchored in the idea of expert-generated (or vetted) content" (Flanagin & Metzger 2011, p.371).

Through a series of focus groups, Metzger, Flanagin and Medders (2010) found that many of their participants questioned the credibility of Wikipedia. In some cases this came from news reports involving user or editor fraud. The participants who used it were skeptical about the authenticity of sources, so they indicated it was "a good starting point" for information searches involving basic facts, technical matters, and ongoing current events. They also indicated that credibility was assigned selectively. For example, they discuss a participant who uses Wikipedia to settle arguments with friends with him stating "well let's check Wikipedia and if it says it's right

then I'm right" (p. 423). Similarly, Pirolli, Wollny and Suh (2009), found that higher Wikipedia use led to lower credibility judgments about articles and contributors.

Chesney (2006) explored Wikipedia credibility through an experiment in which 55 academic researchers received either articles in or out of their specialty. He found no differences in assessment in the credibility of Wikipedia or its contributors with both groups indicating low evaluations. Subject matter experts rated the articles higher than those who were not experts, and this can indicate that people may be more cynical of Wikipedia for topics where they have less familiarity.

## Public Relations and Wikipedia

While Wikipedia is hailed as the encyclopedia “anyone can edit, use, modify, and distribute,” this does not apply to public relations professionals. As Jimmy Wales, the co-founder of Wikipedia stated, “This is not complicated. There is a very simple ‘bright line’ rule that constitutes best practice: do not edit Wikipedia directly if you are a paid advocate. Respect the community by interacting with us appropriately” (Wales, 2012, para 2). The idea of the ‘bright line’ rule was not new when Wales said this in 2012, but the activities surrounding Wikipedia editing from the UK public relations firm Bell Pottinger had led to much attention from both the public relations and Wikipedia communities.

Dating back to at least 2006, Wikipedia has had a policy against editing Wikipedia when there is a conflict of interest (COI) such as working in public relations. “COI editing is strongly discouraged. It risks causing public embarrassment to the individuals and groups being promoted” (Wikipedia:Conflict of interest, 2013, para 2).

In 2012, DiStaso found that only 21% of public relations/communications professionals were familiar with the policy and understood it (2012b). Part of the problem may be in the conflicting information on Wikipedia (DiStaso, 2012a). While Wikipedia states there are not firm rules, public relations professionals are being held to the ‘bright line’ rule. Plus, some Wikipedia articles indicate that direct editing is allowed such as on the FAQ page (the first result when “I work in PR and want to edit Wikipedia” is searched on Google), that answers the question, “I work in PR, and would like to fix up the article about the person or company I represent. Is that okay?” (Wikipedia:FAQ/Article subjects, 2013, question 4). The answer provided is “possibly if you do it in a way that respects Wikipedia’s goal of being an accurate, unbiased source of information.” It then states to remove obvious vandalism, fix minor errors in spelling, grammar, usage or facts, provide references for existing content, and add or update facts with references such as number of employees or “details of a recent event.”

In following the ‘bright line’ rule, public relations/communications professionals are to create a transparent Wikipedia ID identifying who they are and their affiliation. All edits are to be made by requesting the change on the Talk page of the Wikipedia article and waiting for the community. Edit requests should be properly referenced ideally with objective third party sources. This rule can possibly have unfortunate consequences when factual errors remain on the account while waiting for a response. In fact, DiStaso (2012) found that 24% of public relations/communications professionals never received a response when they made requests using the Talk pages.

As mentioned previously, the news of Bell Pottinger led to increased attention on COI editing, but this was not the first company to receive negative media attention about Wikipedia editing. Other examples include: Microsoft (Bergstein, 2007), Daimler (Sabatini, 2012), many politicians, and a variety of companies identified WikiScanner, a website that traced Wikipedia editors in an effort to uncover corporate COI edits. These companies include Anheuser-Busch, the CIA, Diebold, Pepsi, ExxonMobil, Walmart, and many others (Hafnier, 2007).

In 2013, BP was accused of rewriting their environmental record on Wikipedia by making requests using the Talk pages (Blue, 2013). This negative media attention from following the rules brings into question what the best approach is to handling Wikipedia.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Given Wikipedia's popularity, it is critical that content about companies is accurate, but the involvement of public relations/communications professionals can be tricky. While the issue about public relations/communications professionals editing Wikipedia articles has been a problem for many years, continued media coverage highlights the importance of the need for public relations/communications professionals to know the rules. To understand the current state of public relations/communications involvement with Wikipedia through the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How credible and popular do public relations/communications professionals believe Wikipedia is?

**RQ2:** How do public relations/communications professionals believe their colleagues handle Wikipedia?

**RQ3:** How are Wikipedia articles for companies started?

**RQ4:** Do public relations/communications professionals believe there are factual errors in the Wikipedia article for their company or client?

**RQ5:** Do public relations/communications professionals believe there are potentially reputation-damaging errors in the Wikipedia article for their company or client?

**RQ6:** What is the Wikipedia engagement experience of public relations/communications professionals?

**RQ7:** What is the Wikipedia monitoring experience of public relations/communications professionals?

**RQ8:** How do public relations/communications professionals perceive their relationship with Wikipedians?

**RQ9:** What is public relations/communications professionals' familiarity and perception of the 'bright line' rule?

## **METHOD**

An online survey was conducted to explore the perceptions of Wikipedia by public relations/communications professionals. The 2013 survey was conducted from February 24 to March 27, 2013. For comparisons and consistency of measurement, the 2012 and 2013 questionnaires were similar. The layout, order of questions and majority of questions remained the same. They were also distributed in approximately the same timeframe. However, the 2013 questionnaire contained six new questions to better understand factual errors, three new questions that ask about frequency of editing and monitoring, and one question that provided the rule and asked about familiarity with it.

As in the 2012 survey, the Hon and Grunig (1999) dimensions of trust and satisfaction were used to measure the public relations/communications professional-Wikipedian relationship. All scalar data were measured on a 1-5 scale.

