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Analyze This: Usage and Your Collection — Google and Wikipedia: How They Form Expectations for Digital Discovery

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For today's Web user, it's a Google and a Wikipedia world. Businesses that understand how to create Web experiences that build on these familiar foundations are able to create products and features that users are excited to integrate into their personal digital worlds.

Users' reliance on Google and Wikipedia extends beyond forming their digital habits; Google has become a lifestyle, and Wikipedia a familiar reflex. And both sites create expectations that users carry forward with them to new experiences and Websites they discover throughout their lives.

In Google I Trust

When asked why they choose Google over other resources, users explicitly identify the effective and trusted algorithm that Google has for returning the most relevant results on the first page. Based on EBSCO's research on search behavior, users are more likely to search again with new keywords than to navigate to the second page of results on Google because, "if it's not on the first page [of Google], it probably doesn't exist." Users also appreciate the continued learning about their search terms that they receive from the Google results page: "It's not just results, it's information, and sometimes I can get an answer to my question just from looking at the results, without having to click any further," said one participant. For today's user who is focused not only on ease but convenience, Google represents a perfect match for non-premium content searches.

The Importance of User Experience

Google — Google is a top-of-mind resource for searchers for reasons beyond its trusted status. Users navigate the Google results page by skimming the page, looking for their search terms listed in bold in the title of the result item. This is particularly the case with younger users (college students), many of whom have told us in the course of our user research that they learned skimming and scanning techniques as part of their SAT prep study. "I skim the page and read little bits here and there — selectively" said one college sophomore, "and because I can't take the time to read everything, I just look [for my search terms] and read those bits in more detail." Google provides a large, easy-to-read title and a snippet where users can expect to see their own search terms reflected, satisfying their expectations for a quick reading experience.

Wikipedia — In previous studies on how students conduct academic research, the EBSCO team was able to identify three elements that users find very appealing about the Wikipedia experience. First, the "topic overview" at the top of the page is concise, and in layman's language. Users find this welcoming and non-intimidating, and will briefly skim the overview to gain a broad understanding of their topic, and then continue on to the second most important element on the page: the table of contents (TOC) structure.

The "table of contents" gives users a sense of the breakdown of the topic, including related topics. At EBSCO, we have learned that one of the most significant obstacles for students conducting research is narrowing their topic, and the TOC is helpful in guiding students to related and potentially more interesting or personally-relevant angles to a given topic. For example, if a student is searching Wikipedia on the topic of "same sex marriage," the TOC for this topic page includes a section on same sex marriage in popular culture (games, comics, television). This angle of the same sex marriage topic may inspire a student's creativity more than the originally-assigned, more general topic.

The third element that students respond positively to on the Wikipedia site is the "References section" at the bottom of the page. For many students, the References list becomes a starting point for conducting their own premium content searches on their chosen topic.

Forming a Habit

In users' minds, Google and Wikipedia aren't separate resources; they're part of a deeply-ingrained habit cycle that we as user researchers have seen repeated over and over. Today's users like to start all of their research — school and otherwise — on Google, where they have become accustomed to seeing Wikipedia as the first result. Searchers are often starting out with Google to orient themselves within a topic, and clicking on that first result is the easiest way to satisfy that need.

According to author **Charles Duhigg** (*The Power of Habit*, Random House 2012), habits become habits because there is a reward that makes an action worth repeating. Doing some-

thing that feels good, is convenient, and gives us the desired response, means that we will repeat that action, and since the combination of Google and Wikipedia is the easiest path to information, it's become a natural part of users' lives. So natural, in fact, that users will often not mention Google when asked to name their top five most-frequented sites as part of a research study: "Google? I didn't mention it because it's a given. It's the foundation of my life!"

Wikipedia has become a habitual stepping-stone despite the misgivings teachers and librarians have about the use of Wikipedia for research. "It's like a game — teachers tell us not to use Wikipedia, and — wink, wink — we say we won't, but we all know we will!" said one college student, describing why she resorts to the popular wiki site in support of her academic studies. "You can't stop us [from using it]!" said a high school senior who uses Wikipedia as the basis for most of his papers, and plans to continue doing so when he starts college this fall. "I get As, so why would I change?"

Google and Wikipedia represent a successful pattern of information-seeking that works seamlessly for today's users. Like any habit, this is a comfortable behavior that yields successful results each time it is used. Understanding the

aspects of Google and Wikipedia that users respond positively to allow EBSCO and other companies to create new products that will feel familiar to users; for example EBSCO's Research Starters, an authoritative content topic module on the top of the search results page, was created to provide a topic overview that is citable and can help students better understand their topic and improve their research.

To facilitate research, one of the design objectives is to replicate the familiar aspects of search that users have gained from Google and Wikipedia, while also enabling the discovery of premium content to provide a deeper, more immersive research experience. 🌱