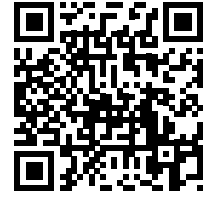


Collaborative platforms to bring about change



Jimmy Wales

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Lecture presenter:

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Abstract: The main topics covered in this lecture are central to contemporary discussions surrounding participation, communication, misinformation, fake news, censorship and freedom of speech. As ways to approach these topics, the lecturer talks about collaborative platforms and how they can inspire societies and governments to overcome contemporary challenges, finally, to end his discussion, Wales answers some popular questions from audience members.

Key words: participation, misinformation, fake news, censorship, freedom of expression, collaborative platforms.



DIOGO COSTA: Participation and collaboration, misinformation, fake news, censorship and freedom of expression. These are the subjects which are in the centre of the contemporary debates and also, at the heart of the debate that we will have now. In order to open the “Astro Stage”, we will welcome Jimmy Wales, founder of Wikipedia, to talk about how collaborative platforms are able to inspire governments and societies to handle the contemporary dilemmas. Jimmy Wales is a futurist and technology leader, who is one of the prominent names in internet history as well as, the founder of Wikipedia and WT Social. Wales features on top lists, such as, the Times magazine’s 100 most influential people and leaders of the World Economic Forum. With you, the Wikipedia founder, Jimmy Wales.



JIMMY WALES: Hello, thank you for having me. Great. Shall I just begin?



DIOGO: Yes, please. Go ahead.



JIMMY: Very good! So, I am going to talk tonight about the themes that were mentioned in the introduction. Thus, I have come up with this sort of amusing concept: “We are all humans, let’s liberate the internet from the machines.” Then, this is, in fact, to talk about the human side of how Wikipedia works. Besides that, how important it is to think about the algorithms that are running the internet and how they are contributing, positively or negatively.

Therefore, let’s go back and discuss the very beginnings of Wikipedia. The origin of Wikipedia is, for all of us, to imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge. Hence, that is what we are doing at Wikipedia. So, we will see where we are today just to understand how far along we have come.

Thus, Wikipedia is seen every month by over one and a half billion unique devices. However, it does not necessarily mean one and a half billion people. Since, most people will see Wikipedia on their mobile device and also on their laptop computer. Anyway, one and a half billion devices is a lot. Furthermore, we think it is 700, 800, 900 million people, every month. So, there are over 50 million entries in Wikipedia, across 288 languages. But actually, there are a few more languages than that. When I look at these numbers, these are the languages that are really thoroughly launched. Besides that, we have new languages launching all the time, but some of them are quite small. So, I stick to the ones that have really gotten it rolling. Then, if you count all the languages, it’s over 300 now.

Therefore, where did we start? It is a really fascinating thing. I mean, we live in an age of technology and algorithms, but of course, Wikipedia came from a very, very simple beginning. This is, in fact, what the homepage looked like on the very first day that I set up Wikipedia. When I installed the software. So, you can see the American flag logo. Which was only there for a short period of time. It just happened to be what I had on my computer at the time. It was just a file that happened to be there.



Then, I typed, as you can see: “Hello World”. And those were the first words of Wikipedia. Moreover, this early software was so primitive. So, this is something that amazes you to hear about, even today. In the beginning, there were no real accounts. You could log in as anyone. This means that you could give yourself a username, but there were no passwords. Thus, anyone could pretend to be anyone else. And that was pretty crazy. Besides that, very little history was kept initially, only the most recent revisions, no more than that. But, we very quickly changed that, to hold all of the past revisions.

So, what was the result of that? Well, a lot of it was not a great idea. We launched this way because we did not have any money. Hence, I used an open-source Wiki software package called UseModWiki. Despite that, it was not terrible either. We were a close-knit community and nobody was really paying attention to us. It was just our little project.

Thus, we were just beginning to work and to think about how to build an encyclopedia, in a way that no one had ever done before. Then, we obviously introduced real passwords and etc. In addition to that, we started to improve the software, as we learned what we needed to make Wikipedia.

On the other hand, what still remains today is: deliberate vulnerability, which is part of the Wiki philosophy. So, it is very easy to participate in Wikipedia. You can go to over 99% of the pages in Wikipedia, click on edit and modify whatever you like. Although, obviously, lots of people are monitoring and watching. But we really like that ease of entry. It is very simple to get started in Wikipedia. Thus, we do not try to gatekeep, upfront. Instead, what we do is to focus on accountability.

In this sense, I have this analogy that I like to tell people, so you can think about the design issues for Wikipedia. Hence, what I invite you to do is to imagine that you have been asked to design a restaurant. A completely clean sheet design, you can design it any way you want. And, I do not just mean how it looks inside, but, the whole concept of how a restaurant works.