Similar to the 2012, survey the 2013 survey was distributed to members of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), Canadian Public relations Society (CPRS), Institute for Public Relations (IPR), Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA), and National Investor Relations Institute (NIRI). Each group sent the link to the online survey to members either in an email about the issue (PRSA, CPRS), as part of an email newsletter (IPR, PRSA, NIRI), or in a blog post (IPR, WOMMA).

There was a total of 1,620 responses, but because the study was interested in the experience of public relations/communications professionals, the responses from educators and students (n=76) and anyone else who indicated that they did not have public relations/communications experience (n=1) were removed resulting in a final number of responses of 1,543.

Respondents were primarily from North America (97.9%, n=1,358), and the remaining 2% were from around the world (n=29). Chi-squares and ANOVAs were run to determine differences between the respondents in North America and others around the world. Just like in 2012, the only significant difference was in how strongly they felt about posing as someone else to edit Wikipedia (see below).

As was found in the 2012 survey and within the profession, 66% of respondents were female (n=912) and 34% were male (n=470). Respondent ages were evenly distributed: 24% were younger than 30 (n=329), 27% were 30-39 (n=367), 23% were 40-49 (n=316), 19% were 50-59 (n=263), and 8% were 60 and older (n=105). This is very similar to the distribution of PRSA members, the largest membership organization that the survey was sent to, possibly indicating a representative sample of PRSA members (see 2011 PRSA membership survey).

While respondents included members from the organizations it was distributed to (CPRS, IPR, NIRI, PRSA, and WOMMA), members from other organizations also completed it. This included respondents from: Arthur W. Page Society, Chartered Institute for Public relations (CIPR), Council of PR Firms, International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), American Marketing Association (AMA), and many others.

The majority of respondents worked in corporations (24.9%, n=345) or small agencies or consultancies (23.5%, n=326), but non-profits (17.7%, n=245), educational institutions (non-faculty) (11.5%, n=159), and government (11.2%, n=156) were also well represented. The remainder of respondents worked in healthcare or hospitals (5.1%, n=71), large agencies (4.1%, n=57), research providers (0.4%, n=5), and other organizations (1.7%, n=27). These percentages were all very similar to the 2012 survey.

Again in 2013, most respondents had been in the field for a number of years. The most common response was 11-20 years (25.3%, n=350). The responses were well distributed with 19% working 21-30 years (n=265), 19% working 6-10 years (n=256), 16% working 3-5 years (n=218), 8% working 1-2 years (n=116), 8% working 31-40 years (n=105), 4% working less than a year (n=49), and 2% working more than 40 years (n=26).

## RESULTS

The 2013 survey found that 74% of respondents indicated that their company or client had a Wikipedia article ( $n=1,123$ ; down 5% from the 2012 study). However, 23% were not familiar with their company/client's Wikipedia article ( $n=348$ ) (down slightly from 25% in 2012).

### Credibility, Popularity and Use of Wikipedia

The 2013 respondents had a slightly lower belief that the public views Wikipedia as a credible source (2013:  $M=3.95$ ,  $SD=0.86$ ; 2012:  $M=4.03$ ,  $SD=0.84$ ) than the 2012 respondents ( $F(1, 2,821) = 4.27$ ,  $p<.05$ ). There was also a 4% decrease in respondents who strongly agreed or agreed (2013:  $n=1,274$ ; 2012:  $n=1,109$ ) (see Table 1). Plus, there was decrease in the number of respondents who believed that the public relies on Wikipedia content more than company websites (2013:  $M=3.11$ ,  $SD=0.99$ ; 2012:  $M=3.21$ ,  $SD=1.01$ ;  $F(1, 2,813) = 7.57$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

**Table 1: Perceptions of How the Public Uses Wikipedia**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score	
<b>I feel that the public believes that Wikipedia is a credible resource.</b>	1.4%	6.4%	5.7%	60.6%	25.9%	4.03*	<b>2012</b>
	1.5%	7.2%	8.6%	59.9%	22.9%	3.95*	<b>2013</b>
<b>I feel that the public relies on corporate content on Wikipedia more than on company websites.</b>	2.7%	24.2%	31.7%	31.6%	9.7%	3.21*	<b>2012</b>
	2.1%	27.9%	30.9%	31.1%	7.0%	3.11*	<b>2013</b>

\* $p<.001$

As was found in 2012, respondents who had experience in editing or using the Talk pages more strongly agreed that the public believes Wikipedia to be a credible source ( $F(1, 955) = 8.10$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Essentially, respondents who had engaged had slightly higher levels of agreement about the public's view of Wikipedia ( $M=4.08$ ,  $SD=0.81$ ) than those who had not ( $M=3.93$ ,  $SD=0.85$ ).

Respondents continued to view editing Wikipedia for a client or company as common practice ( $M=3.53$ ,  $SD=0.91$ ), with 60% strongly agreeing or agreeing ( $n=919$ ) (see Table 2). This slight decrease from 2012 was significant ( $F(1, 2797) = 5.76$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

While posing as someone else to make changes in Wikipedia was not viewed as common practice in 2013 or 2012, this question was again the one significant difference between respondents in North America and those from around the world ( $F(1, 1378) = 12.85$ ,  $p<.001$ ). With a 2 percentage point difference in 2013, 61% of respondents from North America strongly disagreed or disagreed that it is common public relations/communications practice ( $M=2.24$ ,  $SD=1.01$ ) and 41% of international respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed ( $M=2.97$ ,  $SD=0.98$ ).

