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**JOURNALISM,
DENIALISM AND
CLIMATE EMERGENCY:
THE WT.SOCIAL
AUDIBLE INFORMATION
MODEL OPTION**

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Abstract: This article intends to present the auditable news model of WT.Social, a WikiMedia journalism initiative, as an alternative to face denialism about the climate emergency in our days, given the repeated failures of the major platforms to offer effective solutions for the circulation of misinformation. Our appreciation of the problem goes through the recognition of the phenomenon of platformization and the devaluation of wikis; the creation of a task force to confront climate denialism on Wikipedia; and the operating standards of WT.Social (WikiTribune) in relation to the production of news that circulate in its networks, especially on the climate emergency. Using a descriptive and inductive approach, we carried out an exploratory research with the case study of WT.Social. The analysis of 143 posts published on the network demonstrates that the model, although promising, is not followed by most publications on the network, since most posts adopt a pattern very close to that found in more traditional social networks, such as Facebook. The publications adopt journalism as a reference for their data and statements, giving credibility to the work of the press. This support in journalism, however, is no guarantee to avoid denialist narratives.

Keywords: Journalism; Denialism; Wiki; Climate; Climate Emergency.

INTRODUCTION

This article intends to present the auditable news model of WikiTribune, a WikiMedia journalism initiative, as an alternative to face

denialism about the climate emergency in our days. Our appreciation of the problem goes through the recognition of the phenomenon of platformization and the devaluation of wikis; the creation of a task force to confront climate denialism on Wikipedia; and WT.Social operating standards (WikiTribune)¹ in relation to the production of news that circulate in their networks, especially on the climate emergency.

PLATFORMIZATION AND THE WIKIS

The platforming and dynamics of influencers have claimed an often-overlooked victim in today's web obituaries: the popularity of wikis. With this we do not want to advocate for the lack of expression of Wikipedia or the hundreds of thousands of Wikis that deal with the most varied subjects and universes (fictional or not), but to attest to the preference for the propagation of content in the 21st century through centralized networks, of owned by some large technology companies (POEL; VAN DJICK, 2020; GROHMANN, 2020).

By way of comparison, the global encyclopedia coordinated by Jimmy Walles went offline in 2012², 2018³ and twice in 2019^{4,5}, without major concrete consequences registered by its users or any commotion from other actors. In 2021, platforms managed by Facebook (the namesake network, Instagram and Whatsapp) became unavailable globally⁶ for a few hours and provoked protests, remote work stoppages and large financial movements

1 See more details on the website: <https://wt.social/>

2 See more details on the website: <http://g1.globo.com/tecnologia/noticia/2012/01/wikipedia-em-ingles-fica-fora-do-ar-contralei-antipirataria-nos-eua.html>

3 See more details on the website: <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/wikipedia-sai-do-ar-na-italia-em-protesto-contralei-europeia-de-direitos-autorais-22847563>

4 See more details on the website: <https://adnews.com.br/wikipedia-faz-protesto-e-sai-do-ar-na-europa/>

5 See more details on the website: <https://canaltech.com.br/internet/wikipedia-sofre-ataques-e-sai-do-ar-em-alguns-paises-149205/>

6 See more details on the website: <https://www.uol.com.br/tilt/noticias/redacao/2021/10/04/caiu-ai-whatsapp-facebook-e-instagram-passam-por-instabilidade.htm>

on stock exchanges around the world.

WIKIPEDIA, PLATFORMS AND CLIMATE DENIAL

Scofield (2021), in a report for Agência Pública, demonstrates the effort of a group created specifically to combat climate denialism in articles related to the topic on Wikipedia. There is an internal Wikipedia team to ensure sustainable coexistence in the community of editors, subject to a single Universal Code of Conduct (WIKIMEDIA, 2021), but denialism has new formats and powers today (SNOWDEN, 2021; VILELA; SELLES, 2020; EVANS; FETTERMAN, 2021). The problem has such extraordinary nuances to the point of spreading to the denial of well-documented past facts, such as Nazism, the Holocaust and their associated events (COHEN, 2021). Even worse: contemporary denialism is also directed towards the future, leaving us “in denial about our ability to implement changes” that may lead to better alternatives (SNOWDEN, 2021).

