Letter of Support for Wikimedia UK

As a Research Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute at Oxford University, I am involved in a number of projects concerning both Wikipedia and wiki platforms. Much of my work takes place within the context of knowledge access and sharing in the Global South. I have seen that even though the potential of Wikipedia to provide public benefit for developing countries remains at an early stage due to factors such as uneven coverage and uneven global participation, the free access to knowledge in hundreds of languages (it is now available in 281 languages) provided by Wikimedia projects benefits the public in those places. Wikipedia is already of huge benefit to people in parts of the world with poor access to educational resources. For instance, in Kenya (a country characterised by relatively high literacy and internet access rates, but few resources to buy educational materials such as books) the English-language Wikipedia is heavily used by students in schools and universities. Versions of Wikipedia in Kiswahili and other local languages aren't yet as comprehensive as the English version, but there are numerous local initiatives to grow content in those versions. Ultimately, while Wikipedia is already of huge benefit to people in parts of the world with poor access to educational resources, the enormous global reach of Wikipedia and the rapid rate at which it is growing in languages other than English means that the public value of the platform will undoubtedly only continue to increase.

In addition to the benefits of the Wikipedia project, it is also important to point out the value of the MediaWiki open source wiki software developed by the Wikimedia Foundation. The software has been used by the Wikichains charity that I run and many other organisations around the world. Wikichains is a commodity chain tracing project which aims to facilitate the free flow of information to transcend barriers of time and space. Its goal is to encourage consumers to be able to make informed economic decisions and be more aware of their economic, social, political, and environmental impacts. The hope is that ultimately a large enough body of data will be assembled to allow consumers to find out information about the chains of all mass-produced commodities, benefiting both them and those in other places on the chain. Our Wikichains project and hundreds of others around the world would not be possible without the software that is developed and maintained by the Wikimedia Foundation.

 Sincerely,

Dr Mark Graham
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