So, you might think to yourself: “Okay, well, in my restaurant, I would like to serve steak, because I like steaks. And if people are going to eat steak, then I know I have to give them knives. But, if there is one thing we know about people with knives, it is that they might stab each other. Something terrible might happen. Then you think: Okay, well, we can solve this problem by putting everybody in a cage. We will lock everybody away from everybody else. So, they cannot hurt each other.”

However, this is obviously ridiculous. This is a silly idea. Because, if this is how we design everything in society, we would have a bad society, a society of mistrust. Where we would assume the worst of everyone, and we would not have openness, neither collaboration. Instead, we would just focus on designing for the bad people of the world. So, I do not think we should do that. I think we should primarily design for the good people. Therefore, this is really how Wikipedia has grown through the years.

Furthermore, there is a great deal of writing in Wikipedia about how Wikipedia works and what are all of the editorial guidelines and the rules, and so forth. Moreover, what really boils down to these five pillars, which emerged over time, in the first couple of years of Wikipedia, as being our core principles. First of all, Wikipedia is an encyclopedia. So, this means that Wikipedia is not a wide open, free speech forum. It is not a place to come and offer your opinions on everything in the world. It is a very specific type of reference work, which summarizes human knowledge.

Secondly, Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view. This is one of the earliest things that I ever wrote about Wikipedia. So, the neutral point of view is non-negotiable. In fact, we would not have a huge discussion about whether we should be political, whether we should have a particular agenda, either for religion, against religion, for this, for that. That is not the Wikipedia way. The Wikipedia way is to try as hard as possible to be as neutral as we can. In other words, to present all sides of every question, in a fair way, so that the reader can learn, then understand, and make their own decisions.

A third pillar is that Wikipedia is freely licensed. Everything in Wikipedia is under a free license. So, this is similar to a free software, an open-source software, as you probably know. It means that you have the right to copy, to modify, to redistribute modified versions. I think you can do all of these things commercially or non commercially. Hence, that is really a core part of our philosophy. When people are contributing to Wikipedia, they are not just contributing to this one humanitarian project, they are contributing to a storehouse of knowledge that can be reused and repurposed in many, many different ways. In fact, we see this today, for instance, if you ask a question of Apple Siri, or Amazon Alexa, or even Google, very often, you will get an answer that is read directly from Wikipedia. So that is because we make them freely available to everyone to reuse as they see fit.

The fourth pillar is one that I think has been really crucial to helping us avoid a lot of the toxic nature of what goes on in most internet social sites. Therefore, Wikipedians should be respectful and civil. Hence, the original rule for this was “no personal attacks”. The idea here is that we are trying to write an encyclopedia. Thus, if you want to yell at people or insult them, there are plenty of other places on the internet for that. But we (Wikipedia) have a mission here. We have a job: to create an encyclopedia, and we should be kind and respectful to each other. Besides that, we should think about what we are saying. Then, we should try to find the best in other people, in order to bring out the best in the encyclopedia.

Finally, perhaps the most surprising rule or the surprising pillar of Wikipedia, is “IAR.” Which stands for “Ignore All Rules.” This is a strange rule to have, but we do have it. And what does it mean? It does not mean chaos. It means you should not have to learn all the rules of Wikipedia, in order to be able to participate. If you see a way to make Wikipedia better, just do that, and do not worry too much about the rules. Thus, if you break a small rule, people should not yell at you. Instead, they should help you, teach you and bring you on board. The idea is: we should always remember that the rules are not nearly as important as the goal. Hence, the goal is for Wikipedia to be a great encyclopedia.

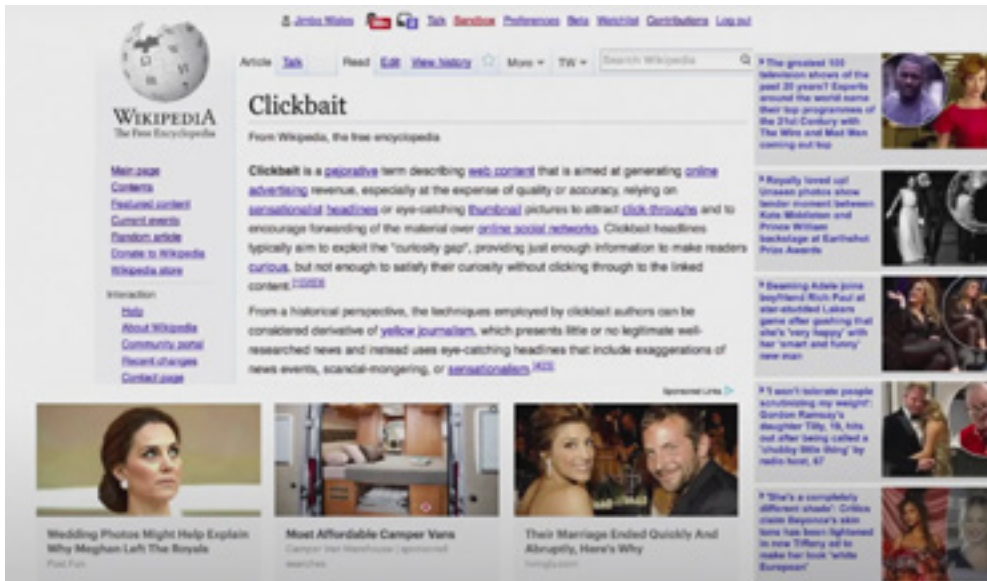
Moreover, we are very unusual as an organization. We are the fifth most popular website in the world. We have an enormous amount of traffic. Incredibly, as famous as any of the major internet brand names. And yet, we are a charity. We are a non-profit organization that I set up, a great many years ago. Now, Wikipedia is 20 years old and the Wikimedia foundation, I set up a couple of years later. Because of that, it actually has a huge impact on how we think about what we are doing, on how we make decisions and so forth. I will talk more about that when we move forward and talk about how things are going on the internet these days.