The groups responsible for contemporary denialism narratives are distributed in multiple spheres, but there is convergence on the prevalence in these circles of the conservative political spectrum, of people whose beliefs are challenged by science and of personalities who gain attention from the press (MIGUEL, 2020; EVANS; FETTERMAN, 2021). Dunlap and Jacques demonstrated, still in 2013, how books with denialist arguments were associated with conservative think tanks, with a notable absence of references for 90% of the data presented in these works (DUNLAP; JACQUES, 2013). Vilela and Selles (2020) offer a way to overcome the problem by reviewing curricula, in order to allow the incorporation of knowledge and experiences to scientific practices and admit the limits of research and its results and indications.

On the side of the Platforms, especially

those that work with digital social networks, there are enunciated efforts to combat denialist narratives. Google and YouTube committed, in 2021, to cut financial transfers to websites and channels that circulate denialist content about the climate emergency (GHEDIN, 2021), attacking the financing of this type of discourse – the tactic is similar to that of the Sleeping Giants, which fights fake news and hate speech based on the appeal to demonetize its propagators.

Despite the content moderation scheme of Facebook or Twitter relying on image and text classification programs, there are humans in the whole process, from the design of algorithm protocols to the operations based on artificial intelligence, performed with the help of the data labelers (GRAY; SURI, 2019; MUNRO, 2020). In the case of WT.Social, the network prides itself on not using automation scripts in content moderation, offering a feed based only on the chronology of publications, without any type of filter organized based on the extensive profiling of its users. Thus, moderation jobs are performed manually by a group of human administrators.

The material structure of networks plays a central role in the circulation of legitimate content and/or disinformation. Lemos and Oliveira (2021) demonstrate, when observing the reference chains in checking fake news on Facebook, that the network operation scheme itself co-produces and contributes to the circulation of fake news. The conclusion, based on the examination of more than 100 checks carried out on the network, calls into question the possibility of resolving the proliferation of misinformation in these spaces by only worrying about the tools in use, as suggested by the guide by Pinheiro, Cappelli and Maciel (2017), for example.

On the other hand, the human component demonstrates strength to modulate the associations in question in the narrative

disputes about the climate emergency, despite the use of similar infrastructures on both sides of the conflict. A study by Alperstein (2021) analyzed the use of widgets, ad trackers, beacons and analytics on websites of organizations that advocate for humane solutions to the climate emergency and also of others that undertake denialist campaigns, identifying similar monetization and user tracking strategies. If this could lead to the reasoning that the technologies in use are just tools devoid of agency, manipulated for different human purposes, we remember that this anthropocentric perspective is precisely what causes numerous analysis errors on the phenomena related to disinformation in our days (Cf. LEMOS; OLIVEIRA, 2021; FOX; ALDRED, 2017). It is enough to point out that, in the dispute researched by Alperstein (2021), despite the difference in ideological spectrums, the objective of the two groups is the same: to co-opt support for their causes.

JOURNALISM AND NEGATIONISM

In Journalism, speeches against and in favor of scientific research in general go back to the beginnings of the profession. The press was responsible for publishing news and broadcasts that praised technical advances, such as the clinical use of penicillin or the invention of the telephone; and, at the same time, by the publication of cartoons and articles that disdained the safety of motor vehicles or the apparent violation of freedom of health and/or vaccination campaigns (BRIGGS; BURKE, 2016).

The journalistic activity was consolidated as a profession of certain social prestige and as a viable commercial model only around the 19th century, when it established its technical principles that guide the deontology of the category until the present day. Objectivity in dealing with any agenda, the search for truth

based on research into multiple versions of a fact – and the voices that enunciate them – became goals in the productive routines of newsrooms (BRIGGS; BURKE, 2016).

However, Monbiot (2021) also demonstrates how groups with a tradition in Journalism, such as the BBC in London, collaborated with denialist narratives about the climate emergency. The network edited a documentary in which it denies global warming; presents arguments that would prove the absence of human influence on the Earth's climate; and criticizes the so-called “green industry”, which would have emerged in association with environmental movements (MONBIOT, 2021). Cook et al. (2019) documented the effort of the fossil fuel industry to discredit research on global warming and to promote palliative solutions to the climate emergency as definitive. The strategy was carried out with the consent and collaboration of major newspapers, such as the New York Times, which circulated advertisements of this type in their periodicals.