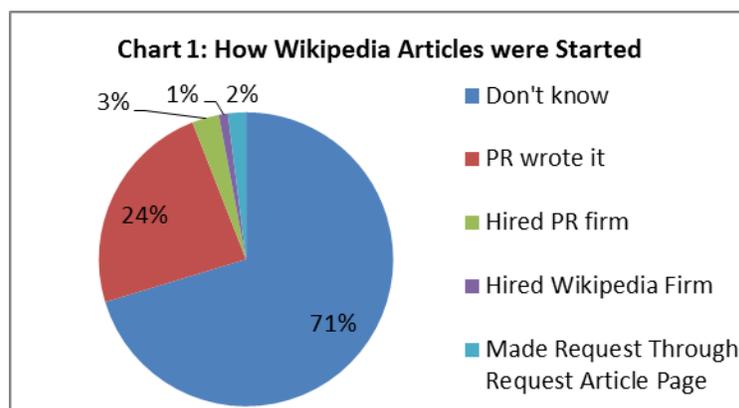
**Table 2: Perceptions of Public Relations/Communications Common Practice**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score	
<b>I feel that it's common public relations/communications practice to edit a company or client's Wikipedia articles.</b>	2.4%	11.3%	23.2%	48.8%	14.3%	3.61*	<b>2012</b>
	2.1%	13.0%	24.9%	50.2%	9.9%	3.53*	<b>2013</b>
<b>I feel that it's common public relations/communications practice to pose as someone else to make changes to a Wikipedia article. North America</b>	27.1%	32.3%	26.0%	11.3%	3.2%	2.31*	<b>2012</b>
	24.7%	35.9%	26.7%	11.4%	1.3%	2.24*	<b>2013</b>
<b>I feel that it's common public relations/communications practice to pose as someone else to make changes to a Wikipedia article. International</b>	17.2%	31.2%	33.6%	18.0%	0%	2.52*	<b>2012</b>
	3.4%	37.9%	31.0%	13.8%	13.8%	2.97*	<b>2013</b>

\*  $p < .001$

### How Wikipedia Articles were Started

Most respondents indicated they were unsure how their company or client's Wikipedia article was started (71.2%, n=643). Other respondents either wrote it on their own (23.6%, n=213), hired a public relations firm (2.6%, n=23), hired a Wikipedia firm (0.3%, n=3), or made the request through the Wikipedia Request Articles page (2.3%, n=21) ( $p < .001$ ; see Chart 1). Additionally, many respondents who did not have a Wikipedia article provided details on their experience in trying to get one. The most common response was that they had problems getting drafts accepted by Wikipedia, and a few indicated that their challenge was getting buy-in from their executive team to spend the time on Wikipedia. This question was new in 2013, so there is not comparison data for 2012.



### Factual Errors

Similar to the 2012 study, a large number of respondents felt there were currently one or more factual errors on their company or client's Wikipedia article. Specifically, in 2013, 59% of

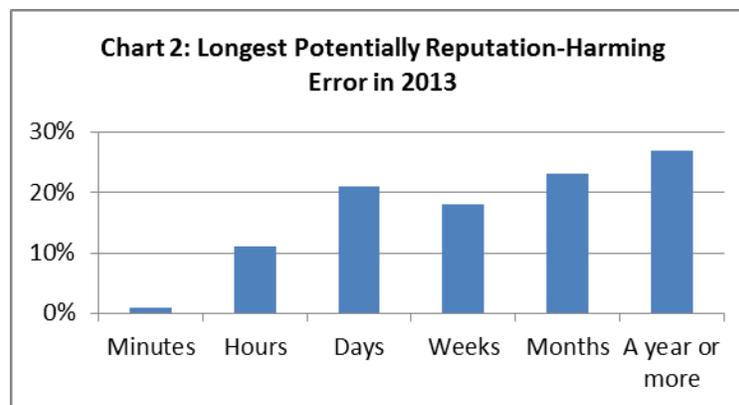
respondents who were familiar with their company or client's Wikipedia article indicated it had one or more factual errors (n=454). In 2012 that number was slightly higher at 60% ( $\chi^2(1, N=2780)=8.28, p<.05$ ). It is important to note that this calculation does not include respondents who selected "don't know" or who indicated their company/client does not have a Wikipedia article. It was determined that the best people to answer about factual errors on Wikipedia pages were the people who know about the article.

As selected by 2013 survey respondents, who indicated that there were errors currently on their company or client's Wikipedia article, the most common error types were historical information (68.6%, n=301; a 0.1 percentage point increase from 2012), leadership or board information (31.9%, n=140; a 5.5 percentage point decrease from 2012), dates (30.3%, n=133; a 7.4 percentage point decrease from 2012), criticisms (27.1%, n=107; a 2.7 percentage point decrease from 2012), financial figures (19.6%, n=86; a 4.8 percentage point decrease from 2012), spelling (18.9%, n=83; a 2.3 percentage point decrease from 2012), and other (24.2%, n=106; an 11 percentage point decrease from 2012) (see Chart 1). In the "other" category, respondents qualitatively identified errors about product information, links, locations, general facts, and even company names.

### Potentially Reputation-Harming Errors

The 2013 survey further explored respondent's perceptions of errors on Wikipedia. When asked if their company or client's Wikipedia article has ever had a "potentially reputation-harming error," 28% said it had (n=221), and 45% of those indicated their Wikipedia article had "many errors" (n=100).

These potentially reputation-harming errors lasted a varied amount of time. Two respondents indicated the longest amount of time they had seen a potentially reputation-harming error was only minutes, but on the other extreme, 27% said it was there for a year or more (n=62) (see Chart 2). The next most common answer was months (22.8%, n=52), followed by days (20.6%, n=47), weeks (17.5%, n=40), and hours (11%, n=25) ( $p<.001$ ).