Therefore, we have a unique place in the culture. Wikipedia is a community site, we are a non-profit site. Besides that, we do not use algorithms, except in very minimal ways. And we really strive hard to be factual and to be neutral.

So, do we really live in a post-fact world? This is a saying that people have said the last few years. Thus, there has been a lot of concern about the rise of misinformation and disinformation. Let's examine that for a moment.

Inside Wikipedia, we are very passionate about facts. Accordingly, Wikipedia is spending an enormous amount of time debating about reliable sources, about what is true. But what is going on outside Wikipedia? Well, outside Wikipedia, we have seen something: the rise of the advertising-only business model. And, this has been incredibly destructive. It has been destructive for journalism, for social media. Thus, I am going to explain why. Once, I think it is a really important concept.

First of all, the thing we need to understand is that the business model always drives incentives. Whatever your business does to make money, that is going to determine what the business does. And this is true actually, for a non-profit or a for-profit. It doesn't really matter if it is a for-profit or non-profit. Whatever your business model is, that drives the incentive of the organization. Moreover, the advertising only social media wants you to click. It wants you addicted. It wants you outraged. They want to keep you on the site as long as possible. In other words, engagement is the buzzword. And this is quite bad. It leads to things like clickbait. We all know clickbait, it is the screaming headlines or pictures that cause you to click. Even though you are not necessarily that interested. But it is something very tempting to click. Sometimes, people ask me: "Why don't you put ads in Wikipedia? You could just put a few ads on Wikipedia and you would make so much money. You would not have to ask for donations". But then I think, well, Wikipedia might end up looking like this:



If you recognize this layout, it is the layout from MailOnline. Which is, by some measures, the number one most popular news site in the world. And it is full of clickbait. It is clickbait in the sense of all these headlines, which are all about celebrities and drama. Besides that, these are ads, very cheesy kinds of ads, that just get you to click. Therefore, I do not think anybody wants Wikipedia to end up like this. I think of Wikipedia as a temple for the mind. It is a place where you go to think, to learn, to reflect. So, we avoid this model. However, that model does not just make a sort of unpleasant website, it actually does something much more damaging. For instance, here is a picture, an absolutely gorgeous one.



Thus, I think this is a really interesting picture. It is showing a sunrise in Beijing, on a giant television screen. Then, you can see, it is a very smoggy day, with a lot of pollution. And this image accompanies this news story in the MailOnline: “China starts televising the sunrise on giant TV screens because Beijing is so clouded in smog”. Well, that is a really interesting human interest story. It tells a story about China. It tells a story about pollution. However, the only problem with this story is that it is completely not true. And, it has been widely debunked online: “No, people in China do not have to watch the sunset, or rather the sunrise, on a giant TV”. This is not what the advertisement is about. It turns out that it is simply an advertising billboard saying: “Come to this part of China where we have beautiful sunrises, it is a great holiday”. Therefore, it has nothing to do with smog. The advertisement is completely unrelated to the headline of the story. The Mail just made that up and it is just not a true story. But they got thousands of clicks. They were shared hundreds of times. And that model actually works. In a case like this, it is not legally a problem. Because there is no libel, there is no slur, it is just false. And that is it.

So, what is the solution? It has been assumed that advertising is the only possible model for social media. If everybody has to pay, too few people are on to make it genuinely social and influential. Hence, you can imagine, if you logged into a social site and you invited your friends, but everybody saw that they had to pay, so, they would not join it. Thus, there would not be enough people. Therefore, it would be kind of hard to have social media. Nevertheless, as we have seen, that model of advertising-only is a formula which leads to the destruction of important human values. Once it leads to clickbait and to addictive technologies. And it is just not right.

