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Big Brother's bullying tactics

SOCIAL MEDIA CENSORSHIP
PROTECTING YOU FROM REALITY

Social media - a wilful and damaging menace to lawful hunting and conservation values.

THARIA UNWIN

With the controversy surrounding the 2020 American presidential election fresh in everyone's minds, one cannot help but wonder how big a part social media played in the outcome thereof.

Media Research Center (www.MRC.org), a media watchdog in the United States of America, founded by Brent Bozell, has dedicated the past 33 years to fighting the left-wing's media bias. During the 2016 USA presidential election, because of MRC's work, ten times as many Americans saw the media as biased against President Trump. They found that 89% of Trump's media coverage was purposefully negative.

Facebook, who is openly anti-gun, banned the sale of private firearms on their platforms some years ago. As recent as 2019, this Tech Giant wanted to ban all firearms from their platforms. According to MRC, they shelved this idea when they realised that a firearm ban would also restrict pictures from the news, the military, official ceremonies, history and culture.

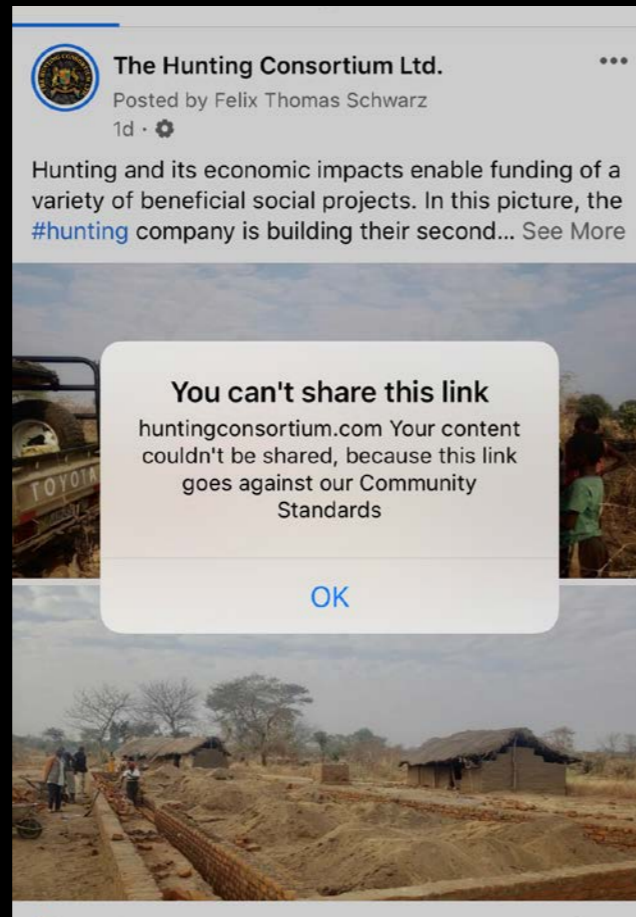
Google is also not innocent. They purposefully and selectively slow conservative news, just long enough for liberals to gain relevance and rendering conservative news irrelevant. Google's corporate chairman assisted Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign by developing a bias in favour of liberal ideologies. This included the infamous "fact-checker" programs, supposedly to combat fake news. However, these programs mainly focused on, and flagged conservative posts, whilst liberal fake news primarily go unchecked. According to MRC, 3.5-billion Google searches are performed daily. Conservative news sites seldom, if ever, make it to the top because liberal news sources, such as Newsweek and the Washington Post, show up first.

Google even took MRC off their search engine, along with 30 other conservative organisations, for four hours, to see how fast they could react and what kind of power or authority they would use.

MRC firmly believes that the hunting community at large is under severe attack by the likes of Facebook, who, for those not in the know, also owns Instagram and WhatsApp.

CASE IN POINT

On the 23rd of July 2020, approximately 60 albums, including between 1,000 and 1,500 posts and pictures, were removed from the **Hunting Consortium Ltd.'s** Facebook page without any prior warning from Facebook.



Posts that aim to educate are censored as supposedly violating community standards.