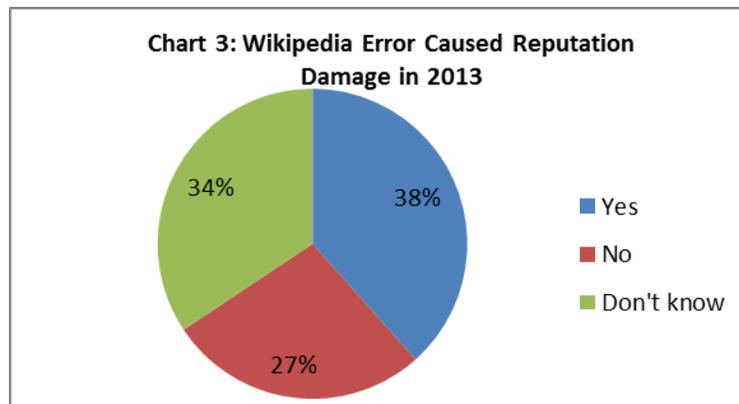
Overall, 54% of respondents indicated they tried to work with Wikipedia to fix the potentially reputation-harming error (n=116), but 46% had not (n=98). The potentially reputation-harming errors were primarily handled by the public relations/communications team directly editing it (42.5%, n=97) but 24% indicated that the potentially reputation-harming errors are still there (n=55). The "Talk" page was used to request an edit for 17% of respondents (n=38), 4% hired a public relations firm to make the edit (n=8), 2% hired a Wikipedia firm to make the edit, and 11% specified other experiences (n=26) such as:

- “Asking others in the audience to correct it”
- “Taking over the administration of the page”
- “Tried editing it as ourselves, then had to log on as another user to correct it”
- “Counseled the client on the approach to take, but they edited it”
- “Still trying using Talk”
- “Threatened Wikipedia with legal action”
- “Web manager edited”
- “Used news placements to message, then Wikipedia picked up the news and changed it”
- “We gave up”
- “Hired a freelance writer”
- “Legal counsel took over”

In an open-ended question, the respondents indicated that the potentially reputation-harming error pertained to topics such as:

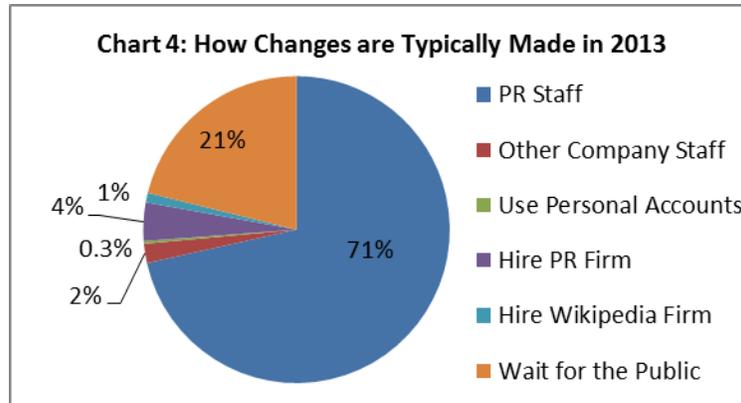
- Performance
- Board establishment
- Attack/slander on CEO and/or executives (including leadership history, marital history, ethnicity, race, age, religion, etc.)
- Fake or misidentification of celebrity affiliation
- Old product information
- Slandorous information about employees
- Human impact from activist organizations
- Incorrect ruling/reporting from a court case
- Inaccurate information about a crisis
- Negative stereotypes
- Outdated health statistics
- Questions about following laws and/or policies
- Incorrect acquisitions and mergers
- Inaccurate future plans
- Customer service complaints
- Rumors

Finally, when specifically asked if the error in Wikipedia had ever damaged the company’s or client’s reputation, 38% indicated that it did (n=82), 27% said it did not (n=59), and 34% did not know (n=74) ( $p<.001$ ; see Chart 3).

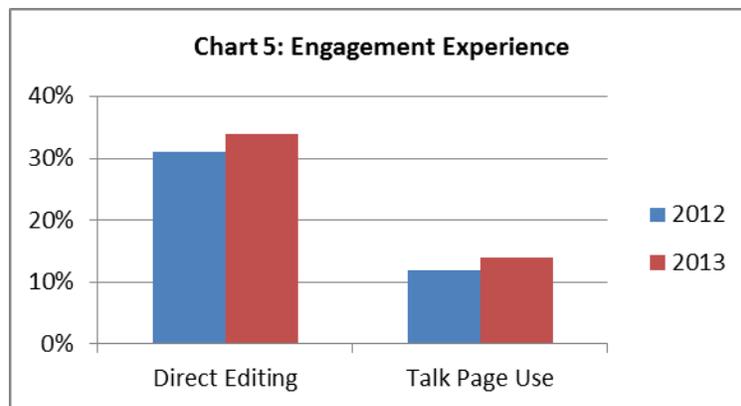


## Engagement Experience

Another new question in the 2013 survey pertained to the way changes are typically made. Seventy-one percent of respondents indicated the public relations staff work to make changes (this included direct editing and using the Talk pages,  $n=541$ ) ( $p<.001$ ; see Chart 4). Plus, 4% have hired a public relations firm ( $n=28$ ) and 1% hired a Wikipedia firm to make the changes ( $n=10$ ). Twenty-one percent wait for the public to make the changes ( $n=161$ ). Two percent have other staff at the company make the edits ( $n=16$ ) and 0.3% make edits from their personal accounts ( $n=2$ ).



To make changes, 34% of respondents stated they have directly edited the article for their company or client ( $n=321$ ); a significant 3 percentage point increase from last year ( $\chi^2(1, N=2,172)=2.99, p<.05$ ) (see Chart 5). The percentage of respondents who reported using the Talk pages to address an issue also significantly increased 2 percentage points from 12% in 2012 to 14% in 2013 ( $n=131$ ) ( $\chi^2(1, N=2,190)=16.77, p<.001$ ). Overall, 40% of respondents had engaged with Wikipedia through either direct editing or the Talk pages ( $n=381$ ). This was a significant increase of 5 percentage points from 2012 ( $\chi^2(1, N=2,202)=5.14, p<.05$ ).