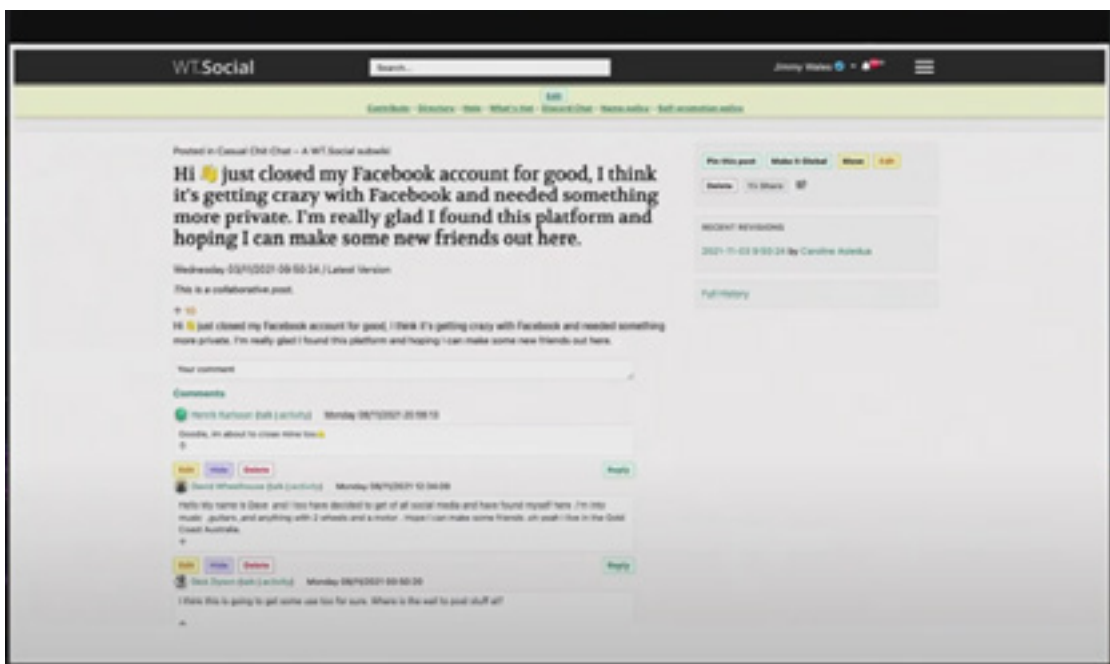
What we want is, when you do see that little banner that pops up and says: “Would you donate to Wikipedia?”. We want you to think: “Wow, Wikipedia is good. Wikipedia is something that matters in my life. And I should chip in a little bit of money”. So, people do it. Therefore, it is incredibly successful for us. We are able to get enough money to survive. In fact, we build our reserves every year. Because, we have a strong financial model which is really working.

Thus, I think we should think about this. It only takes a small fraction of people to pay, to keep the service going. Most people do not pay. And that is totally okay. The important thing to keep Wikipedia going, is a strong community of people who care about getting things right. As long as we have a healthy community, who are very passionate about making Wikipedia, as good as it possibly can be. Then, we know that enough people will donate to help us with our work, to keep it going. And that really, really is working for us.

Accordingly, the Wiki way tells us that resilience is key. Go back now and think about my analogy from before. Hence, Wiki works, not because bad people are not allowed to edit it. On the contrary, they are, at least for a little while, until they get themselves banned. So, it works because good people are given the tools to make things resilient. If we go back and think about that analogy of the steak knives, what happens in real life when someone attacks? Well, it does happen. It is very rare, but it does happen. And what do we do? Well, sometimes we see a brave person, who will jump up and tackle the bad guy, knock them down to save people and stop the attack. And someone is calling the police. Someone is calling an ambulance. And we solve the problem. However, sometimes it is a tragedy. We cannot do it perfectly. But in general, we accept that there is a small risk of something bad happening. For this reason, we build systems that are resilient, so that it is not a complete disaster and the bad people do not win, ultimately. Then, we can have healthy and happy societies that are also open societies. So, do not forget the parable of the steak knives. I believe it is incredibly important to think about how we build better societies, better open cultures. And also, to understand that we cannot make things perfect. But, we can actually build for health and build for resilience.

Furthermore, I have a new pilot project. I invite you to check it out. It is called: WT. Social. In which I am trying to apply these ideas to social networks. So, it is a site, in which we have no ads and no pay wall. Instead, we have voluntary payment. Thus, when you sign up for the site, we are going to ask you: “Would you like to pay?”. If you do not want to pay, just say: “No, it is fine. I do not want to pay”. That is fine too. But please, do pay. We could use the money. And the idea is to say, let’s try a different strategy. In this strategy, we will not have an incentive to keep you on the site as much as possible. We will not have an incentive to just keep you addicted, so we can show you more ads. On the contrary, we have an incentive to build something meaningful in your life, to bring together good quality people, to think through ideas with you, to make your life better in various ways. Therefore, if we do a good job of that, then eventually you will say: “You know what? This is worthwhile. I am going to chip in a little bit of money to make this continue to happen”.

