

= Internet Watch Foundation and Wikipedia =

On 5 December 2008 , the Internet Watch Foundation ( IWF ) , a British watchdog group , blacklisted content on the English Wikipedia related to Scorpions ' 1976 studio album Virgin Killer , due to the presence of its controversial cover artwork , depicting a young girl posing nude , with a faux glass shatter obscuring her genitalia . The image was deemed to be " potentially illegal content " under English law which forbids the possession or creation of indecent photographs of children . The IWF 's blacklist are used in web filtering systems such as Cleanfeed .

The URL to the image 's description page , which depicts the cover art , was also blacklisted ; however thumbnails and the image itself remained accessible . The album cover had been deemed controversial at the time of its release , and was replaced in some markets with an alternate cover image featuring a photo of the band members . The IWF described the image as " a potentially illegal indecent image of a child under the age of 18 " . Wikipedia 's policies state that it does not censor content " that some readers consider objectionable or offensive , even exceedingly so " , although it does remove content that is " obviously inappropriate " , violates other Wikipedia policies , or is illegal in the United States .

As well as the direct consequence of censoring the article and image for UK @-@ based readers of the English Wikipedia through the affected ISPs ( a censoring that could be circumvented ) , and that the album cover was being made available unfiltered on other major sites including Amazon.co.uk ( from which it was later removed ) , and available for sale in the UK , the action also had some indirect effects on Wikipedia , namely temporarily preventing all editors using said ISPs in the UK from contributing to any page of the encyclopaedia , and preventing anonymous edits from these ISPs while the URL remained on the blacklist . This was described by the IWF as unintended " collateral damage " . This was due to the proxies used to access Wikipedia , as Wikipedia implements a blocking policy whereby contributors can be blocked if they vandalise the encyclopaedia . Therefore , all vandalism coming from one ISP would be directed through one proxy ? hence one IP ? and all of the ISP 's customers using that proxy would be barred from editing .

After invoking its appeals procedure and reviewing the situation , the IWF reversed their blacklisting of the page on 9 December 2008 , and announced that they would not blacklist other copies of the image hosted outside the UK .

= = Background = =

The album art of the Scorpions ' album Virgin Killer , featuring a young girl fully nude with a " smashed glass " effect covering her genitalia , was deemed controversial at the time of its release . The cover was replaced in some markets with an alternate cover image featuring a photo of the band members . RCA Records refused to sell the controversial album cover in the United States . The cover was not the only Scorpions ' cover which caused controversy however , as the covers for Taken by Force and Lovedrive have also caused controversy with their content .

In the United Kingdom , access to illegal content ( such as child pornography ) was strictly self @-@ regulated by individual internet service providers . This began when BT Group introduced Cleanfeed , a server @-@ side filtering system which uses data obtained from the Internet Watch Foundation . The IWF is a Quango organisation that operates a website where users can report web pages containing illegal or dubious content to be added to their blacklists . This was implemented in order to prevent users from accessing this material , since it is illegal to possess an indecent image of a child under the age of 18 per the Protection of Children Act . British ISPs were later obligated by the government to implement filters for illegal content by the beginning of 2007 .

= = Addition to IWF blacklist = =

On 5 December 2008 the Internet Watch Foundation added the Wikipedia URLs for the Virgin Killer article and the description page of the image to its blacklist . After the blacklisting , users of major UK ISPs , including BT , Vodafone , Virgin Media / Tesco.net , Be / O2 , EasyNet / UK Online / Sky

Broadband , Orange , Demon , and TalkTalk ( Opal Telecom ) , were unable to access the content .

Sarah Robertson , director of communications for the IWF , said that the image was rated " 1 on a scale of 1 to 5 , where 1 is the least offensive " . She described the picture as " erotic posing with no sexual activity " . While the image itself has not been flagged as " illegal " , IWF determined it to be a " potentially illegal indecent image of a child under the age of 18 " .

The IWF said they were first notified of the Wikipedia URL on 4 December 2008 . This followed the May 2008 reporting of the cover image on Wikipedia by U.S.-based social conservative site WorldNetDaily to the Federal Bureau of Investigation . An officer of the Concerned Women for America , a conservative Christian advocacy group , commented , " By allowing that image to remain posted , Wikipedia is helping to further facilitate perversion and paedophilia " . EContent magazine subsequently reported that the discussion page associated with the article declared " Prior discussion has determined by broad consensus that the Virgin Killer cover will not be removed " , and asserted that Wikipedia contributors " favour inclusion in all but the most extreme cases " . However , according to The Guardian because " the IWF doesn 't talk to people outside of the UK they weren 't able to appreciate what was going on " . Internet security expert Richard Clayton explained that " We see this borderline stuff all the time ; it 's a no @-@ win " , before adding that the decision seems to have been based on taking the image out of context , particularly " given that you can go into HMV and buy a copy on the high street " . On 9 December 2008 the IWF reversed its blacklist of the Wikipedia pages on the basis of the " contextual issues involved in this specific case and , in light of the length of time the image has existed and its wide availability " .