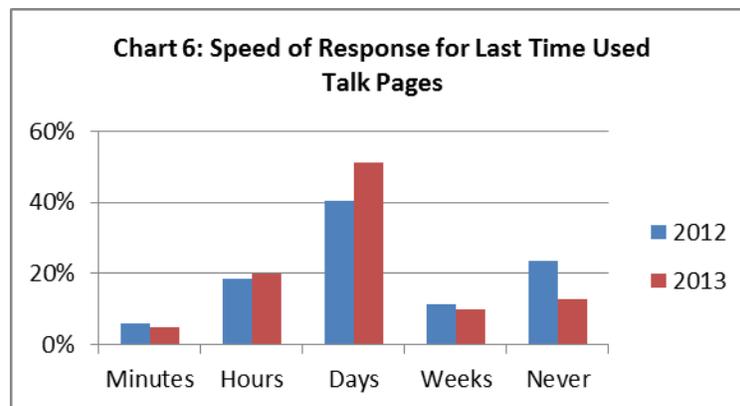


Respondents who had directly edited Wikipedia for their company or client said their edits typically “stick” most of the time. Specifically, in the 2013 study 28% said they always stick ( $n=82$ ; a 4 percentage point decrease from 2012), 31% said they stick three-quarters of the time ( $n=91$ ; a 7 percentage point increase from 2012), 23% said they stick half the time ( $n=67$ ; a 2 percentage point increase from 2012), 11% said they stick one-quarter of the time ( $n=31$ ; same as 2012) and 8% said they never stick, always being reverted ( $n=25$ ; a 4 percentage point

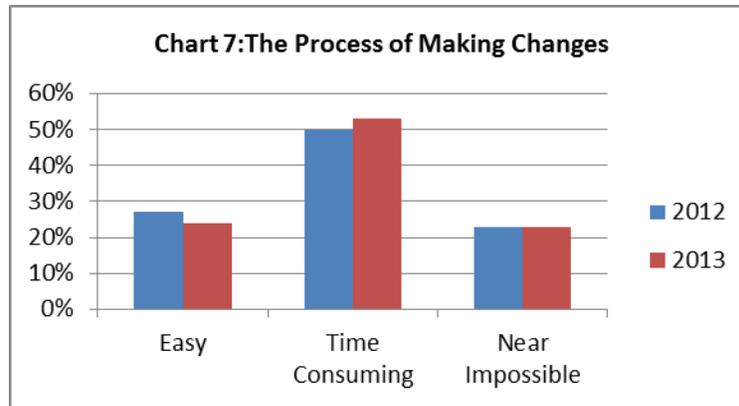
decrease). While the differences within each year were significant ( $p < .001$ ), there were not significant differences between the years.

As was common in 2012, direct editing was most often conducted annually (53.3%,  $n=163$ ), followed by quarterly (34.3%,  $n=105$ ), monthly (10.8%,  $n=33$ ), weekly (1.3%,  $n=4$ ), and daily (0.3%,  $n=1$ ) ( $p < .001$ ). Also similarly to 2012, most respondents in 2013 had been editing Wikipedia for one to three years (34.1%,  $n=103$ ) or three to five years (33.1%,  $n=100$ ), but 10% had been editing for more than five years ( $n=31$ ), and 16% had been editing for less than one year ( $n=48$ ). While the differences within each year were significant ( $p < .001$ ), there were not significant differences between the years.

Response times for changes made using the Talk pages remained a problem in 2013 (see Chart 6). When asked to recall the last time they used the Talk pages 51% of respondents stated they waited days for a response ( $n=61$ ; an increase of 11 percentage points from 2012), 20% waited hours ( $n=24$ ; a decrease of 1 percentage point from 2012), 10% waited weeks ( $n=12$ ; a decrease of 2 percentage points from 2012), 5% waited minutes ( $n=6$ ; a 1 percentage point decrease from 2012) and 13% said they never received a response ( $n=16$ ; a decrease of 11 percentage points from 2012). While the differences within each year were significant ( $p < .001$ ), there were not significant differences between the years.

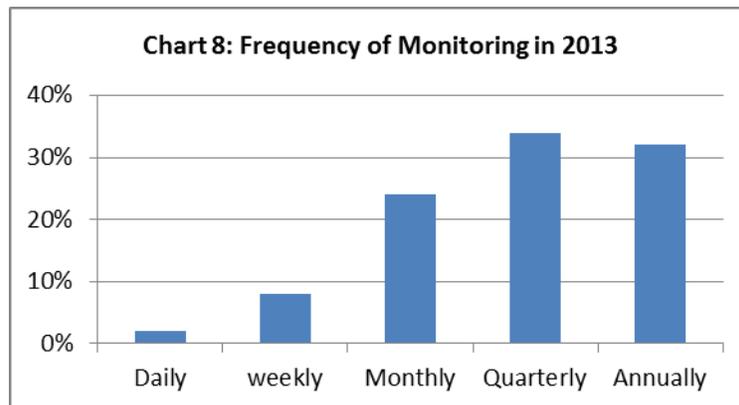


Over half of the 2013 respondents felt making changes (either through direct editing or use of the Talk pages) was time consuming (this was up 3 percentage points from 2012,  $n=307$ ) (see Chart 7). Fewer respondents felt making changes was easy (24%,  $n=142$ ; a decrease of 3 percentage points from 2012), and same as last year, 23% indicated that making changes was near impossible. The differences within each year were significant ( $p < .001$ ), as were the differences between the years ( $\chi^2(1, N=2,090)=7.34, p < .05$ ).



### Monitoring

New to the 2013 study were two questions about monitoring. The first dealt with the frequency of monitoring company or client Wikipedia articles; the most common response was quarterly (34.1%, n=292), followed by annually (31.7%, n=271) and monthly (24.3%, n=208). Some respondents monitored as often as weekly (8.3%, n=71) and daily (1.6%, n=14) ( $p < .001$ , see Chart 8). However, during a crisis 45% of respondents indicated they monitored Wikipedia daily (n=194) and 23% monitored it hourly (n=97).