Here is a great post that was just posted yesterday: “I just closed my Facebook account for good. I think it is getting crazy with Facebook and I needed something more private. I am really glad I found this platform and hoping I can make some new friends out here”. Well, we are a small community, but we loved to see that. We would like to see more people coming in and saying: “I do not like what I am seeing out there on social media. I am going to try something new, something that is healthier”. So hopefully, we can build something amazing.



Well, thank you. That is the end of my prepared remarks. And then I believe we have got time for some questions.

I think the first question was: “Why don’t we have more platforms like Wikipedia?”. I think the answer is that the advertising model has been very easy. For a very long time, we have not had as good a payment layer on the internet as we might like. However, that has gotten better. Thus, we are seeing that newspapers, for example, are able to charge for content, which is very helpful. In other words, it is a newspaper that needs to ask people to subscribe. Again, they have different incentives from newspapers that simply want as many clicks as possible. So, I think that is helpful. Besides that, I am very interested to see what will come from what people are calling Web Three: payments enabled, web using, crypto Ethereum sort of contracts. That is a bubble right now. There is a lot of hype. But I think we are beginning to see some interesting ideas there. Then, they might lead us to a different set of business models for the web.

I always have this question: “What advice do I have for people who are interested in innovation?”. Therefore, one of the things that I always talk about is the importance of being comfortable with failure. This is a fact about innovation: if you are trying to innovate, to do something different, something new, hence, many times it will not work, things will fail.

Accordingly, organizations need to think about resiliency. They need to think about how oftentimes, things will fail. So, they need to be comfortable with that. Moreover, there is a myth of entrepreneurship that comes about, because we see a handful of people like, Bill Gates or Elon Musk or someone. Hence, it seems that they never have had a project that failed. Besides that, at a young age, they came up with a brilliant idea and it went straight to the moon. Then, they became incredibly famous. But that is not the way it is, for most leaders. It is not the way it is, for most innovation. Most innovation involves trial and error. It involves making mistakes. Therefore, I think that people really need to get comfortable with that. For young people in particular, who are trying to do something innovative. This might be in a business context, as an entrepreneur, or even in governments. Since, it is very easy to follow the same path that everyone else is following. Because if you fail then, well, that is fine. Everybody fails, because the whole system is not working. On the other hand, it takes a little bit of courage to be ready to say: “No, let’s try something different and it might not work. We may fail”.



DIOGO: Thank you so much for answering a couple of popular questions. Well, another popular question within our platform is about how most social networks have incentives that favor polarization and agitation, over-learning and persuasion. “What can we do to make the online environment to be more like Wikipedia and less like Twitter?”



JIMMY: I think that it is very hard, given the current business models. So, I think that it is a real issue and we, as consumers and users, should be vocal. In fact, we should begin leaving these platforms, if they are not satisfying us. For instance, I use Twitter. But I do not use Facebook much anymore, I only go on there if I want to chat with some old friends with whom I am more connected on Facebook. However, as a daily matter, I just decided I do not find it helpful, nor pleasant.

On the other hand, Twitter, I find it very difficult to quit. Because, it is addictive and that is the problem with addictive technologies. Besides that, there are a lot of great people on Twitter. Yet, the problem is that the platform is really designed around conflict and it is not very helpful. Thus, for me, one of the things that I have done personally, I have installed a browser extension that limits my amount of time on certain websites each day. So, when I'm working, during a Workday, I only allow myself 10 minutes on Twitter. Because, I do need it for business reasons. I do post there. It is important to be there. Even so, I just think these are the kinds of things that we all have to start doing to say: “Look, we are going to limit our interaction with technologies that we are not finding helpful in our lives”.

Moreover, I do not think there is anything top down that governments can do to fix this. I think it is partly human nature. But it is also an opportunity for innovation, for really thinking about different business models, different types of social platforms that are really optimized around healthy psychology and healthy ideas and all of that. I mean, even now, like I said, I still use Facebook to connect to old friends. I think it is really wonderful that you can see pictures of your friends' kids, that you have not seen in a long time, and all that kind of good stuff. Therefore, avoiding the bad pieces of those technologies is becoming incredibly important these days.



DIOGO: Another question from the audience, “What can we learn from the collaborative initiative Wikipedia to enhance services such as education and public health?”



JIMMY: Well, I think in many organizations, we still have a much too hierarchical view of how information should flow. Hence, there are the big bosses and the departments, so, the information flows down, down, down. In other words, it is not flat and open, in the same way that a Wiki is. Therefore, I do think that if we want collaboration and we want people to learn from each other, we have to recognize that the organization has to actually make some changes. For instance, to encourage that and to help it flourish, mixing people from different areas, not breaking things into such rigid hierarchies.

