



WIKIPEDIA: IMMENSE BUT UNCONTROLLABLE POWER?

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"Knowledge is power in itself"
(Francis Bacon, 1561-1626)

SUMMARY

With editions in 350 languages, over 300 million pages and tens of millions of articles, Wikipedia has become one of the ten most visited websites in the world over the past 24 years.

The online encyclopedia is thus an essential resource for journalists, politicians and, more generally, anyone seeking information on a given subject.

However, this success and dominant position does not immunize this ever-expanding project against certain weaknesses, excesses, and abuses. As we will demonstrate in this report, it is the very functioning of the online "collaborative encyclopedia" that generates these problems: anyone can contribute anonymously - without having any specific knowledge or authority to deal with a subject - and anyone can modify any article, just as anonymously.

The Wikimedia Foundation, Wikipedia's "parent company", claims that such incidents are rare. That may be, but the involvement of activists and extremists - whether "left-wing" or "right-wing", motivated by religious ideology or the simple desire to harm a person or entity - is real. And in this century, when disinformation and conspiracy theories are spreading at breakneck speed, the damage caused can be considerable, since it's on the scale of the site's audience.

If Wikipedia is to remain a relevant, credible, and reliable documentary resource, it must undergo reforms that, while challenging, are nonetheless essential. The right to information and freedom of expression must be preserved, but not at the expense of individuals, communities, and organizations being treated with honesty, rigor, and fairness.

This is why, at the end of this report, we recommend two simple and urgent measures. First, mandatory training and better supervision of contributors. Then, the appointment of a clearly identified editorial director for each language edition of the encyclopedia to whom individuals can turn if they believe they have been unfairly represented. Supported by a dedicated team, this editor would have the authority to modify or remove problematic content and to review, in advance, any publications on sensitive subjects. Without such measures, the number of disputes and legal actions will inevitably continue to grow.

Failure to implement these reforms would constitute a serious ethical lapse, a profound act of social irresponsibility, and an abuse of dominant position on Wikipedia's part.

In a world defined by instant communication, we cannot accept that a platform like Wikipedia might push us toward a reality resembling George Orwell's 1984.

Truth is not - and never will be - a lie.

PREAMBLE

Today, Wikipedia is a key player on the worldwide web, and more particularly in the world of popularizing knowledge and information.

However, while the online encyclopedia can play a useful, even indispensable role - among other things, by putting knowledge within everyone's reach and enabling access to information for those who are deprived of it in their own countries - it suffers from a disease that, in the long term, threatens its credibility and, more seriously, harms (unintentionally or, sometimes knowingly, for ideological or even darker reasons) individuals, groups or political, commercial or social entities.

As we shall demonstrate, this illness is a direct result of the **very design of this tool**.

It can therefore only be "cured" through in-depth reform, by modifying its operating rules and better handling of complaints addressed to the organization.

1- The right to information versus the right of individuals and the protection of security: a complex debate

The public's right to be informed is essential - indeed, it is one of the pillars of democracy and the rule of law - so much so that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, stipulates that *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers"*.

Proof of its importance, **this right to information has been developing steadily in democracies for decades**, as shown by the various laws passed on access to archives¹. However, it is generally accepted that there are exceptions to this right, with access periods ranging from 25 years to a century for government deliberations, "business secrecy", national defense, protection of privacy or police or judicial archives. Jean-Charles Bédague, senior civil servant², explained in an interview in February 2023: *"The law establishes a list of secrets and interests to be protected, and sets deadlines that are all the longer the more sensitive the secret or interest to be protected has been identified..."*³

¹ **Freedom of Information Act** of July 4 1966 in the USA, **Loi du 3 janvier 1979 sur les archives** in France, **Access to Information Act** 1983 in Canada, **Freedom of Information Act 2000** of November 30 2000 in the UK, etc.

² He is deputy director of archive management, communication and promotion at the French Ministry of Culture's Interministerial Archives Department.

³<https://www.culture.gouv.fr/actualites/histoire-memoire-comment-les-archives-s-ouvrent-au-plus-grand-nombre#:~:text=En%20France%2C%20l'acc%C3%A8s%20aux,cela%2C%20avoir%20acc%C3%A8s%20aux%20archives>

Similar legislation exists in all democratic states, with the protection of individuals and public or national security justifying information not being "immediately" accessible to the public.

Moreover, to return to the media⁴, it is obvious that the information disseminated must be true, honest and objective, and must not unnecessarily harm the reputation of individuals or the legitimate interests of entities. Abundant case law in many countries fuels the endless debate between the right to information and the protection of individuals, entities and the essential interests of States.

When judges have to rule in this area, they weigh up the right to freedom of expression against the interests at stake. If they consider that these interests have been unfairly or disproportionately harmed, they try to distinguish between an honest mistake and a deliberately malicious act, and impose compensation for the damage suffered.

2- Disseminating knowledge and information in a globalized, *connected* world

Over the millennia, **four successive revolutions** have profoundly altered the way information and knowledge are disseminated: the appearance of **writing** (to "fix" and preserve information and knowledge) in Egypt and Sumer around 3,300 BC, Gutenberg's invention of movable metal type **printing** in 1450, the development of **radio** after the First World War, followed by **television** after the Second World War (to become the first mass medium) and, of course, the invention and development of digital culture - **the computer**, then the **Internet** and, finally, the **Web** (which will gradually enable everyone to become an actor and a vector of knowledge and information, and, in any case, a consumer of it).

At each of these stages, the circle of those who possessed knowledge (and disseminated it) **became less focused**, and the number of those who had access to it **increased**.

Writing brought knowledge from the priests to the scribes of Antiquity, then to the copyist monks of the Middle Ages; printing created an "aristocracy of craftsmen", the printers and book workers, and increased the number of those who created and disseminated knowledge (the authors); the audiovisual age has enabled us to reach an incomparably wider audience than the written word, and finally, the digital age has extended the potential number of authors and "receivers" of knowledge to, potentially at any rate, the whole of humanity. There is no doubt that the new revolution underway, that of **artificial intelligence**, will result in new "advances" that we are not yet in a position to fully perceive.

Each of these evolutionary phases, which we've just touched on (too briefly), had the effect of **transforming, more or less rapidly but profoundly, the societies** in which they occurred, or which benefited from them.

We can talk endlessly about the "**meaning of history**", but any honest observer will undoubtedly agree that history is complex. Depending on the time and place, this evolution could only be **positive** (in the direction of human emancipation and empowerment) or

⁴ The term "media" is to be understood here in the sense of the definition given by the *Grand Usuel Larousse*: "Any technical process enabling the distribution, broadcasting or communication of written, audio or visual intellectual works".

negative (in that it allowed pernicious ideas to penetrate deeper and run counter to this emancipation).