### Resources

While a variety of resources are available to help public relations professionals with the Wikipedia articles for their company or client, few are using them. Out of the seven resources provided in the survey, the most commonly used was Wikipedia:Oversight, that helps remove defamatory material (34%, n=32). This year's survey asked about the use of the CREWE Wikipedia Engagement Flowchart, the tool created collaboratively between public relations professionals and Wikipedians to help public relations/communications professionals make changes to Wikipedia. This was the second most commonly used tool with 20% of respondents indicating they had used it (n=26) but 48% had never heard of it (n=61).

Out of the remaining tools, most respondents had not used them, but use of three of them increased in 2013 (Wikipedia:Oversight, Wikipedia:WikiProject Cooperation/Paid Editor Help, and Wikipedia:Requests for Comment) compared to 2012 while the use of three decreased (Wikipedia:Biographies of Living Persons/Noticeboard, Wikipedia:Third Opinion, and Wikipedia:Requests for Mediation). Overall, average usage increased 2 to 16 percentage points

and unfamiliarity increased 6 to 33 percentage points for 2013. The least commonly used resource was Wikipedia:Third Opinion, which is used to make requests for an outside opinion of a dispute (8%,  $n=10$ ).

### Perceived Relationship with Wikipedians

As in 2012, the perceived relationships with Wikipedians were tested using the Hon and Grunig (1999) variables of trust and satisfaction. Each was found to be reliable; the three items that measured trust had a Cronbach's alpha of .90 and the three items that measured satisfaction had a Cronbach's alpha of .78. The means from each indicate that there was a moderate level of trust and a higher level of satisfaction in 2013, just as in 2012 (see Table 3). There was not a significant change in the level of trust from 2012 to 2013, but satisfaction did significantly decrease ( $F(1, 2810) = 4.64, p < .05$ ).

**Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations for PR/Communications Professionals-Wikipedians Relationships**

	No. of Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$		Mean		Std. Dev.	
		2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013
<b>Trust</b>	3	.87	.90	2.94	2.92	0.67	0.63
<b>Satisfaction*</b>	3	.76	.78	3.24	3.20	0.86	0.48

\*  $p < .05$

In measuring trust, 20% of respondents felt that Wikipedia does not treat public relations/communications professionals fairly and justly ( $n=312, M=2.9, SD=0.73$ ) while 15% did ( $n=227$ ) (see Table 4). The mean scores reflect a slightly higher perception of treatment in 2013 ( $F(1, 2787) = 2.49, p < .05$ ). Thirty-six percent also felt that Wikipedia does not take the opinions of public relations/communications professionals into account when making policy decisions ( $n=555, M=2.67, SD=0.76$ ) while 10% did ( $n=146$ ); mean agreement was unchanged from 2012. On the other hand, 41% felt that sound principles seem to guide Wikipedia's behavior ( $n=620, M=3.19, SD=0.86$ ) while 20% did not ( $n=307$ ); indicating a 0.11 decrease in mean agreement in 2013 ( $F(1, 2791) = 10.15, p < .01$ ).

In measuring satisfaction, 42% felt that Wikipedia believes the need of public relations/communications professionals to have accurate and complete articles is legitimate ( $n=634, M=3.20, SD=0.93$ ), while 23% did not ( $n=349$ ). This was a 0.14 decrease in mean agreement from 2012 ( $F(1, 2782) = 14.65, p < .001$ ). Seventy-two percent felt that Wikipedia should change its editing policies to accommodate public relations/communications professionals ( $n=848, M=3.55, SD=0.96$ ) while 14% did not ( $n=214$ ), indicating no change in agreement from 2012 about the need for change of policy. Also similar to last year, 22% felt that most public relations/communications professionals are not pleased with their interactions with Wikipedia editors ( $n=342, M=2.85, SD=0.65$ ) while 11% felt they were ( $n=168$ ).

**Table 4: Perceived Relationship with Wikipedians**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score	
<b>I feel that Wikipedia treats public relations/communications professionals fairly and justly.</b> Trust	6.3%	18.7%	60.0%	13.4%	1.6%	2.85*	<b>2012</b>
	5.5%	14.9%	64.7%	14.1%	0.8%	2.90*	<b>2013</b>
<b>I feel that Wikipedia takes the opinions of public relations/communications professionals into account when making policy decisions.</b> Trust	7.3%	28.9%	53.6%	9.4%	0.7%	2.67*	<b>2012</b>
	6.8%	29.7%	54.0%	9.0%	0.6%	2.67*	<b>2013</b>
<b>I feel that sound principles seem to guide Wikipedia's behavior.</b> Trust	2.9%	16.5%	34.4%	40.4%	5.9%	3.30*	<b>2012</b>
	3.5%	16.6%	39.4%	38.3%	2.2%	3.19*	<b>2013</b>
<b>I feel that Wikipedia believes the need of public relations/communications professionals to have accurate and complete articles is legitimate.</b> Satisfaction	3.9%	15.9%	32.5%	37.9%	9.8%	3.34*	<b>2012</b>
	3.8%	19.1%	35.6%	36.6%	4.9%	3.20*	<b>2013</b>
<b>I feel that Wikipedia should change its editing policies to accommodate public relations/communications professionals.</b> Satisfaction	5.2%	13.0%	24.1%	36.8%	20.9%	3.55*	<b>2012</b>
	2.0%	11.9%	30.7%	39.3%	16.1%	3.55*	<b>2013</b>
<b>I feel that most public relations/communications professionals are pleased with their interactions with Wikipedia editors.</b> Satisfaction	5.3%	16.7%	67.9%	9.5%	0.6%	2.83*	<b>2012</b>
	3.5%	18.9%	66.5%	10.9%	0.1%	2.85*	<b>2013</b>

\* $p < .001$ 

A series of one-way ANOVAs found that respondents with experience either editing directly or through the Talk pages felt significantly different than those who did not for many of the relationship variables (see Table 5). Specifically, those with experience engaging Wikipedia had lower agreement about being treated fairly and justly ( $F(1, 946) = 7.5, p < .01$ ) and having their opinions taken into account for Wikipedia policies ( $F(1, 945) = 5.79, p < .05$ ). They were less pleased with interactions with Wikipedians ( $F(1, 946) = 10.54, p \leq .001$ ). Plus, they felt stronger about Wikipedia needing to change its editing policies to accommodate public relations professionals ( $F(1, 953) = 7.79, p < .01$ ).