= = Effects on Wikipedia = =

The blacklisting of Virgin Killer also caused other inadvertent issues for Wikipedia users in the United Kingdom . Usually most Internet users have a unique IP address visible to websites . However , as a result of ISPs using the IWF blacklist implemented through Cleanfeed technology , traffic to Wikipedia via those affected ISPs was then routed through a small number of proxy servers . This caused problems for users of the site . Since Wikipedia allows users to anonymously edit its encyclopaedia articles , these individuals are identified only through their IP addresses , which are used to selectively block users who vandalise the site or otherwise break its rules . The proxy filtering makes it impossible to uniquely distinguish users , and to prevent vandalism Wikipedia " instituted a blanket ban on anonymous edits from the six ISPs , which account for 95 % of British residential internet users " . This had the immediate effect of requiring nearly all registered users in the UK to request the lifting of IP Autoblocks on their accounts before they could edit again , and the de facto permanent effect of barring any contribution from people without user accounts on the site , who contribute merely under an IP address and not a user name .

The MediaWiki software that Wikipedia runs on can interpret X @-@ Forwarded @-@ For ( XFF ) headers , allowing Wikipedia to identify a user 's main IP address rather than the proxy IP address , allowing the ability to block proxy users individually by their client 's IP rather than the proxy server IP ( avoiding the need to block the whole proxy due to the actions of a single user ) . However , none of the ISPs subscribing to this system pass XFF information to Wikipedia , having the impact of reversing the normal method of identification and blocking on Wikipedia . IP addresses assumed to be assigned to an individual person or organisation were assigned instead to millions of people and thousands of registered editors . Wikipedia servers saw them all as the IP of the proxy rather than each as the IP of their own machine .

Due to erroneous use of Border Gateway Protocol ( BGP ) and other routing technology to redirect the connections to the filtering proxies , users of some networks were temporarily prevented from accessing or editing any content hosted by Wikimedia , a problem reminiscent of Pakistan 's accidental blocking of YouTube for much of the world instead of only their own citizens .

= = Responses = =

On 7 December 2008 , the Wikimedia Foundation , a non @-@ profit organisation which supports

Wikipedia , issued a press release about the blacklisting of their sites by the IWF stating that they had " no reason to believe the article , or the image contained in the article , has been held to be illegal in any jurisdiction anywhere in the world " , and noting that not just the image but the article itself had been blocked .

On 9 December 2008 , Jimmy Wales , who holds the board @-@ appointed " community founder " seat on the Wikimedia Board of Trustees , told the UK 's Channel 4 News that he had briefly considered legal action . After the block had been removed , Mike Godwin , general counsel for the Wikimedia Foundation , stated " there is still plenty to be troubled by in the operations of the Internet Watch Foundation and its blacklist " .

On 9 December 2008 , the IWF rescinded the block , issuing the following statement :

[ ... ] the image in question is potentially in breach of the Protection of Children Act 1978 . However , the IWF Board has today ( 9 December 2008 ) considered these findings and the contextual issues involved in this specific case and , in light of the length of time the image has existed and its wide availability , the decision has been taken to remove this webpage from our list .

= = Aftermath = =

The incident was commented in some countries implementing or considering to implement Internet filtering or censorship plans . In Australia , Electronic Frontiers Australia vice @-@ chairman Colin Jacobs said that " [ the ] incident in Britain , in which virtually the entire country was unable to edit Wikipedia because the country 's Internet Watch Foundation had blacklisted a single image on the site , illustrated the pitfalls of mandatory ISP filtering " . The Sydney Morning Herald has commented that " Ironically , the banning of the image has only made it visible to more people as news sites publicise the issue and the image spreads across sites other than Wikipedia . " an example of the Streisand effect .

At the time of the incident Amazon US were also displaying the image on their site and the IWF stated that it " might yet add Amazon US to its list of ' blocked ' sites for hosting the picture " ; however , Amazon subsequently took the decision to remove the image from their site . In an impact study preparing a bill dealing with cybercrime , the Cabinet of France listed the Virgin Killer block as an example of indiscriminate filtering .

The Electronic Frontier Foundation criticised the IWF 's reasoning :

We agree with their decision [ to reverse the ban ] , but they have the wrong reasoning [ for the reversal ] : they had no business censoring that article in the first place ? the community of Wikipedia editors is if anything the more legitimate , reliable and grown @-@ up adjudicator of which images are appropriate subject matter for an encyclopaedia .

The IWF continues to assert that the image is indeed child porn , and asserts that the image would be blocked if it were on a British server .