In the Middle Ages, **writing, which** had enabled philosophy and science to progress in Antiquity, became the almost exclusive "property" of men who thought they could spread the "word of God" and make it a universal law.

Printing and books enabled the Protestant Reformation, humanism and the Enlightenment to flourish, but a few centuries later they became powerful tools in the service of the two great totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century, communism and fascism. Both currents also exploited **broadcasting and cinema** to increase their influence on the masses.

Of course, the same is true today: **the Internet and the Web are both instruments for liberating thought** (through the dissemination of knowledge and information) **and vectors for dumbing down** (through the increase in disinformation, *fake news* and *hoaxes*). And artificial intelligence will have no other effect than to accentuate these two trends, but by making them increasingly difficult to distinguish one from the other, thanks to technical progress and the immediacy of dissemination.

Two trends have been repeating themselves for 5,000 years: on the one hand, the **number of those who create or disseminate "knowledge" is necessarily small** (even if, as we've said, it has grown considerably); on the other, **for many (the vast majority) of those who receive and consume this knowledge, what is written** (or broadcast on radio or television, or posted on a website or social network) **inevitably corresponds to the truth.**

Worse still: for a variety of reasons, **those whose job it is to inform are now widely distrusted, even detested.** According to an October 2022 *Gallup* poll, **only 34% of Americans trust the media**⁵. Journalists are criticized, in no particular order, for keeping to themselves, having connivances (real or supposed) with those in power, being corrupt, being inaccurate, having ideological biases, and so on. According to an October 2019 *Morning Consult* study, 72% of Americans don't trust politicians⁶. The results of similar studies are much the same in Europe: in France, in 2023, 57% of people surveyed by the *La Croix-Kantar Barometer* admitted to "*mistrusting what the media say about major current affairs*".⁷

On the other hand, and even if this result may seem paradoxical, while the French have little confidence in social networks, in 2023 they were the first source of information cited by the same *La Croix-Kantar Barometer* (**26% of those questioned said they got their information first from networks...**).

According to the same survey, **69% of French people watch television every day, 62% consult the Internet every day and 45% "read the press as a whole"**.

⁵ Only 7% of Americans trust the media "very much", and 27% "quite a bit". Meanwhile, 28% of American adults say they don't trust newspapers, TV and radio very much, and 38% don't trust them at all. It's worth noting that this is the first time that the percentage of Americans who have no confidence in the media is higher than the percentage of those who have a great deal or a fair amount of confidence.

⁶ <https://wtop.com/politics/2019/10/new-poll-finds-what-americans-hate-the-most-about-politicians/>

⁷ <https://www.la-croix.com/culture/barometre-des-medias-2025-desinformation-fatigue-confiance-notre-sondage-en-8-chiffres-cles-20250114>

With these figures in mind, it's time to look at Wikipedia's philosophy, its place in the online encyclopedia and how it works.

3- Wikipedia: "The place to be"

In its twenty-four years of existence - the encyclopedia was founded on January 15, 2001 - Wikipedia has established itself in a more than comfortable position: **it now exists in almost 350 languages, with nearly 300 million pages and 64,673,469 articles.**

Its English version, the largest⁸, had 6,970,891 articles on March 23, 2025⁹, attracts 1.5 billion unique visits per month, generating 13 million modifications over the same period.¹⁰ In comparison, the French version of Wikipedia had 2,673,093 articles on March 23, 2025.¹¹

Wikipedia is just one of the projects managed by the **Wikimedia Foundation**¹², founded in 2003 by **Jimmy Wales**, a businessman who made his fortune speculating on interest rates and currency fluctuations.

3.1. Project philosophy

When he helped design Wikipedia and then the Wikimedia Foundation, Jimmy Wales's major project was to **"create the library of the future"** on the Internet¹³. The basic principle behind Wikipedia - and all the other Wikimedia Foundation projects - is therefore the use of **"Wiki"**, described by Wikipedia as *"a web application that enables the collaborative creation, modification and illustration of pages within a website. It uses a markup language, wikitext, and its content can be modified using a web browser. It is content management software with a minimal implicit structure, while the explicit structure is gradually implemented according to user needs"*.¹⁴

In addition to Wikipedia, the Wikimedia Foundation's other projects are¹⁵: **Wiktionary**¹⁶, **Wikiquote**¹⁷, **Wikibooks**¹⁸, **Wikimedia Commons**¹⁹, **Wikisource**²⁰, **Wikispecies**²¹,

⁸ The five most popular language versions of Wikipedia are published, in descending order of importance, in English, Cebuano (the lingua franca of the Philippines), German, French and Swedish.

⁹ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia_en_anglais

¹⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia>

¹¹ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia_en_fran%C3%A7ais

¹² The birth of the Wikimedia Foundation was announced on June 20, 2003 by Jimmy Wales, one of its co-founders. It was set up as a 501(c)(3) non-profit American foundation, governed by the laws of the State of Florida but based in San Francisco (California).

¹³ Daniel H. Pink, *The Book Stops Here*, Wired, March 1st 2005, <https://www.wired.com/2005/03/wiki/>

¹⁴ <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>

¹⁵ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fondation_Wikim%C3%A9dia

¹⁶ <https://www.wiktionary.org/>

¹⁷ <https://www.wikiquote.org/>

¹⁸ <https://www.wikibooks.org/>

¹⁹ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

²⁰ https://wikisource.org/wiki/Main_Page

²¹ https://species.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Wikinews²² , **Wikiversité**²³ , **Wikivoyage**²⁴ and **Wikidata**²⁵ . Other projects are currently under development.

According to Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales' philosophy can be summed up in one sentence: *"to promote the growth and development of projects containing free knowledge based on the wiki principle, and to distribute their content publicly and free of charge"*²⁶ . In other words, and again according to Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia represents *"an effort to create and distribute a free encyclopedia of the highest possible quality to every person on the planet in their own language"*²⁷ , with the aim of *"achieving a level of quality at least equivalent to that of Encyclopaedia Britannica"*.

