

Wikipedia blocks Scientology from altering entries

May 30 2009, by Glenn Chapman



Wikipedia has blocked the Church of Scientology from editing entries at the communally-crafted online encyclopedia due to an unrelenting battle over the group's image.

A "longstanding struggle" between admirers of Scientology and critics of the group prompted [Wikipedia](#) on Thursday to bar online edits from computer addresses "owned or operated by the Church of Scientology and its associates."

An array of editors believed to have taken sides in a Scientology public-image war at Wikipedia have also been barred from tinkering with topics related to the church.

"Each side wishes the articles within this topic to reflect their point of

view and have resorted to battlefield editing tactics," senior Wikipedia editors said in arbitration committee findings backing the decision.

"The worst casualties have been biographies of living people, where attempts have been repeatedly made to slant the article either towards or against the subject, depending on the point of view of the contributing editor."

A church spokeswoman downplayed the development, saying the Wikipedia arbitration committee is part of a routine process for handling conflicts at the website.

"Do Scientologists care what has been posted on Wikipedia? Of course," said Karin Pouw. "Some of it has been very hateful and erroneous. We hope all this will result in more accurate and useful articles on Wikipedia."

The Wikipedia committee described the editing clash as "ongoing and corrosive" with "persistent point-of-view pushing."

"The corrosive atmosphere has resulted in normally neutral editors adopting polarized positions in countless minor sub-feuds," the committee said in written findings. "Sockpuppetry is rife."

Sockpuppetry refers to creating alternative accounts to perpetrate mischief or fraud at the website.

Listed among aggravating factors were coordinated Wikipedia edits made from Scientology computers and critics of the church citing self-published material to back entries.

"Many Scientology articles fail to reflect a neutral point of view and instead are either disparaging or complimentary," the committee

concluded.

"Neutral editors entering this topic are frequently attacked from both sides and stand little chance of making progress until the key players disengage."

Wikipedia warns that Scientology-related entries are "a hostile editing environment."

Wikipedia prides itself on allowing anyone with an Internet connection to contribute or edit content. Wikipedia is one of the most-visited sites on the Internet.

"What is really important is Wikipedia has stopped those involved in biased editing for the purpose of antagonism instead of information," Pouw said. "It's good from our perspective."

The Church of Scientology and six of its French leaders went on trial on Monday in Paris on charges of organized fraud that could lead to an outright ban on the organization in France.

Known for its Hollywood celebrity followers Tom Cruise and John Travolta, the group is in the dock in Paris for the second time in six years.

The court is hearing a complaint from two women, one of whom alleges she was manipulated into handing over 20,000 euros (28,000 dollars) for costly Scientology products, such as an "electrometer" to measure mental energy.

The second complainant alleges she was forced by her Scientologist employer to undergo testing and enroll in courses in 1998. When she resisted, she was fired.

The plaintiffs' lawyers argue that Scientology resorts to harassment and pressure to rein in victims who show signs of vulnerability.

The Scientology Celebrity Centre in Paris, its director Alain Rosenberg and five other top officials are accused of preying on fragile followers "with the goal of seizing their fortune by exerting a psychological hold."

The group's spokeswoman in France has rejected the accusations, insisting that Scientology was a legitimate religion being "hounded" in French courts because it advocated new ideas.

Founded in the United States in 1954 by science-fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, the Church of Scientology is officially recognized as a religion here for tax purposes.

Politicians in some European countries including France, Germany, Greece and Russia have accused the movement of exploiting its members financially.

The movement claims a worldwide membership of 12 million.

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Citation: Wikipedia blocks Scientology from altering entries (2009, May 30) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-05-wikipedia-blocks-scientology-entries.html>

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