

A WORKSHOP ON MARATHI WIKIPEDIA

Venue: Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay

Date: 10th March 2018.

Language is a critical means for humans to communicate with each other. A common language is one of the most important bonding factor for a community. One of the best linguistic sources in the world, *The Ethnologue Catalogue of World Languages*, currently lists 6909 living languages.

The Internet Society (ISOC) supports initiatives that enable the Internet to develop as a global technical infrastructure and a knowledge resource that enables individuals to take more informed decisions. In this context, a multilingual Internet plays a critical role to make the Internet relevant and meaningful to the global community.

Wikipedia is a free online encyclopaedia, created and edited by the volunteers around the world. It is hosted by the Wikimedia foundation. In order to cater to the online global community, there are currently 301 language editions of Wikipedia. Additionally, there are 33,402,152 registered Wikipedia users. But only 30% of them are women. Further, the number of female users is lesser for the regional languages like Hindi, Marathi i.e. only 2-5 percent. One of the main reasons for this gender divide over Wikipedia usage is the lack of awareness for the female internet users and dominance of English as de facto language over the Internet.

Accordingly, ISOC India Mumbai decided to conduct the Marathi Wikipedia workshop along with Wikimedia India at the Indian Institute of Technology – Bombay (IIT-B) with the intention of creating awareness among the female internet users. This session was conducted at the IIT-B Powai campus to commemorate the occasion of International Women’s Day. It was attended by 30 enthusiastic female participants, IIT-B volunteers and ISOC India Mumbai volunteers. Each woman attending the session desired to learn and contribute to the Internet eco-system in her own way.

The session began with the address to enlighten the attendants about Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, and Marathi Wikipedia. The issue about the strikingly limited female contribution to Marathi Wikipedia as compared to their male peers was also highlighted.

The attendants were also informed about how different users could contribute to a better Marathi Wikipedia by writing articles on topics, editing the already existing articles, flagging out the inappropriate contents in articles, flagging out the inappropriate articles and linking different relevant articles. All the articles present on Wikipedia are reviewed. If the assigned reviewers find any inappropriate content or distortion of facts, the author of the article is notified and given a written warning about the same. The author’s or user’s account can be disabled if these instances are repeated.

The reviewers and the authors of the articles are also notified if a user edits an article. If a user incorrectly edits an article, he is warned by the reviewer. Failure to heed to repeated warnings might result in blocking of user account. As Wikipedia is free and open to all, content that doesn’t adhere to Wikipedia community guidelines is not tolerated by the reviewers.

Currently, the English Wikipedia alone has over 5,625,456 articles of any length, and the combined Wikipedias for all other languages greatly exceed the English Wikipedia in their size! There are more than 27 billion words in 40 million articles in 293 languages. It is essential for the Wikipedia community to ensure that these articles are rightly linked together and there are no orphan articles.

Many of the participants attending the workshop were unregistered users. So, volunteers registered them as users of Wikipedia. With their usernames and passwords, the participants were divided into four groups depending on their interests. The first group was responsible for writing articles of their choice, the second group was responsible for editing the existing articles, the third group was reviewing the articles and flagging articles that required further review whereas the fourth group was ensuring that no broken links were present in the article. To develop a comprehensive understanding of Marathi Wikipedia, the participants were shuffled among various groups.

As Marathi Wikipedia is being used by rural schools to introduce students to new forms of knowledge beyond their course textbooks, this initiative will broaden the knowledge horizons of rural school students and online Marathi community. At ISOC India Mumbai, we look forward to support such initiatives.



Female participants of Marathi Wikipedia at the Workshop on campus with Miss Sneha Tambe, Secretary, ISOC India Mumbai.