The organization is financed by donations, mainly from North America and Europe, but also by federal subsidies (USA), sponsorship and merchandising. In June 2021, its reserves stood at \$231 million²⁸ . By 2023, it employed around 700 people.²⁹

The Foundation prides itself on its decentralized structure, developing through a network of local or regional organizations, or "chapters". There are chapters in **Canada, France, Spain, Germany, Hong Kong, Russia** and some thirty other countries and territories. It should be noted, however, that these chapters do not own the servers hosting the various sites, which remain the property of the "parent company" and are located in the USA, the Netherlands, Singapore and France.³⁰

3.2. A dominant position in information distribution

Now **one of the ten most visited websites in the world** (700 million daily visits by the end of 2022³¹), in every language, and offering tens of millions of articles for free consultation - on subjects as diverse as culture, the arts, history, politics, current affairs, science, health, biographies of living or deceased people, etc. - **Wikipedia** has become **a reference** not only for the **general public**, but also for the **majority of journalists and many students**.

While we can't speak of a monopoly situation - there are many other sources of knowledge and information, but not all of them are online, free or accessible at all hours of the day and night - **Wikipedia nevertheless occupies a central, inescapable and, to put it bluntly, dominant position** in the dissemination of information.

Since the creation of this tool, a simple but crucial question has arisen: is it reliable? In other words, **is the information provided true, objective, precise and sufficient (or even complete)**

²² <https://www.wikinews.org/>

²³ <https://www.wikiversity.org/>

²⁴ <https://www.wikivoyage.org/>

²⁵ https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Wikidata:Main_Page

²⁶ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fondation_Wikim%C3%A9dia

²⁷ <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia>

²⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_Foundation#Expenses_\(2004%E2%80%932020\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_Foundation#Expenses_(2004%E2%80%932020))

²⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_Foundation#Staff

³⁰ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fondation_Wikim%C3%A9dia

³¹ <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia#Volum%C3%A9trie>

to give an exact idea - or at least as close as possible to the "truth" - of a given subject or person?

Without being able to generalize, it seems that the answer to this question must be nuanced, if not negative.

Of course, the more you're interested in the "hard" sciences (mathematics, physics, astronomy, biology, etc.), the closer Wikipedia's content will be to what you'd expect from an encyclopedia: the dissemination of the state of knowledge on subject X at a given point in time. Conversely, the more we turn to the humanities (history, sociology, etc.) and, a fortiori, to recent news or biographies of living people, the more the content of the articles will be polluted by cognitive or political bias.

3.3 How does Wikipedia work?

The reason for this risk of distorting reality **lies in the very nature of the Wikipedia project.**

Traditionally, an encyclopedia - whether universal, national or thematic (*Universalis*, *Britannica*, the German *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie*, the Chinese *Zhongguo da baike quanshu*, the *Grand Larousse Universel*, the *Bordas Encyclopedia*, the *Quid*, the Japanese *ekai Dai-Hyakka Jiten*, *Judaica*, etc.) - **draws on the best specialists in a subject to offer the general public a popularized, expert approach.**

Since Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*³², it has had to be extremely rigorous, aiming not only to disseminate knowledge, but also to correct misconceptions and combat prejudice and superstition. **This noble ambition can only be approached - if not achieved - by relying on recognized specialists in each field.**

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of Wikipedia: as long as the site's editing rules are respected, anyone can propose or write an article, and anyone can make changes to articles written by others. All this, moreover, in complete anonymity and without any authority or scientific committee³³. This can lead to what Wikipedia calls an "*editing war*" if several opposing points of view clash.

In this respect, an interesting comparison can be made with another major online encyclopedia that operates strictly in the field of business: Investopedia. Unlike Wikipedia, where articles and sections are often written by anonymous contributors or authors using nicknames and pseudonyms, Investopedia provides transparent information not only on the author of an article, but also on the people who proofread and checked it before publication.

³² Published between 1751 and 1772 in Paris, in 28 volumes, *the Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* marks a turning point in the genre. Although attempts to synthesize knowledge have existed since antiquity (in Sumer in the fourth millennium BC), they were the work of a single man. Diderot and d'Alembert, on the other hand, surrounded themselves with 160 collaborators to write the 71,818 articles in their work.

³³ Conversely, scientific journals published by recognized universities or research centers rely on validation of contributions by peers and/or an editorial board of experts.

To put it plainly, in contrast to the "elitist" knowledge produced by recognized experts, the Wikipedia project opposes a participative (or "collaborative") production of knowledge based on the "intelligence of crowds." ³⁴

Please don't misunderstand us: our intention is not to reject or condemn all the articles in the online encyclopedia or their editors: on the one hand, genuine specialists are involved in the project and, on the other, we fully accept that an honest "enlightened amateur" can produce excellent work.

3.4. A collective work with few rules

To fully understand the "Wikipedia model", just look at what the encyclopedia says about itself³⁵ :

- *"Wikipedia is produced collaboratively over the Internet by a decentralized, self-organizing network of volunteer contributors, with no formal hierarchical structure.*
- *"Wikipedia's wiki system allows all visitors to create and edit pages immediately, even without registering. Wikipedia was the first general encyclopedia to use this system, opening up the editing of its articles to all Internet users. No article is considered complete, and Wikipedia presents itself as an encyclopedia in continuous improvement. The constant monitoring of modifications is also open to all, thanks to the wiki system.*
- *"Encyclopedic content is supposed to respect "point-of-view neutrality", defined by Jimmy Wales as "describing the debate rather than participating in it". Every contributor to a Wikipedia article must strive never to take sides in an argumentative discussion he or she is reporting. Point-of-view neutrality consists in objectively presenting ideas and facts reported by verifiable and known external sources, independently of the prejudices of the article's editors. Wikipedia's editorial rules are designed to suit rational people, even if they don't always share the same opinions. Wikipedia's policy of neutrality stipulates that articles should address all aspects of a controversial issue, and not assert or imply that one point of view or another is a priori the right one. The neutrality of viewpoints does not, however, imply equal representation of all opinions, as Wikipedia gives more space to the most widely accepted opinions"*

That said, all contributors to Wikipedia must respect its **founding principles**³⁶ :

- *The encyclopedia is not a compilation of indiscriminately added information. It is not a source of first-hand documents and original research, nor is it a propaganda forum. Wikipedia is not a newspaper, a free hosting service, a provider of personal pages, a social network, a series of promotional articles, a collection of memoirs, an anarchist*

³⁴ Pierre Willaime and Alexandre Hocquet, "Wikipedia au prisme de l'épistémologie sociales et des études des sciences", in Cahiers Philosophiques, 2015, 2, issue 141, pages 68 to 86,

³⁵ <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia>

³⁶ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia:Principes_fondateurs

or democratic experiment, or a directory of links. Finally, this is not the place to share your opinions, experiences or debates. All contributors must respect the prohibition on original research (also known as "unpublished work") and strive to be as accurate as possible".