**Table 5: Perceived Relationship with Wikipedians**

	Mean Score for Engagement	Mean Score for No Engagement	Significance	
<b>I feel that Wikipedia treats public relations/communications professionals fairly and justly.</b> Trust	2.68	2.94	.001	<b>2012</b>
	2.77	2.91	.01	<b>2013</b>
<b>I feel that Wikipedia takes the opinions of public relations/communications professionals into account when making policy decisions.</b> Trust	2.49	2.77	.001	<b>2012</b>
	2.53	2.66	.05	<b>2013</b>
<b>I feel that Wikipedia should change its editing policies to accommodate public relations/communications professionals.</b> Satisfaction	3.77	3.43	.001	<b>2012</b>
	3.82	3.45	.01	<b>2013</b>
<b>I feel that most public relations/communications professionals are pleased with their interactions with Wikipedia editors.</b> Satisfaction	2.65	2.93	.001	<b>2012</b>
	2.71	2.87	.001	<b>2013</b>

As was found in the 2012 study, when the relationship variables were factor-analyzed using principal component extraction with a varimax rotation, the analysis yielded one factor with eigenvalues exceeding 1.0, accounting for 47% of the explained variance. For an item to be included in the factor, a primary loading of at least 0.50 and no secondary loading within 0.30 of the primary loading was required. All six items loaded together indicating that they were all measuring the relationship, therefore, they were combined and used to analyze the public relations/communication professional-Wikipedian relationship. The relationship variable had a mean of 3.06 and a standard deviation of 0.46 ( $p < .001$ ); a slight decrease from last year's mean of 3.09.

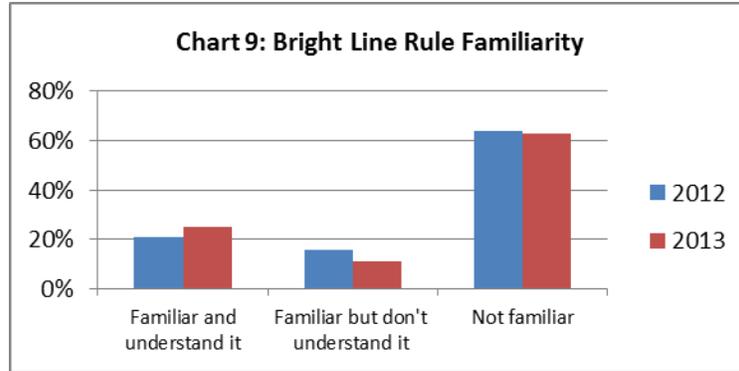
Just as in the 2012 study, a series of ANOVAS did not find significant differences in the relationship for any of the demographic data. However, the stronger the public relations/communication professional-Wikipedian relationship, the less likely respondents were to have factual errors ( $F(3, 1,518) = 37.05, p < .001$ ). The stronger the relationship, the less likely respondents were to have reputation-harming errors too ( $F(3, 1,108) = 37.94, p < .001$ ).

The strength of the relationship was not significantly related to the amount of time it took for respondents to receive a response when they last used the Talk pages in both 2012 and 2013, but the relationship did help with potentially reputation-harming errors. Specifically, the stronger the relationship, the quicker potentially reputation-harming errors were fixed ( $F(6, 227) = 5.20, p < .001$ ). Plus, the stronger the relationship, the more likely direct edits were to stick ( $F(5, 317) = 9.65, p < .001$ ) and the more productive their interactions were perceived to be ( $F(5, 319) = 10.46, p < .001$ ). It was also found that the relationship did not influence how often respondents monitored Wikipedia for their company or client.

When asked about the frequency of their interactions with Wikipedians, about 22% of respondents who had directly edited Wikipedia articles for their company or clients indicated their interactions with Wikipedians were never productive ( $n=41$ ), but 16% claimed they were always productive ( $n=30$ ); both extremes decreased from 2012 (see Chart 8). About 42% stated that Wikipedians were always civil ( $n=71$ ; up from 37% in 2012), while 7% identified that they were never civil ( $n=12$ ; down from 14% in 2012). Plus, about 27% stated that Wikipedians were always fair ( $n=47$ ; up from 23% in 2012), and 10% indicated they were never fair ( $n=17$ ; down from 21% in 2012).

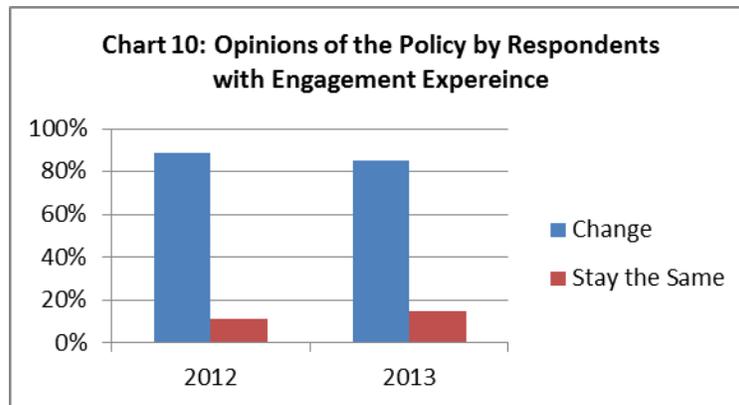
### **Wikipedia's 'Bright Line' Rule**

Unlike in the 2012 study, this year's survey provided respondents with an explanation about the 'bright line' rule when asking about their familiarity. However, this did not result in much difference from last year; 25% of respondents were familiar and understand the rule ( $n=348$ ; up from 21% in 2012), 11% were familiar with the rule but did not know what it meant for them ( $n=163$ ; down from 16% in 2012), and 63% were not familiar with the rule ( $n=870$ ; down 1% from 2012) (see Chart 9). The differences within each year were significant ( $p < .001$ ), as were the differences between the years ( $\chi^2(2, N=2,573)=11.7, p < .01$ ).