Girardi and collaborators (2018), as well as Amaral, Girardi and Loose (2020) argue that environmental journalism must relativize the alleged position of neutrality that serves as a standard for journalistic text. In editorials and works dedicated to the climate emergency, for example, the intention must be to endorse the scientific discourse, in addition to adopting it as a guide for defining agendas, interviews and final products (GIRARDI et al, 2018; AMARAL; GIRARDI; LOOSE, 2020).

WT.SOCIAL, NEWS AND AUDITABILITY

Faced with this situation, any alternative to the operating pattern of large media groups or the operating logic of social networking platforms seems worthy of examination, at the very least. Thus, with the proposal to unite the works of professional and citizen

journalists, the WikiMedia group created the WikiTribune in 2017, with a model based on the creation and circulation of auditable and editable news by the community itself. similar to the model adopted in Wikipedia (GHEDIN, 2019; STATT, 2018; VOLPICCELLI, 2019).

With problems maintaining the team of journalists hired for the project, in addition to internal conflicts over the editorial line, the proposal was reformulated in 2019, when the site was renamed “WT.Social” and the focus shifted to content generated by users themselves (GHEDIN, 2019; STATT, 2018; VOLPICCELLI, 2019). On the page about rules regarding self-promotion, the network defines itself as “a news-based social platform”, asking the user not to create “an account for your company that does not work with news or content” within the environment⁷.

It is important to note, however, that the writing/reading/circulation model of content idealized by WikiMedia suffers from the pattern of consumption of information consolidated in times of digital social networks. Most of the posts found on the term “Climate Change” are reposts of news already available on the websites of large traditional journalism groups, such as The Guardian, Washington Post and People. There are original posts with community interventions in their content, but this group of publications is many times smaller than the set of posts that only replicate information, eventually adding a comment about the original news in its title.

This aspect reflects the pattern of production and reading of news in our time, characterized by reading only the title/subtitles of the article and replication of content (several times, without proper authorial mentions) in agreement with what Barsotti and De Aguiar observe (2018) and, from a more general angle, Davies (2022). Thus, although the publication model has the potential to be a solid alternative to Journalism and Platform

⁷ Free translation of “a news-based social media platform -Do not make an account for your non-news/content related company”.

ways of combating denialism, users themselves end up reproducing the pattern of production and consumption of information used in more traditional platforms, such as Facebook (POEL; VAN DJICK, 2020; GROHMANN, 2020).

Publications do this, however, almost always relying on traditional press organizations and/or vehicles specialized in covering news about the climate emergency or bioeconomy. We will now proceed to a closer look at a sample of these web posts.

WT.SOCIAL POST ANALYSIS

Publications on WT.Social are organized in the form of “subwikis” – groups of posts that deal with the same topic. They technically operate like the tags on any website or like the hashtags on most of the most popular digital social networks. At the time of this survey, there were 257 subwikis. When searching for the term “climate change”, the most popular subwiki has exactly that name, gathering 59,516 members and 814 posts.

We manually collected, on October 5, 2021, all posts published on the climate change subwiki in 2021, gathering a sample of just 143 posts. We built a set of categories from the repeated reading and analysis of the posts using the Atlas.TI software, according to a focused coding scheme (LEWIN; SILVER, 2007) based on the Grounded Theory, specifically on the proposition of Charmaz (2009). Although the sample refers to all publications of an entire year, we do not consider it a statistically efficient demonstration of all publications on the site, since the subwiki that consisted of our collection site seems to us to be a very specific filter in the face of the variety of subjects that make up the other topics on the network – many of them, with a much larger number of posts than the one found here.

In this set, we found more active users who

were responsible for most of the publications made during the same week or within an interval of a few months. Most of these posts (72%) were made by network administrators. This data can be read as an attempt by WT.Social to tutor the discourses that circulate on the subwiki, guiding the themes and tones of the debates as desired by the organization's management.

We did not identify denialist content in any of the collected publications. On the WT.Social page that publicly lists the edits made by the network administration, until October 5, 2021, there was no post deleted from the subwiki that is the object of analysis in this article. In addition to being absent of denialism, the subwiki environment also offers remedies against misinformation: 18% of all posts present news or links to reports that point to the sponsorship of large companies to denialist campaigns (FIGURE 1).