- *"Wikipedia endeavors to respect the neutrality of points of view, which means that articles should not promote a particular point of view. This sometimes means mentioning several points of view and representing each of them as faithfully as possible, taking into account their respective importance in the field of knowledge. It also means providing the necessary context for understanding these points of view, based on the sources from which they are derived, and not presenting any one point of view as the truth or the best point of view. These conditions make it possible to verify information by citing authoritative sources on the subject (particularly in the case of controversial subjects)".*
- *The encyclopedia is published under a free and open license: published texts are available under a Creative Commons - Share Alike 4.0 International (CC-BY-SA 4.0) license and a GNU Free Documentation License (GFDL 1.3). This license allows anyone to create, copy, modify and distribute Wikipedia content. Obligations are to maintain the same license for verbatim and modified copies, and to credit the original authors. No one has control over any particular article. Any text contributed to Wikipedia may be modified and redistributed without notice by anyone, including commercial redistributors. "Free" does not mean that anyone can write or do whatever they want in total freedom. Copyright must be respected.*
- *"Wikipedia is a collaborative project that follows rules of etiquette: you must respect other Wikipedians, even if you disagree. Always remain polite, courteous and respectful. Seek consensus. Don't attack people or make insulting generalizations. Keep your cool when things get heated. Avoid editorial wars [...]. Act in good faith and assume that your interlocutors do the same, unless there is clear evidence to the contrary. Try to be open, welcoming and friendly.*
- *"Wikipedia has no fixed rules other than the five founding principles set out here. Don't be afraid to be bold in your contributions, because one of the advantages of being able to edit Wikipedia is that not everything has to be perfect the first time. So you don't need to know all the rules to contribute. If you make mistakes, other contributors will spot them, correct them and explain them to you. Don't worry about making a mistake either: all previous versions of articles are preserved and accessible via the history, so it's impossible to damage or irretrievably lose information on Wikipedia. But don't forget that everything you write will be preserved for posterity.*

3.5. Contributors can be divided into different categories:³⁷

Wikipedia contributors are divided into different roles that define the actions they are allowed to take, but *"the criteria for acquiring status and how to use the capabilities provided are set independently by each community"*.

³⁷ <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia>

The five main statuses are:

- **Anonymous users** identified by their IP address, who *"can only create and modify articles, and intervene on discussion pages (with restrictions on the creation of articles on certain language versions)";*
- **Registered users** who *"can do the same thing, but in addition rename a page and copy illustration files (images, videos, etc.). Depending on certain criteria chosen by each community - generally a minimum threshold of contributions made by the user account - they can also vote in various consultations, such as elections for administrators or referrers";*
- **Administrators** are elected by the community, which gives them this status. Their role is essentially technical, involving tools whose use is subject to community approval: deleting a page, deleting intermediate versions of a page (known as "history purging"), setting different levels of blocking to filter the modification of problem pages, blocking a user whose behavior is problematic. They cannot judge the content of an article, but can intervene to limit the modification of a page when it is the site of a conflict between users";
- **Bureaucrats** who *"are elected by the community and can rename a user account. They also examine the results of an application for the role of administrator or bureaucrat, and validate it by changing the status of the user account concerned if it has been approved by the community";*
- **The arbitrators** who *"are elected by the community that confers this status on them. They form the Arbitration Committee, which examines conflicts between users and can decide on sanctions, including blocking modifications or more specific restrictions. They cannot judge the content of an article; their role is limited to assessing conflicts between people and their behavior on Wikipedia".*

3.6. Error monitoring and correction

According to Wikipedia³⁸, changes to articles are subject to several levels of **post-control**, so that even the most obvious errors can be corrected.

Jimmy Wales, for example, has stated that *"in general, the correction of an error or misleading information is done in a few hours, or even a few minutes"*.³⁹

Monitoring is also carried out by a registered user who *"reviews" recent changes to his "watch list" (a list of pages he has marked for monitoring). This review enables major substantive problems to be detected and corrected fairly quickly: obvious errors, off-topic additions, lack*

³⁸ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia#cite_note-figaro-96

³⁹ Didier Sanz, "Wikipedia, une encyclopédie sous haute surveillance", in *Le Figaro*, October 15, 2007.

of objectivity or neutrality in editing. The article's co-authors can then check suspicious additions in greater detail, if necessary with the help of reference sources". ⁴⁰

Sanctions are provided for: *"When it appears that a 'problem' contributor is making too many negative contributions to Wikipedia, he or she may be banned from writing on the entire encyclopedia": "The administrators, elected from among the contributors, have the power to delete or protect pages, block or exclude a contributor after a decision by the arbitration committee, also composed of members chosen by the community".* ⁴¹

Nevertheless, *"the errors that escape these first levels of control are errors that are not very obvious, or that concern marginal articles, not very advanced and not very closely followed. These errors can remain in the article for months, even years, and they remain all the longer as the article is little read and little modified. They can be corrected spontaneously by a reader. What's more, when a new modification is made, the article undergoes the previous checks again, and the volunteer proofreaders may decide to reread it entirely to correct the old errors".* ⁴²

Finally, *"the last level of control, collective, is made up of projects to improve articles linked to a given theme, organized around a "portal". In this context, articles are reread, completed and corrected by volunteers with a passion for the theme. Articles that benefit from these reviews are first corrected, and then generally continue to be monitored by the "portal" team.* ⁴³

3.7. An operating mode that allows for error and manipulation

But Wikipedia's very *modus operandi* also allows for numerous errors, unfortunate approximations and abuses, whatever the national communities of contributors who maintain and develop this tool may say.

The "supervision" and verification of contributors' work are partly responsible for this weakness.

For example, **on March 24, 2025, the French edition of the site contained 2,673,274 articles, written or modified, since May 11, 2001 (launch date of the French pages) by 5,141,533 contributors, including 18,848 "active"⁴⁴, but only 142 administrators.**

On the same day, the English edition counted 6,971,221 articles written or modified (since January 15, 2001) by 48,899,457 contributors, including 125,295 active contributors and 848 administrators.

The German edition has 2,999,726 articles, 4,545,935 contributors (17,762 active) and 171 administrators.

⁴⁰ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia#cite_note-figaro-96

⁴¹ <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia#R%C3%A9daction>

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ A contributor is considered "active" if he/she makes at least five modifications per month.