Of those who had experience with either using the Talk pages or making direct edits, 49% were not familiar with the rule (n=175; a 9 percentage point increase from 2012) ( $\chi^2(3, N=913)=34.15, p<.001$ ). Plus, only 36% of those who directly edited the Wikipedia article for their company or client (aka breaking the rule) indicated they were familiar and understand the rule (n=94; a 5 percentage point decrease from 2012) ( $\chi^2(2, N=903)=3.05, p<.01$ ).

Eighty-five percent of respondents with engagement experience through editing or using the Talk pages felt the rule should change (n=176; a 4 percentage point decrease from 2012) (see Chart 10). In fact, 49% felt that public relations/communications professionals should be able to make any edits they want directly on the article (n=114; a 2 percentage point decrease from 2012) ( $\chi^2(2, N=903)=3.05, p<.01$ ).



## SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

As Wikipedia continues to show prominence in search results and popularity with the public, an understanding of the current state of public relations/communications involvement with Wikipedia is important. Through a comparison with DiStaso's (2012) survey about Wikipedia and public relations, this study sheds light on the changes over the past year along with providing a deeper analysis of errors on company pages.

In the year between the 2012 survey and this study, efforts have been made to educate public relations/communications professionals about Jimmy Wales' 'bright line' rule. This rule, also known as the conflict of interest policy, prohibits public relations/communications professionals from making direct edits to Wikipedia articles for their company or client.

Similar to the 2012 study, 59% of respondents indicated that the Wikipedia article for their company or client had one or more factual errors. Although the percentage in 2013 decreased 1% from the previous year, this is still a substantial amount of inaccurate content on Wikipedia. Most of the factual errors were about historical information, but respondents stated a variety of topics including general company facts contained errors.

The 2013 survey further explored the errors in Wikipedia by asking questions about potentially reputation-harming errors. Twenty-eight percent of respondents stated their company or client's Wikipedia articles have contained a potentially reputation-harming error. Respondents reported that an alarming 50% of these potentially reputation-harming errors lasted from "months" to over a year.

The topics of the potentially reputation-harming errors as defined by the respondents ranged from performance to rumors and fake celebrity affiliations to incorrect court rulings. Given the emphasis and placement of each potentially reputation-harming error, it is easy to see how many topics on the list would be a big concern for companies, especially consumer-facing companies. The longer they last, the greater the possibility of harm, so it is not surprising that 38% of respondents indicated that these errors had damaged their reputation.

The 'bright line' rule requires public relations/communications professionals to use the Talk pages instead of making direct edits on the Wikipedia articles for their company or clients. Unfortunately, 63% of the respondents in this study were not familiar with the rule. This combined with those who were familiar with it but did not understand it results in approximately three-quarters of public relations/communications professionals who need further education on Wikipedia rules. However, education may not be the only concern with the policy, since 36% of respondents knew the rule but still made direct edits.

Overall, engagement with Wikipedia increased five percentage points from 2012. The number of respondents reporting that they have directly edited the Wikipedia account for their company or client increased to 34% and the number of respondents who used the Talk pages increased to 14%. Given the efforts to educate public relations/communications professionals that the suggested way to make changes in Wikipedia is through the Talk pages, the increase in direct editing is concerning. According to the Wikipedia:Conflict of interest page, direct editing is "strongly discouraged. It risks causing public embarrassment to the individuals and groups being promoted" (2013, para 2).

On the other hand, using the Talk pages is not without risk. This was seen when Arturo Silva, a member of BP's corporate communications department, clearly identified himself as a BP employee and made all his Wikipedia requests through the Talk pages but still received negative media coverage. Before engaging on any level, public relations/communications professionals should consider if the change is necessary and how the request can be interpreted in the media.

In evaluating the relationship between public relations/communications professionals and Wikipedians, both the levels of trust and satisfaction slightly decreased. It is also telling that the respondents with experience engaging, either through the Talk pages or through direct editing, had lower agreement about being treated fairly and justly. Given that the ultimate goal of most public relations/communications professionals and Wikipedians is accurate information for the public, the public relations/communications professional-Wikipedian relationship needs

attention. Both sides could benefit from a better understanding of the other along with a reminder that Wikipedia's goal is to be a reliable source.

One of the concerns that came from the 2012 study was the response time when the Talk pages were used. Jay Walsh, director of communications for the Wikimedia Foundation, agreed that response times were a problem although according to him it was one that could not be fixed (Porter, 2012). Both the CIPR guidelines and the CREWE Wikipedia Engagement Flowchart were created to assist in making edits and maneuvering through the resources available. Although the differences from 2012 to 2013 were not significant, there was an 11 percentage point decrease in the number of respondents who indicated that they had never received a response using the Talk pages.

Another surprising finding was that many public relations/communications professionals continue to be unaware of the Wikipedia articles for their company or client. While editing can be tricky, monitoring Wikipedia content for a company or client is absolutely necessary. This is a popular source for the general public, so it is important to be familiar with its content. The frequency of monitoring needed depends on the company, but it is likely that quarterly or annually, as most respondents in this study indicated they monitor, is too infrequent.

Finally, this study addressed opinions of the 'bright line' rule, and similar to the 2012 study, most respondents with engagement experience through direct editing or using the Talk pages felt it should change. More research is needed to determine how the rule should change, but with the goal of accurate Wikipedia content, the findings of this study indicate that the 'bright line' rule is not working.

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