

## International

# Wikipedia founder says social media giants mishandled Trump

## Online resource one of the last examples of early web utopianism

**LONDON:** Twitter and Facebook repeatedly mishandled Donald Trump as he pushed baseless claims, including his assertion that US presidential election he lost was rigged, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales told AFP. The two social media giants indefinitely suspended Trump after his supporters stormed the US Capitol on January 6, an attack on the seat of democracy that on Wednesday led to Trump's second impeachment.

Wales told AFP in an interview to mark Wikipedia's 20th anniversary on Friday that responsibility for the unprecedented events in Washington rested "100 percent at the feet of Donald Trump". But he said Twitter and Facebook had consistently "struggled with misinformation, disinformation" peddled by the firebrand former New York real estate tycoon who is due to leave office next week. "With Donald Trump, they did a poor job of dealing with him for a very, very long time," Wales said. "He was clearly spreading disinformation, he was clearly being abusive to people."

### Eyeballs v knowledge

In the 20 years since it was founded, Wikipedia is now one of the most popular websites in the world, with in excess of 55 million articles in 300 languages. It is read more than 15 billion times every month. It is also, as Wales first envisaged, "a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge". The Internet entrepreneur's decision in 2003 to make the site non-profit is one reason he believes

Wikipedia has not faced the same backlash and difficult decisions as Twitter or Facebook.

"They (social media platforms) have a business model that says, 'We need as many eyeballs as possible, we need as many page views as possible'," the 54-year-old said. "Now it's also damaging for their brand. So they have to deal with that. But I think they're going to struggle."

Facebook and Twitter have become closely associated with the deeply divisive culture wars in the United States and the spread of misinformation worldwide. In contrast, Wikipedia is considered one of the last examples of early web utopianism, supporters say. In the early 2000s, though, falsehoods and user vandalism on Wikipedia sparked a debate on web regulation. But the online resource is now more likely to be held up as an example of the best the Internet has to offer, the American-British entrepreneur says. "I always say, we were never as bad as they said we were and we're not as good as they think we are," he said. "But we still know Wikipedia isn't perfect. We still have a lot of work to do."

### 'Building it to last'

Wales is also aware Wikipedia is fundamentally different from social media platforms. "We have a very clear mission to create an encyclopedia. So everything we do we judge against that standard," he said. "(That is) a very different mission statement from a social network that says, come and post what you think, post

your opinions. "Because the truth is, lots of people have really horrific opinions."

Wales admits that Wikipedia still has challenges to overcome, and has faced questions about the diversity of the thousands of "Wikipedians" - the community of editors and administrators who keep the site running. In 2021, Wikipedia will implement a uniform code of conduct with corresponding sanctions against insults and harassment, which have targeted minority groups within the community in the past, across all 300 of its different language versions.

Wales said formulating the code of conduct "did take longer than it should have", but that was because the community was so large "it takes a long time to work through things and get buy-in and understanding". The goal for the next 20 years, though, will be remarkably similar for the first two decades. In 2006, Wales set the goal of having 100,000 entries in Wikipedia for every language with more than one million speakers. "We're still at least 20 years from that," he said. — AFP



Jimmy Wales

## Twitter chief says Trump ban sets 'dangerous' precedent

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Twitter chief Jack Dorsey on Wednesday backed the messaging platform's ban of US President Donald Trump, but said it sets a "dangerous" precedent and represents a failure to promote healthy conversation on social networks. "Having to ban an account has real and significant ramifications," Dorsey said in a string of tweets about his take on the company's decision late last week to permanently bar the president.

"While there are clear and obvious exceptions, I feel a ban is a failure of ours ultimately to promote healthy conversation," Dorsey said, inviting feedback from users. Trump's access to social media platforms that he used as a megaphone during his presidency has been largely cut off since a violent mob of his supporters stormed the Capitol in Washington last week.