And also, having a culture that says: “Sometimes, we are having conversations in a positive way, and we do not have a specific objective. Namely, to improve the standing of our department or whatever. We are just trying to understand the world better, so that we, as an organization, can be more resilient”. And so, this can be on education or on all kinds of government services. Hence, the idea is to say: “Look, we have a specific job we need to do, but actually these days we need to be very open to quality ideas coming from anywhere in the organization”.



DIOGO: Jimmy, what is your thought on legislation about content removal right now? In Brazil, the Congress is discussing a content removal bill called, “Fake news law”. Other countries have also moved towards allowing governments to remove content that is esteemed false or is against public interest, or even for the right to be forgotten. Thus, “What is your opinion on these kinds of policies?”



JIMMY: I think, in general, they are very dangerous. Although they sound good, people can understand that there is a problem. The real risk, it is very often, the governments themselves, who are putting forward false information and so forth. Hence, just giving the United States, as an example, because it is very famous. I do not think anyone would argue that we would be better off, if Donald Trump had been able to remove news stories that he did not like, about the election results. Despite being a rather dramatic example, it just shows how we can go in a really bad direction. However, that would not happen in the United States because of the First Amendment.

But of course, around the world, the laws can be much more flexible around freedom of expression. And I think it is a real problem. Therefore, in general, it is not something that I support. At the same time, I do think that some reforms are possible. Particularly, reforms around harassment, threats of violence, things like this. Which are not always handled in a timely manner. Besides that, most countries are not investing nearly enough money in pursuing cybercrime and fraud. And so, those are real problems that we can do something about. But I think it is very dangerous to allow governments to start deciding which ideas are true, which ideas are false. We know that normally, it does not end very well.



DIOGO: Thank you! Another question from the public: “How do we achieve more diversity and representativeness in a polarized environment and of fake profiles?”



JIMMY: I think it is an interesting and very hard question. For social networking platforms, it really depends on the context and the nature of what they are trying to do. For instance, if we think about what I call “old Facebook”. Facebook was about connecting to your friends and you would have chats with them. So that is not an environment that is normally particularly diverse and, nor is that lack of diversity particularly a problem. Although that reflects a broader problem in society.

But that is a different story. Whereas, when we look at a more public facing broadcast. Whether it is on Facebook or typically on Twitter. There is this very complicated question around, how can they both keep an open, free speech environment, which they very much want to have. On the other hand, this is a lot harder than what we try to do at Wikipedia, where we say: “We are not an open, free speech environment. We are an encyclopedia”. So, we need sources and so forth. But if you have got a little box on the screen that says: “What are you thinking?”. So, type your random thoughts. Then, some people are going to have horrible thoughts. And some people are going to say abusive things. Hence, drawing that line is incredibly difficult.

Therefore, my solution to this, even though it is imperfect, it is what we are working on at WT.Social. Because, a top-down content moderation by a company is never going to scale very well. It is never going to be effective, since it is going to involve the company making decisions about things that are far too hard for them to even understand. And for me, the better example or the better idea is to put more power in the hands of the users. In other words, find the most trusted users. Then, give them the power to control the environment and trust them to do that. Because you cannot scale the problem. And that is really the Wiki way to say: “Look, the Wikimedia Foundation cannot decide what is true or not.”

But we have a great community. Thus, we make people administrators, who are great people and they control what is happening. And that works reasonably well.



DIOGO: Another question from our platform is about “Institutional Sclerosis.” Institutional Sclerosis happens when systems become less dynamic to favor special interests and preserve the status quo. Hence, “How do you prevent institutional sclerosis on Wikipedia?”



JIMMY: Well, in some ways we are subject to it. Therefore, this is something that we have to focus on. There is no magic answer to this. I think it is a very human problem. “Special interests” is not how I would frame it in Wikipedia, but the truth is: we grow rigid sometimes. Because, we have been doing things and they work really well for a long time. Even so, we know that we should remain open to new ideas. But it is hard.

In this sense, at times, people come in with a new idea. Oftentimes, they think it is a new idea. But, in fact, it is an old idea, which we have heard a million times. So, we know why it will not work. However, we have to really focus our minds and try hard to treat any new idea that comes in, with respect. And say: “Okay, look, we know what we are doing. We think this is working pretty well. Although we also believe we can improve”. So we should listen. Since we have certain areas of Wikipedia, such as Wikipedia policy, where I think we do have a problem. For example, how many administrators do we have in the large language versions of Wikipedia? Well, it has become quite difficult to become an administrator. Because there are a lot of hurdles to get through. On the one hand, there are good reasons for that. On the other hand, it does mean that we are not making enough administrators. We know what our problem is and I think most Wikipedians would agree with that. But there are about 10 different possible solutions. Thus, we have a really hard time choosing between the 10 different solutions. So, that is our own version of an area where we know we need to change, yet we cannot decide which change to make. Then, we were a little bit paralyzed. But I think we will get through that.