In our entire sample, there is only a single post flagged as edited, where regular users edited a broken link in a news article, correcting it to a working address. It is important to note that posts that must be moderated or even removed, according to the rules of the network itself, remain available and without any record of editing or signaling to be audited. In Figure 2, the account of the Green European Journal makes a post referencing an article on the website itself (www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu), conduct prohibited by the terms of use of the network.

Martins, Menezes and Orrico (2021) attest to the limits for this type of work on platforms such as Reddit, highlighting its exhaustive nature when dealing with hateful and denialist content, but also the motivation to continue doing so, based on the convictions in a more human internet built by its own users. Still on the posture of the administrators, for a social network that presents itself as a novelty and an alternative to the platforms that dominated

this market, the use of Trello to monitor bugs and Discord for chat rooms, in place of tools or proprietary pages for these purposes.

In fact, "discussions" on subwiki posts are sparse, with rare records of more than 2 comments on posts. The network has an upvote feature for publications, but its use is also very incipient, with rare records of more than 1 upvote in a publication.

The fluctuation in the average number of comments illustrated in the graph in figure 3, between posts 97 and 117, can be attributed to the proximity of COP 26, when the subwiki registers an increase in posts about the conference. This group of publications is also the one that received the most likes, indicating a mobilization of the subwiki community around the event. Among the most discussed topics in the posts, CO2 emissions stand out; the COP-26; studies and research on the Anthropocene; impacts of the climate emergency on terrestrial biodiversity; the accountability of corporations and countries that pollute the most; legislation and public policies for crisis treatment and prevention; populations in economic/social fragility affected by the climate emergency; and inequality in the provision of sustainable solutions.

In each of these groups of publications, the absolute majority treats journalism as the main source of reference to prove points. Of the 143 posts that make up our sample, 137 have as their content only a link to news published by traditional press sites (32.17% of the posts) or by specialized portals (67.83%). Another 4 are questions to discuss a subject (only one of them received responses) and only one post is an authorial publication, which also calls for a discussion (no responses). But unlike Facebook, where a news link is eventually used to rebut or support arguments in a post generated by a user's opinion, here the post is generated by the news. Almost always, a piece

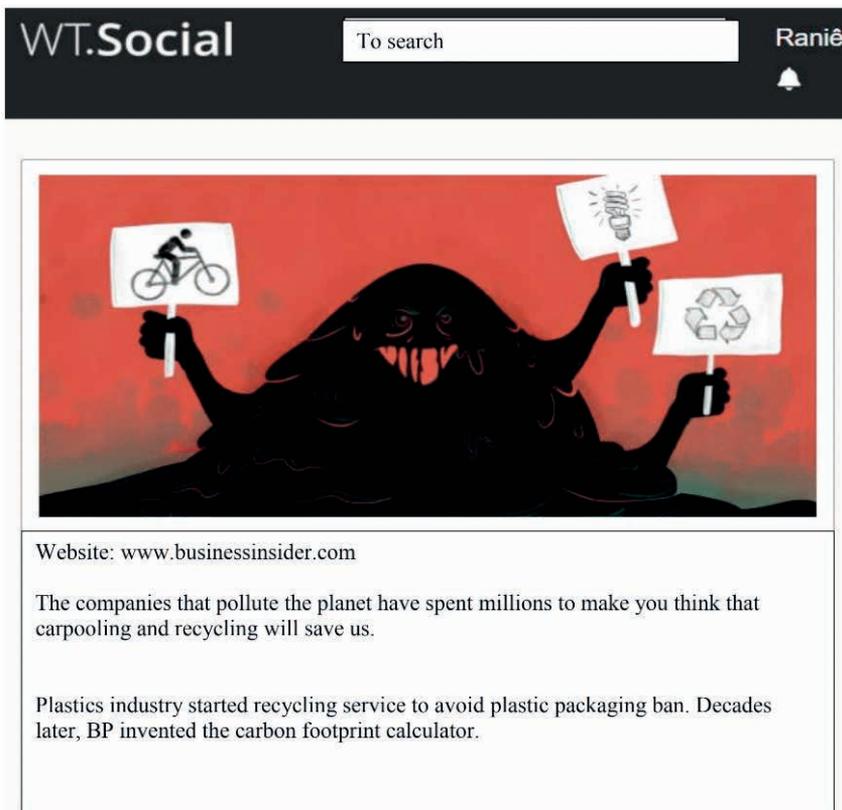


Figure 1 - Screenshot shows anti-misinformation news shared on the “climate change” subwiki by a WT.Social user.