The "Wikipedia system" - permission to write open to all, with no requirement of competence (nor any real possibility of verifying this competence before an article is put online), no validation of articles by any "authority" and, finally, correction of errors or biases based on this same openness - is at the heart of most of the criticisms levelled at the encyclopedia since its creation.

Added to this is the anonymity of the contributors, which does not allow the reader to verify the real skills and knowledge of the authors, nor their possible political or philosophical commitments, all of which can detract from the relevance of their work.

The same weaknesses allow anyone to "vandalize" a Wikipedia article. According to the encyclopedia, *"vandalism" is defined as "modifications made to Wikipedia articles with the intent to harm the article, the subject of the article, or the Wikipedia community".*⁴⁵

3.8. Wikipedia as social media

The structure of Wikipedia's operation, or its "modus operandi", as mentioned above, resembles that of a social media platform, similar to global platforms such as Facebook or X (formerly Twitter). Although Wikipedia attempts to present itself differently, this should not mislead the public into thinking that the content of Wikipedia articles is often shaped in a very similar way to that of social media platforms.

Typical social media features such as user-generated content, community moderation and content discussion functions are all clearly present in Wikipedia. The declared neutrality and verifiability are nothing but a mirage, as we'll show later in practical cases.

In fact, under the EU's Digital Services Act, Wikipedia is considered a Very Large Online Platform (VLOP). As a VLOP, Wikipedia is required to: (1) assess the significant systemic risks arising from its services, including the dissemination of misinformation, (2) following the risk assessment, implement reasonable and proportionate measures to mitigate identified risks, such as misinformation, and (3) voluntarily consider the development of Wikipedia's code of practice on misinformation.

The aforementioned legal requirements are designed to ensure that online platforms, such as Wikipedia, proactively assess and mitigate the spread of misinformation, thereby promoting a safer and more trustworthy digital environment.

Wikipedia would probably oppose its classification as a social media platform, but such opposition would not only misrepresent the true nature of Wikipedia as it operates today, but would also ignore the views of the general public and its readers, who deserve to be protected from the spread of misinformation on Wikipedia and are entitled to a trustworthy digital environment.

⁴⁵ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aide:Jargon_de_Wikip%C3%A9dia#Vandalisme

4- Errors, bias and manipulation: case studies

We'll now look at a few examples of Wikipedia's weaknesses and shortcomings. The profusion of articles in the encyclopedia and the multiplicity of languages in which it is published make an exhaustive search impossible. We will therefore cite just a few particularly emblematic cases, spread over the last 20 years and published in the encyclopedia's various languages of expression, which illustrate perfectly the fact that errors or manipulations resulting from Wikipedia's operation can harm entire communities as well as individuals or entities.

➤ The Croatian dossier (2011-2021)

The "Croatian dossier" is one of the longest episodes of "vandalism" suffered by Wikipedia.⁴⁶

The Croatian edition of the online encyclopedia was launched on February 16, 2003. **Around 2011, following various extremist infiltrations, manipulations and threats against the editors, a local far-right group managed to take full control of this edition. They kept it for... 10 years.**

For 10 years (from 2011 to 2021), **Wikipedia.hr** became **one of the main vehicles for Croatian neo-fascist propaganda**. In addition to systematically distorting facts and biographies about democratic parties, activists engaged in systematic propaganda against voluntary termination of pregnancy and LGBT circles, while attempting to distort the country's history and **systematically rehabilitate the pronazi regime of the Ustasha, the ultranationalist, anti-Semitic and pro-German militia that ran the Berlin-allied "Independent State of Croatia" between 1941 and 1945.**

The new editors have also tried to **downplay the countless crimes committed in the Jasenovac concentration camp**, which is presented as a simple assembly or work camp. Although assessments differ, the most recent studies, including Israeli ones⁴⁷, estimate that close to a million people were exterminated in the Jasenovac complex (which in fact comprised several camps): 800,000 Orthodox Serbs, 40,000 Jews, at least 10,000 Gypsies, and so on.

Faced with this scandalous situation, and despite the multiplication of reports of abuse and other warnings, the **Wikimedia Foundation** admits to having shown a guilty passivity: *"The Wikimedia Foundation [...] refrained from intervening for fear of undermining the autonomy of the Croatian Wikipedia. The Foundation confined itself to issuing a call for comments, which failed to elicit critical opinions on the operation and drifts of the Croatian-language Wikipedia: opponents were in fact neutralized. The report published in 2021 acknowledges that "the Foundation's lack of intervention directly pushed moderate users off the platform". The activities of the dominant group continued for 10 years. The power of this group was finally "overthrown" by those who disagreed with these methods..."*⁴⁸

⁴⁶ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia_en_croate

⁴⁷ "Expert: 800,000 Serbs were killed in a Croatian death camp during World War II - English - on B92.net [archive]", on B92.net

⁴⁸ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia_en_croate#cite_note-18

➤ The case Israel (2025)

In mid-March 2025, the **Anti-Defamation League** (ADL) published an investigation⁴⁹ revealing "systematic manipulation of Wikipedia content in favor of anti-Israeli positions".

The report identified a **group of around 30 editors who actively collaborate to distort information relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**. These editors are characterized by a much higher-than-average level of activity, with twice as many edits over the past decade and internal communications up to 18 times more frequent than other contributors. **Their strategy involves systematically deleting references to credible sources and using concerted voting to minimize criticism of Hamas while amplifying criticism of Israel**. The report also points out that the Arabic version of Wikipedia violates the platform's neutrality policies, particularly on pages dedicated to Hamas that glorify the terrorist organization.

"Clearly, Wikipedia needs to do much more to combat this very active anti-Semitic and anti-Israel bias," said Daniel Kelley, one of the study's leaders, before adding, *"In the meantime, platforms that rely on Wikipedia, such as Google Search and AI models like ChatGPT, need to give less weight to such content to prevent the spread of misinformation."*

The ADL **recommended several corrective measures**, including the introduction of a review program by experts accredited by the Wikimedia Foundation, the appointment of special administrators to oversee discussions on controversial topics, and reform of the dispute resolution process.

➤ The *Le Point* magazine affair (2025)

In mid-February 2025, a crisis broke out between the respected French news magazine **Le Point** and Wikipedia.⁵⁰

According to the public news channel **France Info**: *"The dispute arose from an update to the weekly's Wikipedia entry. It suggested that the paper had taken a "populist" turn and that its editorial line was increasingly close to the identitarian right. A Le Point journalist, Erwan Seznec, wrote on February 15 to the author of these changes, who contributes to Wikipedia under the pseudonym FredD..."*

Also, according to *France Info*, Wikipedia contributors denounced *"intimidating e-mails"* and published an open letter on February 17 to offer their *"full support to [their] peer"*. These users claim that the *Le Point* journalist threatened FredD to divulge personal information about him.