Therefore, it is the kind of thing that I think every organization - whether it is a formal organization, like a company or a non-profit, or an informal organization, like the Wikipedia community - still has to face these issues. Namely, you can become too entrenched in doing things that you have always done. Thus, you will miss opportunities to improve.



DIOGO: “Do you know examples of public organizations or political parties that have used the Wiki model to success?”



JIMMY: I have heard a few examples. I mean, I do know that there are efforts, in several different political parties, mostly at the local level, that I have seen to use Wikis in their work. For instance, to work on policy papers, to hash out strategies, things like that. That is really mainly using it as a software tool. More than really being a completely open kind of Wiki.

Wiki is a great tool for making an encyclopedia. It is a great tool for some other things. But it is not a great tool for everything. However, I think some of the Wiki philosophy, for instance, the idea of openness, of being ready to hear a great idea from a surprising source, I think that is really valuable. Hence, a lot of successful political parties need to do that. Because, very often, it can be the thing that a political party loses over and over again. Since they cannot change their ways. In other words, they have got a certain set of policies, which are outdated.

Although the intentions are good, they are not meeting the needs of the people who are voters. Then, they do not get elected. So, they need to really break out of that, open their minds and listen to the voters. On that account, the political parties should think about how, given the values that they believe in, what are the policies that they need, and what are the policies that the voters need?

Thus, that is why we do not always do very well in political parties.



DIOGO: We have a question about voluntary payment. “Do you think that we need more platforms where people pay for it? And if so, how do we achieve that instead of relying on ads?”



JIMMY: I do not have anything against advertising as a business model. Except, when it becomes the only business model. Particularly, for journalism. It is very unhealthy. However, we do see the rise of new payment models. A lot of newspapers are finding that people are willing to pay. I think in part, their willingness to pay has not changed. It is just that, their ability to pay has gotten a lot easier. I mean, it used to be much harder to type all your credit card information into a form. Nowadays, people use various services to manage that. Thus, it is just one click on the mobile and, your browser fills in your credit card details. Since, the payment mechanisms have gotten easier, we are able to get people to pay for valuable content. And I think that model could extend beyond just news. There are a lot of other areas and opportunities for people to have “paid for services” that are valuable to them. Although I think we are not there yet. I think we are on a path to get there. But it’s going to take some time.



DIOGO: You have mentioned crypto technology as something that we should maybe look forward to in the online environment. Thus, “Have you seen any concrete steps with which crypto has been used to make healthy environments on the internet?”



JIMMY: Not yet. I think it is still very early days in crypto. Unfortunately, because of the speculative boom, that is mainly what is in the news. Of course, there is nothing wrong with covering that in the news. It is very interesting and a bit crazy. However, I think what is more interesting about this idea is that you do not have a payment layer really integrated into the platforms. So, people use MetaMask, where they can connect to websites and send money immediately, in a very convenient way. Except, it is only convenient after you have set a MetaMask and you further buy cryptocurrency. Hence, it is not that trivial, after all. Therefore, I think we are seeing the beginnings of this technology working into what I would say is a payment lander for the web.

Moreover, that might end up not being for the famous cryptocurrencies, like Ethereum and Bitcoin. Instead, we might actually end up using that same type of technology for US Dollars, or Brazilian Real. In other words, our traditional currencies may become more digitized in a way that makes payments much more straightforward online. Though I think this is looking out five or ten years. Besides that, there is a lot that can go wrong and I am not sure about it. But it is an area that I am watching. Because I think it is very interesting.



DIOGO: “What kind of subjects do you think that Wikipedia is not well-designed for?”



JIMMY: Well, Wikipedia is designed to be an encyclopedia. So, we are looking for reliable sources. We are looking for mainly proven facts. However, what we see at Fandom, which is my for-profit Wiki company – I did not talk about it tonight, but I can tell you quickly. It is the number 20 website online. Then, in there, we see wikis being used, in pop culture and in gaming, in a much more casual way. People write about, summarize what happened in the TV show. Besides that, there are no news sources, no journal articles and no academic sources. Instead, people watch the shows and they write down what happened. And then they run about the characters and so forth. It is more casual and it does work there. Even though that would not work for Wikipedia.

Because Wikipedia really needs sources. So, there are a lot of things. Another example: I love to cook. But, in Wikipedia, in fact, I have not seen any really successful recipes. On the other hand, we have got a few at Fandom. Because, I think, somehow that is harder to collaborate on. If you are going to change the recipe, that is very subjective. In addition to that, you have to cook it and see if it works, and so on and so forth.

So, I think there are certain areas where collaboration is easier and certain areas where collaboration is much harder.



DIOGO: “How different do you think Wikipedia would be, had it not been founded by you. If it had been founded by someone else? How dependent is Wikipedia on your personality and your management style?”