In addition to Twitter, bans have also been put in place by Facebook, Instagram, Twitch and Snapchat, while YouTube temporarily suspended his channel. However Twitter was the Republican billionaire's go-to tool, which he used to directly communicate on a daily basis with some 88 million followers, posting everything from proclamations to accusations and spreading misinformation via the platform. Social media operators say the embittered leader could have used his accounts to foment more unrest in the run-up to President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration. On Monday, Twitter took things one step further, announcing it had also suspended "more than 70,000 accounts" linked to the far-right QAnon conspiracy theory that claims Trump is waging a secret war against a global liberal cult of Satan-worshipping pedophiles.

### Overdue or overdone?

Twitter's decision to permanently suspend Trump is considered overdue by critics who argue he has gotten away with abuses, but has worried free-speech advocates and drawn criticism from various NGOs and leaders. The company said in a blog



Jack Dorsey

post explaining its decision that after close review of the president's recent tweets it had "permanently suspended the account due to the risk of further incitement of violence."

Twitter also blocked efforts by Trump to sidestep the ban of his @realDonaldTrump account when he posted tweets from the official presidential account @POTUS and the @TeamTrump campaign account. "We understand the desire to permanently suspend him now," ACLU senior legislative counsel Kate Ruane said at the time. "But, it should concern everyone

when companies like Facebook and Twitter wield the unchecked power to remove people from platforms that have become indispensable for the speech of billions."

Even German Chancellor Angela Merkel weighed in, stating Monday through her spokesman that she believed freedom of opinion should not be determined by "the management of social media platforms". Dorsey said Wednesday that while he believes Twitter made the right decision to ban Trump, it "sets a precedent I feel is dangerous: the power an individual or corporation has over a part of the global public conversation."

"This moment in time might call for this dynamic, but over the long term it will be destructive to the noble purpose and ideals of the open internet," he said. Dorsey rejected the notion that social media giants coordinated efforts, reasoning that it was more likely they each came to the same conclusion about the potential for violence. Image-centric social network Snapchat on Wednesday became the latest platform to permanently ban Trump. "Last week we announced an indefinite suspension of president Trump's Snapchat account," the platform told AFP. "In the interest of public safety, and based on his attempts to spread misinformation, hate speech, and incite violence, which are clear violations of our guidelines, we have made the decision to permanently terminate his account." — AFP

## Former presidential hopeful Yang to run for New York mayor

**NEW YORK:** Former US presidential hopeful and tech entrepreneur Andrew Yang has announced he will run for mayor of New York City in an election this year that he is an early favorite to win. Yang, 46, announced his run on Twitter Wednesday, posting a video of him skateboarding with his wife on the Brooklyn Bridge. The son of Taiwanese immigrants - running as a Democratic candidate - said he would aim to reverse the fortunes of a city shaken by the coronavirus pandemic.

"I moved to New York City 25 years ago. I came of age, fell in love, and became a father here. Seeing our City in so much pain breaks my heart," he wrote. The lawyer turned tech entrepreneur would become the city's first-ever Asian-American mayor. His mastery of social networks, fervent support within the "Yang Gang," and fundraising skills placed him among the heavyweights of the presidential election.

But he eventually threw in the towel after the New Hampshire primary in Feb 2020 in a race won by President-elect Joe Biden. Yang has been criticised by some for spending too much time outside the city he aims to lead. He spent the last few weeks in Georgia, helping the Democrats to win two key seats in the US Senate. The election to decide Bill de Blasio's successor is scheduled for Nov 2, but in the Democratic stronghold of New York the race will effectively start in the party's mayoral primary on June 22.

Economic recovery is set to be a central theme in the election to lead a city that suffered a severe financial hit when coronavirus was first recorded there in the spring. Many businesses have closed, unemployment and crime are rising, and a budget crisis is looming, raising fears that the city may return to its dark days of the 1970s and 1980s. Around 30 candidates will jostle to win the Democratic primary. — AFP