In addition to FredD's criticism, Erwan Seznec considers the weekly to be the object of a *"smear campaign"*. In an article, *"he draws up a long list of criticisms of Wikipedia:*

⁴⁹<https://www.i24news.tv/fr/actu/international/ameriques/artc-wikipedia-l-adl-denonce-un-biais-anti-israelien-systematique>

⁵⁰https://www.francetvinfo.fr/economie/medias/detournements-ideologiques-reglement-de-comptes-on-vous-explique-la-polemique-entre-wikipedia-et-le-magazine-le-point_7091871.html

egocentrism, total absence of contradictory debate, biased selection of data, accusatory inversion, pack effect, arbitrary elimination of discordant information". For the journalist, his magazine is presented in a biased, even misleading, manner by Wikipedia contributors, particularly with regard to its supposed proximity to the hard right and the conspiracy movement".

The magazine's management supports its journalist, with Etienne Gernelle (its director) explaining to *France Inter* public radio that "**Wikipedia contributors work like trolls on social networks, masking their identity and talking nonsense**".

The magazine goes even further, initiating a **petition** signed by almost a hundred personalities, including several former French ministers, members of parliament, intellectuals and writers: they are calling for Wikipedia to become "**a truly participatory, responsible, transparent, neutral and fair encyclopedia**".

The case is now in the hands of the lawyers.

➤ **Violation of French national defense secrecy (2013)**

In early March 2013, the **Direction Centrale du Renseignement Intérieur** (DCRI, now the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure, DGSi) wrote⁵¹ to the **Wikimedia Foundation** to request the immediate removal of an article published in French on Wikipedia about a French military installation. The DCRI considered that the article infringed national defense secrets. The Wikimedia Foundation refused.

➤ **The death of Kenneth L. Lay (2006)**

On Wednesday July 5, 2006, **Kenneth L. Lay, CEO of US oil company Enron**, who had just been convicted of fraud involving hundreds of millions of dollars, died.⁵²

At the time, *Reuters* observed the development - "*at an alarming rate and with totally inaccurate information*" - of the Wikipedia page dedicated to the billionaire: "*News outlets began announcing Lay's death at around 10 a.m. on Wednesday. According to Reuters, at 10:06 a.m., Lay's Wikipedia entry stated that he had died 'of an apparent suicide'. Two minutes later, the entry was 'updated' to say that Lay had died 'of an apparent heart attack or suicide'. Within the same minute, a Wiki author backtracked, and the article stated that the cause of death was 'yet to be determined' [...] At 10:11 a.m., the article on Lay concluded, 'The guilt of ruining so many lives finally [sic] led him to his suicide' [...] A minute later, some real news managed to make its way into Wikipedia: 'According to Lay's pastor, the cause was a 'massive coronary' heart attack.' But the reason didn't last long. At 10:39 a.m., a so-called medical expert declared, 'Speculation about the cause of the heart attack led many to believe it was due to the stress of the Enron trial.' Finally, on Wednesday afternoon, the Wikipedia entry on Lay stated that he had been pronounced dead at a hospital in Aspen, Colorado, and had succumbed to a heart attack, citing news sources.*"

⁵¹<https://www.wikimedia.fr/la-dcri-menace-un-administrateur-de-wikipedia-pour-supprimer-un-article/>

⁵²<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/08/AR2006070800135.html>

Washington Post reporter and editor **Frank Ahrens** analyzed this flood of conflicting versions as follows: *"What does all this tell us? That Wikipedia's greatest strength is its greatest weakness. If the assertion that 'history is written by the victors' is too crude, it expresses an underlying truth: every definitive encyclopedia reflects the point of view of its era. This is inevitable [...] An encyclopedia written from many points of view should, in theory, help to eliminate this defect. What's more, however well-versed encyclopedia authors may be in research, there are countless experts on thousands of subjects who know more than Wikipedia's authors; every subject has its fetishists, and all the better for it. If the aim is to compile all verified facts, Wikipedia could be a powerful tool. [...] But here's the fear of Wikipedia: it combines the global reach and authority of an Internet encyclopedia with the worst elements of radicalized bloggers. If you enter a blog, you know what to expect. But if you search an encyclopedia, you're bound to expect something else. Real facts, for example. At its worst, Wikipedia is an active deception, a powerful tool for agitprop rather than information. Some Wikipedia articles contain disclaimers indicating that doubts have been cast on their accuracy. But that's not the same as offering verified data. I'm a fan of Wikipedia and related concepts like "citizen journalism". I just wish they were better.*

➤ **The Chirac couple's "adopted" daughter (2009)**

In 1979, **Jacques Chirac** (then Mayor of Paris, after serving as Prime Minister and future President of the French Republic) and his wife, **Bernadette Chodron de Courcel**, met a group of Boat People fleeing Vietnam at Roissy-Charles-de-Gaulle airport. **Without formally adopting her, they decided to take in one of the refugees, 21-year-old Anh Dao Traxel.**

Thirty years later, Anh Dao Traxel discovered on the Wikipedia page dedicated to her that she had *"abandoned her children"*⁵³, a gravely defamatory accusation which caused her unbearable suffering and serious damage to the association she chaired (and which earned her several decorations, including the Légion d'honneur).

Anh Dao Traxel continues her fight. After being defamed by an Internet user on the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, the adopted daughter of the Chirac family, who lives in Boissy-la-Rivière, has filed a complaint against the site. The author of the insertion, a former friend of her son, acknowledged the facts and apologized. However, the victim declared that she found it *"scandalous that anyone can modify a person's profile without the information being definitively verified and validated by the volunteer administrators, thus enabling people to write insulting or defamatory comments for free, with the sole aim of harming others"*.

➤ **Italian lawyer Cesare Previti (2013)**

On January 30, 2023, Cesare Previti (lawyer, former minister and advisor to Silvio Berlusconi) filed a complaint against the Wikimedia Foundation, claiming that the page dedicated to him was riddled with inaccuracies and defamatory statements, in short, that it was *"pseudo-journalistic gossip fueled by the work of absolutely unreliable subjects"*.⁵⁴

⁵³<https://www.leparisien.fr/essonne-91/boissy-la-riviere-91690/la-fille-adoptive-de-chirac-porte-plainte-contre-wikipedia-04-11-2009-698334.php>

⁵⁴<https://www.firstonline.info/fr/wikipedia-previti-perde-la-causa-contro-la-wikimedia-foundation/>

However, a Roman court disagreed, ruling that "**the Wikimedia Foundation cannot be held responsible for the dissemination of defamatory content**". This is because, under Italian law, the Foundation is a hosting provider (i.e. a space used for publication) and not a content provider. Wikimedia cannot guarantee the accuracy of entries published on Wikipedia, which is the responsibility of individual users. In addition, the Court pointed out that the content of entries can be corrected and modified by anyone".