JIMMY: That is a really good question! I do not know. I mean, I like to think it is because of me. But I think it is because of the Wikipedia community. So, I think there are a lot of people out there, who share the same kind of idea as us. In other words, we want good quality information. We do not want to be told what to think. We want to examine issues from all sides. And, we want to be thorough. Although, that is my style, it is not just me, it's a lot of people. We did make early decisions at Wikipedia, to say, a neutral point of view is really important. We could have gone in a different direction and ended up in a different place. I do not know. It is hard to really know.



DIOGO: “Is there any other language where the community is especially good at Wikipedia, and stands out?”



JIMMY: We are in hundreds of languages. So, there are a lot of really great languages. Obviously, German Wikipedia is quite large and quite thorough. Hence, it has a reputation for being quite serious. I know that Portuguese Wikipedia faces similar questions, but maybe slightly more than English. Then, of course, there is British English, American English, Indian English and other little variations in English, all around the world. Besides that, although I cannot speak Portuguese, I understand that Brazilian Portuguese and European Portuguese are also different, but similar. Thus, sometimes people fight about that, which is not necessary. That is an interesting thing. Despite that, what we see around the world is that there is no monopoly in any language on thoughtful people. Because thoughtful people, working hard to get it right, is really the core for all of these things.



DIOGO: Some people on the internet believe that pseudonyms are very important for a new future. “Do you think that pseudonyms play an important role on Wikipedia?”



JIMMY: Indeed, they do! However, it is important to highlight that pseudonyms are different from just completely random anonymity. Since with pseudonyms, over time, people build a reputation. For instance, if you are in English Wikipedia, you may not know New York Brad's real name. But you know that Brad is incredibly good at being a Wikipedian. He is incredibly thoughtful and a real leader in the community. Because New York Brad has generated that reputation over time. Hence, it is not really important to know the real name of a person, if you see their behavior on a day in and day out basis. So that works really well for us. Besides that, another function that pseudonyms play for us is that people can separate aspects of their life, as they wish to. Sometimes it is a really serious matter.

Namely, if you are a Wikipedia editor in an authoritarian society, you may find it helpful, for example, if you want to edit about politics in your own country. Even in a neutral way, it is important to disconnect a little bit from your real-world identity. Because you could get into trouble. Even though you are not doing anything illegal, you may find pressure. Then in other sillier cases, it is interesting as well, to have a pseudonym. I always give the example of, maybe there is a very serious academic professor, who is also a huge fan of Britney Spears. Then, he wants to write about Britney Spears without his work colleagues knowing about it. And that is okay too.



DIOGO: Someone is asking about the impact that Sci-Fi has had on you. Thus, “Have any of your ideas came from Isaack Asimov’s *Foundation series*? Are there any other books which have influenced you?”



JIMMY: It is a great question! I did read the *Foundation series*. Most of it, I think it is a trilogy, but with more after that. Hence, I think I read four books. Even though I was aware of it, they were not a direct inspiration. A similar question would be, *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, which has some really funny ideas about a galactic encyclopedia, which is edited by all kinds of people. However, there was no direct inspiration nor a direct thought. But I assume it was somewhere deep in my mind, in some small way. I do not know.



DIOGO: “What do you see as the main threats for Wikipedia?”



JIMMY: Well, one of the things I am concerned about these days is as we see governments beginning to react to the poor job that social media has done around moderation.

Therefore, we will see legislation passed to regulate social media. Which will accidentally impact Wikipedia and make our model difficult to continue with. I mean, I do not think we would want to see a world in which, suddenly, the Wikimedia Foundation is responsible for everything that people write in Wikipedia. Because, then, we can no longer have volunteer administrators. And also, it will begin to destroy our volunteer ethos. In other words, we would have to have different models. So, I think that would be incredibly unhealthy. Hence, I am hoping that, as we move forward in a lot of places, the most important thing is that governments just slow down a little bit and do not react to the populist wave of the moment. Moreover, I hope that they really think through any kind of regulation as to how it might impact all the real parts of the internet, the community spaces that are not part of the big tech hegemony.



DIOGO: Jimmy, our time is almost over. But we still have one last question. So, “Wikipedia has changed the world for the past 20 years. How do you see Wikipedia, 20 years from now, in the future?”



JIMMY: I think in many ways, Wikipedia will be very similar in 20 years. Just as it is similar today, although different, from 20 years ago. We are happy with the model. So, we are not going to turn into TikTok and have streaming videos or that sort of thing. We will remain an encyclopedia and we will remain community driven. I think editing will become easier as the tools become better.

Besides that, I think support from volunteers should become better as we begin to harness technology, to help the volunteers find areas that need work and automate certain things. But we are not thinking of automation, once we want to keep it really, really human. So, I think we will be very similar.



DIOGO: Thank you so much! Thank you for your insights and for being here with us, at the Innovation Week 2021.



JIMMY: Thank you!

