



ADMM Cybersecurity and
Information Centre of Excellence

UPDATE ON THE INFORMATION DOMAIN

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Wikipedia: The Overlooked Platform for Information Warfare

INTRODUCTION

1. Founded in 2001, Wikipedia is a free internet-based encyclopedia, and has become the go-to source of information for many people around the world. People rely on Wikipedia for information on various topics ranging from history, current affairs to pop culture, conspiracy theories, and even rare attraction sites like *Hunderprutterutchebane* – a famous roller coaster in Denmark with a dog-flatulence theme.
2. Putting the world's knowledge just a click away plays a huge role in providing people with information, and also influencing people's perception of reality. After all, Wikipedia's billions of facts have helped many understand the world better. As one of the most visited websites on the internet, Wikipedia's most distinctive feature is building a ground-up repository of information that is constantly updated through the wisdom of the masses. However, this is arguably also its biggest vulnerability since practically anyone can make edits to its articles, including malicious actors who leverage Wikipedia to spread misinformation and disinformation.

Information Threats to Wikipedia

3. According to *The Atlantic*, the operations of Wikipedia has since evolved to allow Wikipedia's editors¹ to take into consideration factual dilemmas instead of deferring to experts and professionals. In other words, editors have assumed a new level of authority, where proposals for tweaks are now coming from ordinary readers instead of professionals and experts; unlike conventional encyclopedias such as Britannica where edits are credentials-based. The fundamentally unique and open form of information sources and production has made Wikipedia susceptible to information threats, as edits can be made to Wikipedia pages to advance certain ideological or political agenda.

4. As anyone can edit most of Wikipedia's pages, state-linked groups may also mount a concerted operation to alter the content on Wikipedia pages to further their nationalistic interests. A *BBC* report alleged that a few Saudi officials had posed as independent Wikipedia editors to alter Wikipedia's content, in an attempt to control information about the treatment of political detainees in Saudi Arabia² as well as narratives about the country on Wikipedia. They also attempted to sway public opinions by promoting positive content about the Saudi government and deleting those that are negative. While the alleged alteration was later denied by Wikipedia due to insufficient evidence, Wikipedia acknowledged that there were inaccuracies on pages related to the Middle East, suggesting possible attempts of information manipulation.

¹ All contributors to Wikipedia are formally known as editors of the encyclopedia. Any individuals can register to be a Wikipedia editor with a verified email address.

² Political detainees are people whose actions or beliefs are contrary to those of the government.

5. Wikipedia articles can also be subjected to bias or manipulation by malicious actors with specific agendas. For instance, a group of Wikipedia editors have been promoting a skewed version of history on Wikipedia by whitewashing the role of Polish society in the Holocaust and bolstering stereotypes about the Jews. According to *Aish*, countless Wikipedia entries have equalised the sufferings of the Jewish and Polish people during the Holocaust, ignoring the fact that the Jews were more viciously targeted by the Nazi regime. The editors also introduced hateful and false anti-Jewish ideas into countless Wikipedia entries, including alleged information that the Jews had conspired with the Communists to undermine Poland, and that the Jews have controlled Poland historically, and continued to do so today. Wikipedia entries like these can be an issue of concern as they distort readers' understanding of historical facts and information.

6. Information sources derived from user-generated content do have profound effects on important social outcomes. As reported by *Legal Futures*, it was observed that senior judges were relying on Wikipedia's write-ups on judicial rulings when drafting decisions. The use of freely available internet sources has made it plausible for false information to spread via popular and widely-used online information repositories such as Wikipedia, which could lead to serious consequences in real-life legal settings, and in some cases, incorrect judicial decisions.

7. As Wikipedia continues to be a platform with valuable information sources, it is imperative for Wikipedia, as well as other relevant agencies, to ensure that the information shared on Wikipedia remains accurate. To mitigate possible information threats, Wikipedia has set up several communities such as a counter-vandalism unit and volunteer fact-checkers committee. In addition, other safeguards to consider include:

MITIGATING INFORMATION THREATS TO WIKIPEDIA




Regular Monitoring & Patrolling

Wikipedia committee of editors should monitor & remove any false, misleading information found on Wikipedia articles

Always Verify Sources

Wikipedia editors should cite credible references. In turn, this allows readers to evaluate the accuracy and validity of the content.




Educate The Public And Train Wikipedia Editors

To educate the public on steps to evaluate Wikipedia articles; to train editors and provide resources on Wikipedia's policies, guidelines, and best practices.

References:
https://www.libraryguides.vu.edu.au/evaluating_information_guide/wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_policies#Conduct

8. Governments and other organisations have also urged Wikipedia to implement stricter policies and guidelines. According to *NewVision*, the European Union (EU) had designated several online platforms, including Wikipedia, to enforce stricter rules under a new EU legislation known as the Digital Services Act (DSA). The DSA has a wide range of objectives, including compelling platforms to better protect children, and to strengthen transparency around digital services. Failure to abide by the new legislation may subject online platforms to fines up to six percent of their annual global sales for repeated infringements.

CONTACT DETAILS

All reports can be retrieved from our website at www.acice-asean.org/resource/.

For any queries and/or clarifications, please contact ACICE at ACICE@defence.gov.sg.

Prepared by:

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- 3 Wikipedia Editors Deliberately Distorted Holocaust Articles
[Link: <https://www.aish.com/wikipedia-editors-deliberately-distorted-holocaust-articles/>]
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