The Hunting Consortium is a seasoned, well known and highly respected family-owned hunting outfitter and booking agent that does business across the globe.

Let us be honest: hunting is not, and will never be a spectator sport. Unbecoming and disrespectful photos such as a truck-load full of management cull carcasses, questionable hunting practices filmed and posted on Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, have done immense damage to the hunting industry's reputation over the last few decades. Still, people fail to think of the unintended consequences when they post photos on social media in a

moment of excitement or achievement.

Public perception is also a bitch. It is not necessarily inaccurate or based on something other than the truth. Hunters, as mentioned above, are often their own worst enemy. Keyboard warrior animal rights activists (ARA's) will pounce on any video or photo depicting unnecessary suffering to portray all hunters as perverse, cruel "murderers". They wilfully choose not to distinguish between legal, ethical and sustainable hunting and illegal poaching and wildlife trafficking. Everyone gets tarred with the same brush.

Sadly, the majority of society remains ill-informed about the role hunting plays in conservation and community upliftment. People's ignorance makes them susceptible to manipulation by the ARA's, and they end up serving the anti's deceptive and dubious agendas, which often centre around financial gain and not the welfare of wild animals.

Knowing how misunderstood sports hunting is and how important it is to be sensitive to non-hunters, the Hunting Consortium has gone to great lengths to post photos and stories that are legal, accurate, respectful and in good taste. Bob Kern, president of the Hunting Consortium, has never hesitated to speak out against irresponsible hunters and outfitters – even terminating business ties with less-than-honest partners, to protect his company's hard-earned reputation. This company, like many other responsible outfits and booking agents,

understand conservation and the dangers of habitat and wildlife population loss. They actively support sustainable use and community upliftment programs in many marginal economic areas.

THEN WHY THE CENSORSHIP?

After some investigation, it was found that both Facebook and Instagram have banned Hunting Consortium's URL (www.huntcon.com) as well as their e-mail addresses. To boot, Facebook also disabled the sharing of posts and disallowed the company's profile to post, text, like, comment or even be tagged on Instagram. Messenger also did not work. The only explanation: a flag declaring "huntingconsortium.com link violates community standards".

All the Hunting Consortium did, was trying to make an honest living, inform the public and add value to a multi-million-dollar eco-tourism industry on which so many rural communities and economies depend. Who is this Facebook "community" whose standards have been violated? Who are they to judge and censor a perfectly legal economic and leisure activity?

Nothing the Hunting Consortium could do or say, could convince Facebook to review the ban. The company reported the error through Facebook's reporting software – to no avail. They began a soft media campaign, using the hashtag #STOPHUNTINGCENSORSHIP, which, surprise-surprise, only reached 1,600 followers instead of the usual 35,000 to 40,000.



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AFRICAN OUTFITTER SUPPORTING OUTFITTERS IN AFRICA

It was at this time that MRC's philanthropic advisor, Jason Quick, contacted Rob Kern, the executive vice-president of the Hunting Consortium. After many long phone calls, investigations and Google meetings, it became clear to MRC that the Hunting Consortium was the proverbial canary in the coal-mine.

MRC firmly believes that Facebook's bullying tactics against this booking agency are aimed to -

- see what the hunting industry's response will be;
- see how quickly the hunting industry can mobilise; and
- what impact the hunting industry's response will have on their platforms.

This kind of bullying is not new, nor aimed at businesses such as the Hunting Consortium alone. Readers will recall the absolute hell and near destruction of lives and livelihoods hunters like Dr Walter Palmer of Cecil the lion fame, TV personality Melissa Bachman and cheerleader Kendall Jones, had to go through. The filthiest untruths were spread and some of these good folks even got death threats, clearly violating Facebook's standards, with absolutely no repercussions.

ARA's and couch preservationists are openly over the moon with joy when an elephant mortally wounds a professional hunter in the line of work, as was the case with Theunis Botha, Ervin Kotze and Simon Burgess, with total disregard of their loved ones' feelings. Facebook simply ignored their despicable responses...