➤ **Omar Harfouch (2025)**

Omar Harfouch is a Lebanese businessman and media personality living in France, as well as a renowned pianist and composer with an international career.

In January 2025, his Wikipedia page was modified dozens of times by people who deleted all references to his musical and philanthropic activities. Omar Harfouch "*has counted around twenty fake news items on his Wikipedia page, where the veracity of the information published seems to be the least of his worries*". The encyclopedia attributes to him, against all truth, a personal fortune of three billion dollars, as well as links (unverified) with several French political figures.

Omar Harfouch was "*outraged that Wikipedia has become an instrument of propaganda and denigration for some, in the hands of ill-intentioned individuals who are perfectly aware of Wikipedia's shortcomings*".

Legal action is underway at the time of writing.⁵⁵

➤ **Tamaz Somkhishvili (2023-2025)**

Tamaz Somkhishvili is a British businessman of Georgian origin. He has interests in various parts of the world, **including working and investing in Russia and Ukraine.**

He is also a **major philanthropist and a well-known donor to a number of charities, some of which he heads.**

In Kiev, in 2007, he was the promoter of the largest real estate project of recent decades (the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Kharkivska Square) before the project was expropriated and rejected by the city council due to constant violations by the municipal authorities. Since then, he has been on trial with the capital's municipal authorities.

His Wikipedia page⁵⁶ contains **unfounded and seriously defamatory statements**. He is accused of setting up criminal structures to monopolize municipal land in Kiev and Odessa, taking advantage of money-laundering and tax evasion schemes, and using "8 different passports" to move around Ukraine.

⁵⁵<https://entrevue.fr/omar-harfouch-va-porter-plainte-contre-wikipedia-qui-lui-prete-une-fortune-de-3-milliards-de-dollars/>

⁵⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamaz_Somkhishvili

Even more seriously, in the context of the war between Ukraine and Russia, Tamaz Somkhishvili is alleged by Wikipedia to have organized the repair and maintenance of Russian fighter-bombers in Georgia. **This accusation is obviously particularly serious and threatens not only Mr. Somkhishvili's interests but also his freedom and physical safety.**

Despite several attempts and the provision to Wikipedia editors of evidence demonstrating that the accusations are completely false, and despite Wikipedia editors acknowledging that Tamaz Somkhishvili has become the object of concerted attacks in which Wikipedia is used as a tool, no amicable agreement has been reached with the Wikimedia Foundation to correct these "errors".

The investigation carried out by his international lawyers shows, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the (anonymous) authors of the accusations on his page are Ukrainian journalists who have long been at the heart of a vast smear campaign against him, and are even known in Ukraine as the "mercenaries" of smear campaigns like this one.

In this regard, not only has the Wikimedia Foundation been alerted to the facts of the obvious and blatant misinformation being spread using Wikipedia, but also to the weaknesses in Wikipedia's policy that allow such misinformation to be easily disseminated. Not only the Wikimedia Foundation refused to remove the misinformation published in Wikipedia about Tamaz Somkhishvili, it has also refused to address its policy weaknesses. Thus, the Wikimedia Foundation has refused to fulfill its regulatory obligation under the EU's Digital Services Act.

The case of Tamaz Somkhishvili shows that not only can Wikipedia be easily used as a tool in defamation attacks, but also that the Wikimedia Foundation is not prepared to obey the law on its site by not allowing the publication of disinformation on Wikipedia. Furthermore, this case has shown that Wikipedia editors have more leeway to act in a biased way, if they wish, and that they don't have to answer for their wrongdoing. Tamaz Somkhishvili seems to have no choice but to take legal action against the Wikimedia Foundation. It seems that his legal action would be aimed at forcing the Wikimedia Foundation to fight misinformation and comply with the law, as other companies do.

➤ **Claude Moniquet (2016-2025)**

The author of this study has also been honored by Wikipedia. His page describes him as a *"liberal-conservative politician"*, *"a former Belgian journalist"* and *"a former intelligence agent with the French General Directorate for External Security (DGSE)"*, *"born of a practicing Jewish father and a French Catholic mother"*.

Although he was also involved in politics, this only lasted 9 months out of a 47-year career (now aged 67, he started working at the age of 20), so it's surprising that this "quality" is highlighted.

Finally, although he has dual French-Belgian nationality, he has spent most of his media career working for French, Swiss, American and British media, so to describe him as a "Belgian journalist" is an obvious "shortcut". And while his father was Jewish, he was never a practicing Jew and his mother was not Catholic.

In addition to these factual errors, the article is characterized by an obvious ideological bias, putting forward false assertions about his DGSE past (based on the writings of an author convicted in Paris of defamation and undermining state security) in the French special services. On his expertise in anti-terrorism, the authors of this page have chosen to retain only three opinions or comments, all negative, although there are thousands of them on the Internet, and they retain only three of the twenty or so books he has published at the time of writing.

Despite repeated attempts, he was never able to correct these erroneous or incomplete statements.

5- When the damage is done, can you get compensation?

The ten or so cases we've just mentioned (but we could have cited hundreds more) demonstrate the damage that Wikipedia can cause.

They also show that, **in many cases, it is difficult if not impossible - given the *Wikipedia system* - to correct errors, defamatory statements or approximations.**

Finally, there is the possibility of legal recourse. But these procedures are time-consuming, highly technical, difficult to identify precisely the authors and to involve the national chapters of Wikipedia or the Wikimedia Foundation. Finally, they are costly. These delays, difficulties and costs undoubtedly discourage most Wikipedia "victims" from taking legal action.

And since the encyclopedia is sometimes reluctant to admit its wrongdoing, contentious content all too often remains accessible for months or even years.