Source: Captured by the author from the WT.Social website

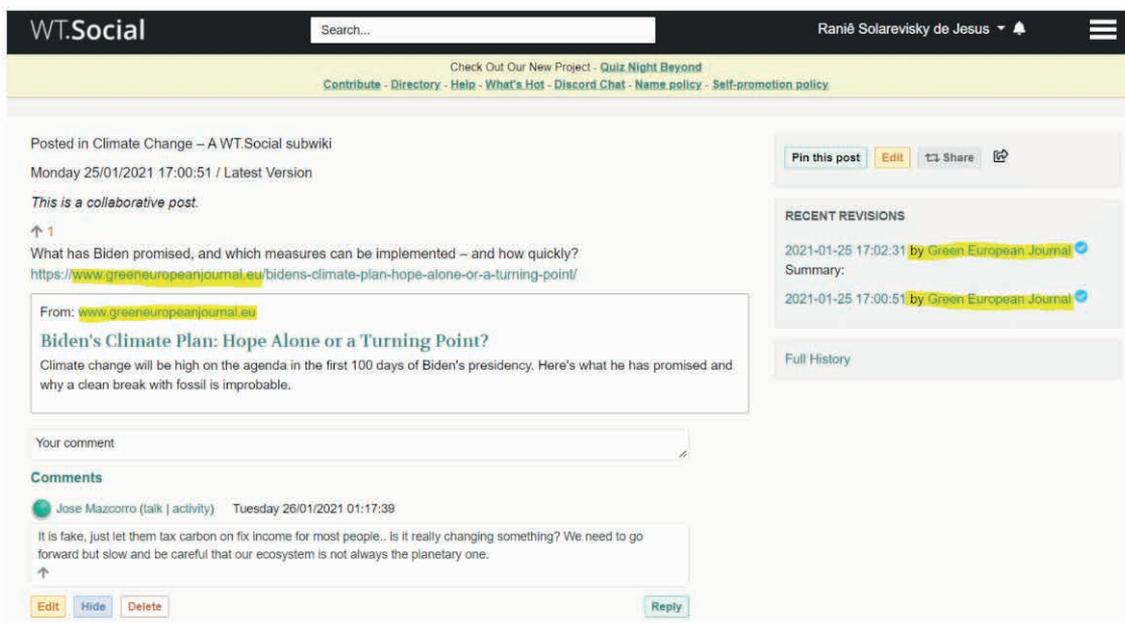


Figure 2 – Self-promotion post had not yet been removed by WT.Social moderation as of the writing date of this article

Source: Captured from the WT.Social website by the author. Available at <<https://wt.social/post/climate-change/prl5quj5371980171458>>. Accessed on February 20, 2022.

