**Headline:** Why Wikis Are a Useful Tool to Protect Online Information From Being ‘Disappeared’

**Teaser:** Wiki sites are at the forefront of a shift toward decentralized information sharing.

By Damon Orion

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**[Article Body:]**

The beginning of Trump’s second presidency in January 2025 marked an upsurge in the suppression of online information. On February 2, the New York Times [reported](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/02/upshot/trump-government-websites-missing-pages.html#:~:text=More%20than%208%2C000%20web%20pages,initiatives%20and%20%E2%80%9Cgender%20ideology.%E2%80%9D) that more than 8,000 webpages had been erased from the sites of U.S. government agencies like the Department of Justice, the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Internal Revenue Service.

This has led to the removal of critical information about diversity initiatives, vaccines, hate crimes, scientific research, etc., and could have “profound consequences for American democracy,” Ben Worthy, a reader in politics at Birkbeck College, [wrote](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2025/02/11/donald-trump-is-plunging-government-websites-into-darkness-with-profound-consequences-for-american-democracy/) for the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Meanwhile, a February 6 piece by the National Security Archive [stated](https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/climate-change-transparency-project-foia/2025-02-06/disappearing-data-trump#_edn1), “In the first two weeks of President Donald Trump’s second term, the administration has begun to scrub critical environmental resources and datasets from federal agency websites.”

The Trump administration’s efforts to erase information from the internet—not to mention [television, radio](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/01/business/media/pentagon-press-corps.html), and [school curricula](https://truthout.org/articles/erasing-history-erasing-democracy-trumps-authoritarian-assault-on-education/)—coincide with a trend toward digital democratization. The global market size of [Web 3.0](https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/Web-30)—a user interface model designed to “decentralize the internet, putting power and control of the internet back into the hands of its users,” according to [Komodo](https://komodoplatform.com/en/academy/building-a-decentralized-internet/)—is expected to grow by more than 41.18 percent from 2025 to 2034, Precedence Research [states](https://www.precedenceresearch.com/web-3-0-market).

In December 2024, the employment agency Abel Personnel [pointed](https://www.abelpersonnel.com/own-your-data-understanding-local-first-and-decentralized-technology) to a shift in the online world in which “power is distributed among many, like a potluck dinner where everyone contributes. This shift, called decentralization, prioritizes user control, enhanced security, and a more resilient internet.”

This movement may prove crucial to the preservation of online information. In a 2022 study, researchers Ying-Ying Hsieh and [Jean-](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/authored-by/Vergne/Jean%E2%80%90Philippe)Philippe Vergne [noted](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/smj.3455), “On a decentralized platform, algorithms are used in lieu of a central authority to coordinate time and space, which opens new strategic opportunities for building censorship-resistant platforms.”

Wikis, which Wikipedia [defines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki) as “hypertext publication[s] on the internet which… [are] [collaboratively edited](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaborative_editing) and managed by… [their] audience directly through a web browser,” have served as community-based, decentralized information sources since 1995. Unlike other web-based systems, these sites comprise content “created without any defined owner or leader.”

In December 2024, CNN [cited](https://www.cnn.com/2024/12/03/business/wikipedia-most-viewed-2024/index.html) Wikipedia as the most popular wiki. According to the Wikimedia Foundation, the English-language Wikipedia received more than 76 billion views globally before October 2024.

However, Wikipedia is only one of [many sites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_wikis) that run on wiki software. Some notable others are the interactive math and science resource [Brilliant](https://brilliant.org/), the [UK LGBT Archive](https://lgbthistoryuk.org/wiki/Main_Page), and the culinary encyclopedia [Foodista](https://www.foodista.com/).

Wikipedia pages are important for preserving information that is no longer accessible online. Fifty-four percent “of Wikipedia pages contain at least one link in their ‘References’ section that points to a page that no longer exists,” according to a May 2024 [report](https://www.pewresearch.org/data-labs/2024/05/17/when-online-content-disappears/) by Pew Research Center.

“If you’re single, you have to go meet singles where they are,” notes Emilio Velis, the executive director of [Appropedia](https://www.appropedia.org/Welcome_to_Appropedia), a [self-described](https://www.appropedia.org/Appropedia:About) “green living wiki” whose users “develop and share collaborative solutions in sustainability, poverty reduction, and international development.” “It is similar with wikis: ‘How do we think about planetary problems? How can we start thinking about climate change?’ Go to a wiki and you can consume the content and fight with people about what’s important and what’s not. Social media is proving time and time again that it’s not the right space to do these kinds of things.”

Velis says the difference between social media and wikis is similar to the difference between malls and public parks. “A mall has police around it, people are trying to sell you things, and it’s a bit noisier.”

According to Velis, Appropedia’s main goal is “to be a steward of experiences people have had building ‘appropriate technology (AT),’” which the organization [defines](https://www.appropedia.org/Appropriate_technology) as technology designed to be environmentally, culturally, and economically appropriate to its intended context. Appropedia’s entry on this subject adds, “The main characteristics of most ATs are that they should be sustainable, small, and appropriate.”

Unlike encyclopedia-style wikis like Wikipedia, Appropedia “welcomes many different kinds of content, not just encyclopedic,” the site [states](https://www.appropedia.org/Appropedia:What_Appropedia_is_not). This can include literature reviews, how-tos, original research, and project write-ups.

While inviting a broader range of content than the encyclopedic format, this approach can also lead to the spread of inaccurate or biased material. To help filter out misinformation, Appropedia revises user-submitted content. “We correct some of the inaccuracies, but we try to leave as much of people’s original intent [intact as possible], and then we let the community decide what’s useful and what is not,” Velis explains. He adds that Appropedia collaborates with larger organizations and nonprofits that fund documentation work. “They are the ones verifying the accuracy of the information.”

Like many collaborative online publications, Appropedia shares and integrates information with other wikis. It encourages cross-pollination with several sites, including some free ones like [the](https://commons.wokimedia.org/) media file site [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page), the textbook site [Wikibooks](https://www.wikibooks.org/), and the learning resources site [Wikiversity](https://www.wikiversity.org/).

The content of resources such as the permaculture-based [PermaWiki](https://www.appropedia.org/PermaWiki) is ported to Appropedia, which also hosts [ASApedia](https://www.appropedia.org/ASApedia#), a wiki on permaculture overseen by Catholic Relief Services. “They have a lot of training resources for farmers,” Velis explains, adding that Appropedia supports the site by editing its materials into a simpler format, making its information available under a Creative Commons license, and enabling automatic translations. “We’re going to build a few tools [for ASApedia such as] a web app and [Kiwix](https://kiwix.org/en/about-us/#:~:text) version for offline access to ensure that more people see them,” he says.

Appropedia also [supports](https://www.appropedia.org/Surgical_Education_Learners_Forum) the [Surgical Education Learners Forum](https://www.intuitive-foundation.org/self/) (SELF), an effort by the philanthropic organization [Intuitive Foundation](https://www.intuitive-foundation.org/) to build educational resources for surgical training.Velis explains that Appropedia helps SELF’s community of experts document training modules and “their instruction to build low-cost simulators that could be used anywhere to train surgeons.”

Velis ties the present shift toward grassroots, community-based information sharing to philosopher Marshall McLuhan’s concept of the [tetrad of media effects](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetrad_of_media_effects). “[The late McLuhan spoke] about how sometimes when you heat up a technology, medium, or type of communication, it [regresses],” he explains. “For example, you can go fast in a car, but then when you have too many cars, you revert to walking because it might be too slow when you’re in traffic. I think that’s happening with media: We are reverting to one-to-one communication. We used to communicate this way in the past; we [would get information] from people we trusted.”