There are, however, legal safeguards that allow the encyclopedia to be sued, as specialist lawyer Arnaud Dimeglio points out⁵⁷ :

- Wikipedia is **obliged to keep data enabling contributors to be identified, and may therefore be required to disclose them** in response to a legal request. This was the case in 2008 (defamatory and insulting comments).
- In addition to potentially being ordered to disclose identifying data, **Wikipedia can also be held liable if it fails to promptly remove manifestly illegal content.**
- In another case, the interim relief judge ordered Wikipedia to disclose the IP address of the author of the disputed comments. **However, as the one-year retention period had expired**, the plaintiffs were unable to obtain the user's contact details from Free.

However, in France at least, since Act no. 2021-998 of July 30, 2021 on the prevention of acts of terrorism and intelligence, and the Act of March 2, 2022 to combat school harassment, it has become more difficult to identify the perpetrators of offenses such as damage to a

⁵⁷<https://www.village-justice.com/articles/responsabilite-wikiped>

person's reputation. The claimant must first provide proof of injury. Failing this, the claim will be rejected.

Finally, even if the offender is convicted, the fines are low.

At the European level, Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation should be required to comply with the EU's Digital Services Act and actively combat misinformation, which the Wikimedia Foundation currently allows to be published on Wikipedia. If the Wikimedia Foundation truly aspires for Wikipedia to be a true source of free knowledge and its motto not to be rooted in hypocrisy, it should proactively tackle misinformation rather than resist taking action even when credible evidence of such misinformation is presented.

The encyclopedia is quick to advise against legal action⁵⁸ : *"Threats of legal action are rarely the best way to end a conflict on Wikipedia. Very often, these threats are the result of a page not being edited according to certain people's wishes; they reflect a lack of understanding of the project's rules and recommendations, and they exacerbate tensions far more than they resolve them".*

The encyclopedia points out that *"Since its creation, Wikipedia has made every effort to comply with the various laws. Specialists on the subject are present within the foundation that hosts it, and members of the community also follow this subject closely".*

According to Wikipedia, *"threats of legal action against other Wikipedia users pose several problems: they intimidate contributors and seriously hamper the freedom to edit pages. They threaten Wikipedia's neutrality, which is a principle of Wikipedia, and risk revealing a new bias in articles; they damage the atmosphere and cause a lack of trust within the Wikipedia community. The result is a reduction in our ability to act quickly and effectively in mutual good faith."*

The encyclopedia doesn't even hesitate to brandish what could be interpreted as a threat or, at any rate, an intimidation maneuver: *"Wikipedia has had bad experiences in the past with users threatening to take legal action with the aim of causing harm. This type of action can damage your reputation on Wikipedia".*

6- Our recommendations

We recognize that, in its conception and form, **the Wikipedia project corresponds to new aspirations in today's globalized and interconnected society**. These aspirations run deep, as evidenced by the number of contributors to the encyclopedia in every language and its worldwide success.

It would therefore be pointless to try to oppose it.

However, it is equally obvious, as this brief study has shown, that the very functioning of the encyclopedia - the trust in the "intelligence of crowds", the absence of formal hierarchical structures, the anonymity of contributors, etc. - allows for all kinds of errors and abuses,

⁵⁸ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia:Pas_de_menace_de_poursuites_judiciaires/Alt

whether intentional or unintentional. - allows for every kind of error and abuse, whether intentional or unintentional.

Admittedly, **the Wikimedia Foundation claims that these incidents are a minority and represent only a tiny fraction of its content.** But the fact remains that they do exist and tend to multiply in articles relating to people, "sensitive" subjects or "hot" news, and that they **can have disastrous consequences for the people or entities that fall victim to them.**

In a society that is increasingly polarized, subject to multiple tensions that threaten its cohesion, where misinformation is reaching unprecedented heights, and at a time when artificial intelligence is developing (with both beneficial and disastrous effects), this trend can only become more pronounced.

It is therefore necessary to introduce changes to the way the encyclopedia works, to prevent these "errors" or at least limit their effects.

We thought long and hard about what was necessary, reasonable and compatible with the general philosophy of the Wikipedia project.

Clearly, the Wikimedia Foundation will never agree to go back on the encyclopedia's collaborative aspect, open to all contributors, nor on the anonymity of its contributors. Nor will it put in place a mechanism enabling it to check whether a contributor's knowledge really enables him or her to deal with a subject, or whether an ideological commitment (in the broadest sense of the term) risks marring the "*neutrality of points of view*" that is one of its five founding principles.

There are, however, simple ways of asserting the rights of individuals, groups or entities who may have been wronged. The first, of course, is to prevent this from happening in the first place. **We therefore advocate that every Wikipedia contributor be reminded of the ethical and legal principles that are generally those of publishing. This could be done by means of a short online training course.**

But this is obviously not enough, especially when the incidents are not simple errors but are due to ideological bias, lack of caution or deliberate ignorance of the rules.

A formal measure is therefore necessary.

In democratic countries, press and publishing law stipulates that every author is legally responsible for what he or she writes or publishes if his or her words violate the law or unfairly damage the reputation of a person or entity. In the case of Wikipedia, the anonymity of contributors precludes such recourse.

It is therefore possible to invoke the liability of the director of publication or editor-in-chief (in the case of the media), or of the publisher in the case of a book.

In France, for example, the same applies to illegal content on the Internet .⁵⁹

We therefore recommend that each language edition of Wikipedia should have a clearly identified editorial manager, whose name and contact details automatically appear at the end of each published article. This editorial manager would be an employee of the Wikimedia Foundation (the latter's profits more than cover this effort).

It would then be possible to turn to this manager and **demand the publication of a "right of reply"** (according to the technical and legal procedures laid down by law for press offenses) **and, if necessary, the modification or outright removal of the offending text.** This director could be **obliged to publish the right of reply or to have the undesirable content modified or removed within a "reasonable" timeframe** (e.g. 48 hours), on pain of prosecution.

In addition, **it could be decided that this editorial manager - possibly assisted by a small team - should control a priori new publications on sensitive subjects or individuals.**

Of course, some will dismiss these proposals as a form of "censorship". This is clearly not the case. How can we justify, given Wikipedia's importance in public debate, the fact that the encyclopedia can publish anything about anyone? And without any control or responsibility? This question is all the more important in today's world of immediate communication.

This is more than an abuse: it's a serious ethical error that threatens us all. As we emphasized at the start of this study, the right to information is a powerful imperative. But **protecting people and their rights - whether individual or collective - is just as important. Otherwise, tomorrow we'll be living in a world worthy of George Orwell's 1984, in which defamation, harassment and lies will reign supreme.**

⁵⁹<https://www.servicepublic.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F32075#:~:text=Vous%20pouvez%20engager%20la%20responsabilit%C3%A9,a%20r%C3%A9network%20social%2C%20etc.>