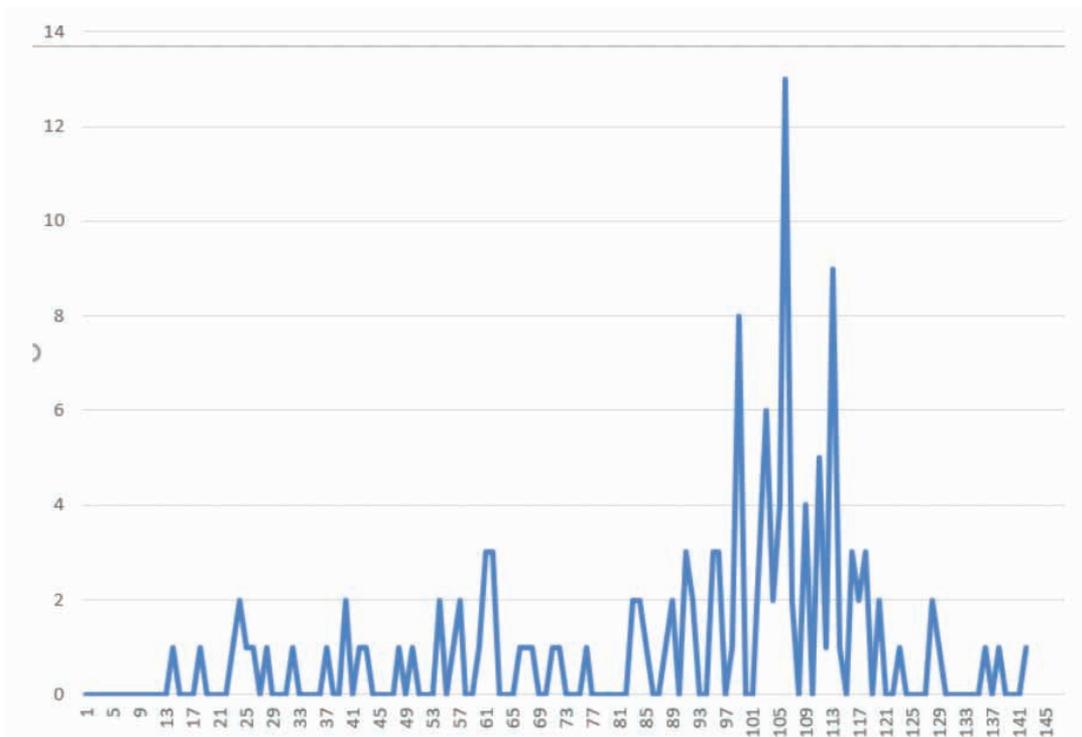


Figure 3 - Number of comments (0 to 14) recorded on each post collected from WT.Social
Source: Author elaboration

WT.Social

Posted in Climate Change – A WT.Social subwiki
Wednesday 20/01/2021 17:08:19 / Latest Version
This is a collaborative post.

↑
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/allanmarks/2021/01/20/court-decision-lets-biden-set-new-emissions-rules-to-meet-paris-agreement-climate-goals/?sh=5970018c7242>

From: www.forbes.com

Court Decision Lets Biden Set New Emissions Rules To Meet Paris Agreement Climate Goals

Thanks to a D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals decision yesterday vacating Trump-era rules for coal-fired power plants, the U.S. EPA has a clean slate to adopt new greenhouse gas emissions limits and Presi...

RECENT REVISIONS

2021-01-20 17:08:19 by Kyle Crider

Figure 4 – Example of a post that uses a journalistic publication as a reference

Source: Screenshot taken by the author. Available at < <https://wt.social/post/climate-change/2y3qzt05370541664415>>. Accessed on February 20, 2022.

of news is used to produce a post, as in the example in Figure 4.

In material terms, it is certainly not WT.Social's moderation model that guarantees this state of affairs: most of the posts in which there is no editing signal are already configured as dependent on journalistic practice. The publications are manufactured under these conditions by the users themselves – even those that were not produced by the network administrators. Thus, it is not the moderation or auditability of news/publications on the network that prevent the production of denialist discourse – although the attitude of administrators can positively influence the propagation of discourses based on science and journalism.

It is difficult to recognize any direct agency from the auditable aspect of WT.Social in the absence of denialist content. A real possibility, however, is that users who identify with denialist discourses decide to remain silent on the network or not even participate in it, once they are aware of this auditable aspect. If this hypothesis could be proven with interviews or questionnaires with these users, we could say that its auditable aspect has great agency power over the network it mobilizes, in the terms coined by Fox and Aldred (2017). However, this research did not interview WT.Social users and therefore cannot make these claims.

What the data we present prove is the reliance of subwiki posts on material published by the press. This dependency generates risk as media outlets have already supported denialist speeches or strategies about climate in the past (Cf. MONBIOT, 2021; COOK et al, 2019). Bruggemann and Engesser (2014), in a study with journalists who have already covered the topic in five different countries, detected that a small number of professionals – especially those who do not have a background in journalism

and who cover the topic occasionally – defend skepticism or denial regarding to the assertion that human actions contribute to the effects of the climate emergency. The same research demonstrates that most professionals, with experience of continuous coverage of the theme – and therefore, who deal more with scientists and data that serve as sources – form an interpretive community that defends the plurality of adverse voices, but does not condones denial of scientific evidence from the Anthropocene. Thus, the article proves the presence of denialism within the newsrooms, as well as the protection of denialist discourses that circulate on the pages of newspapers (BRUGGEMANN; ENGESSER, 2014).

Jaspal and Nerlich (2014), in a study on the coverage of British newspapers on global warming and the ozone layer during the year 1988, demonstrate that the press has oscillated since that time in the search for a “culprit” for the phenomenon: sometimes attributing -o to greenhouse gases and other natural sources, now admitting with reservations its association with human actions. In Brazil, Miguel (2020) documents multiple episodes of granting scientific status to denialists interviewed on television programs, while the same author, along with Dunlap and Jacques (2013) and Vilela and Selles (2020), recalls that many of the denialists invited by newspapers to talk about the subject occupy seats in the academy.

Thus, although the content on climate emergency in WT.Social is associated with journalism, this association does not guarantee scientific accuracy in discussions about the phenomenon. The works we have listed so far attribute this mismatch, in large part, to the monetary commitments of newspapers with their advertisers (COOK et al, 2019; MONBIOT, 2021; MIGUEL, 2020; JASPAL; NERLICH, 2014). In our sample, we did not find any post that defends denialist

content based on journalistic material, but it is noteworthy that almost 70% use small portals and specialized blogs as a reference, instead of large journalism organizations. The motivation of users' preference for press initiatives with a firmer editorial line and less prone to commitment to sponsorships and advertisements is another variable that can only be properly gauged based on direct contact with these users.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis presented allows us to state that the absence of Climate Denial in WT.Social is produced by its own users, who choose to replicate content from research institutions, specialized portals and traditional journalism organizations.

The social network's lenient management model becomes evident when one realizes that content moderation is not done properly, allowing self-promotion strategies that are expressly prohibited in its terms of use, for example. On the other hand, the same moderation is apparently committed to setting an example of the conduct it expects from subwiki users, assuming the authorship of most posts. Regardless of the causal relationship, which the methodological limitation of this research prevents us from evaluating, the pattern of posts produced by administrators is repeated by common users and without advanced editing privileges.

Even so, despite the choice to share quality content, users follow a pattern of interaction very similar to that of other social networks: a closed cycle in the actions of replicating someone else's content, eventually adding some metadata (likes, comments) and following scrolling the feed. Our observations make it clear that, in the current state, the network seems very far from the picture idealized by Jimmy Walles, painted with the colors of a continuous production of authorial

news or independence from other Platforms.

In this sense, this research does not seem to have found any indication that the social network model adopted by WT.Social can inhibit the propagation of denialist content. Our results point to an ordering of pro-science discourses on the subwiki that originates either from the will of its users, or from the not-so-discreet stimulus of the moderators, who are responsible for most of the publications. The two possibilities are not mutually exclusive and can occur simultaneously. Both point to a conformation of discourses that is carried out in an "artisanal" way, without a direct or pronounced agency of the operating and interaction structures of the platform itself.

Even so, this research finds limitations not only in its methodological choices, but also in the restriction of its analyzes to the collected posts. A more complete answer to the investigation presented here would ask for a study with users, raised not only by the prevalence of posts by administrators, but also by the possibility that content moderation can function as a device with a panoptic function, which inhibits the occurrence of misbehavior without necessarily directly punishing them. This last intuition could only be verified by using a method that listened to users, paving the way for new findings and variables that this research bias could offer.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the search for reference in journalism to conduct science-based interactions on the climate emergency. This data, while demonstrating the image of the craft of news associated with the work of university laboratories, also reveals risks. The protection and projection of denialist discourses by press companies originate, at the last level, in the organizational aspect of journalism, which still largely depends on sponsorships and advertisers to monetize its activities (COOK et al, 2019; MONBIOT, 2021; MIGUEL, 2020; EVANS; FETTERMAN,

2021; BRUGGERMANN; ENGESSER, 2014). This way, possible remedies to denialism in journalism are presented in the form of alternative monetization schemes or business models; training of professionals

with solid references about science; and ethical performance on a personal level in interviewing, framing and editing by journalists covering aspects of the ongoing climate emergency.

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O autor é responsável pela fidedignidade dos dados apresentados.