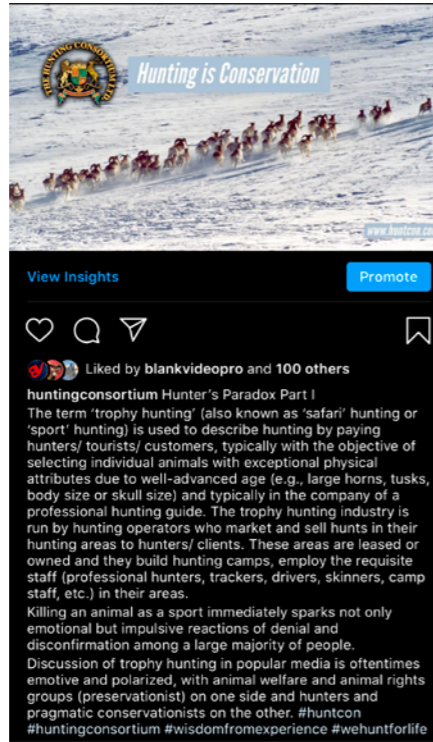
ALL ANIMALS ARE NOT EQUAL

The hypocrisy of it is sickening. The very same liberals that are opposed to hunting see nothing wrong in promoting abortions, paedophilia, blasphemy, mob violence and destruction on social media platforms. This brings to mind George Orwell's novel, Animal Farm, where the pigs that controlled the government declared "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others," giving power and privileges to a small elite.

Hunters are also to blame. We have not done enough in the past to unite, fund and act swiftly against this blatant bullying. The Cecil and Marine Mammal Protection Act in the USA are but two of the detrimental pieces of legislation that were promulgated right under the American hunters' noses. In Australasia, the United Kingdom and EU countries, regular attempts are made to ban hunting and trophy imports.

CITES and the IUCN are already infiltrated by organisations that are outrightly opposed to sustainable use and any form of legal trade. These organisations and their liberal media platforms are hell-bent on labelling traditional, regulated hunting as unethical and illegal.

What is very evident, is that NGO's such as the



Hunting Consortium's posts are informative and in good taste.

Humane Society, PETA and Born Free are creating the framework and content for these anti-animal-use laws and regulations. We, the hunting fraternity, are however too lax or too slow to influence the decision-making processes to stop it. We expect hunting and advocacy organisations such as Safari Club International, Dallas Safari Club, CIC, FACE, Conservation Force and others to fight our battles for us. We stick our heads in the sand, lest we too, become the next target.

Suppose Mark Zuckerberg's team continues to censor the Hunting Consortium: What prevents them from targeting other hunting agents, outfitters and hunters in general, who are perhaps less careful with their social posts, from shutting them down too? MRC believes that Facebook is on the verge of creating new community standards that will ban trophy and other photos of dead animals.

If Facebook can censor a business such as the Hunting Consortium, it will be a piece of cake for them to censor individuals. All they have to do is amend their so-called community standards and the content will automatically be censored by their complex algorithms. If Facebook has the power to influence elections and censor fact-based information, they can also cripple outdoor and hunting communities. We already see content being covered that is "too sensitive" for the average viewer - even on closed groups.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

MRC's advice to Rob Kern was to drum up support from the industry to speak out against this unjustified censorship and blatant attack on First Amendment rights. By the time of going to press, Dallas Safari Club (DSC), Safari Club International (SCI), American Wildlife Conservation Partners (consisting of roughly 60 hunting organisations), Conservation Force, National Rifle Association (NRA), Houston Safari Club, Sportsmen's Alliance, CIC, as well as the International Professional Hunters' Association has joined the fight.

Even Eugene LaPointe, former Secretary-General of CITES in Switzerland wrote: "As president of IWMC World Conservation Trust, may I take this opportunity of expressing my support to the hunting community. Needless to say, that we share the same conservation ideals to protect, not only the hunting heritage, but all threatened and endangered wildlife resources". The fight against hi-tech's censorship is gaining momentum and hopefully, many other hunting associations, hunting outfitters and like-minded supporters of legal, sustainable utilisation will join the course.

SCI's CEO, W. Laird Hamberlin, wrote to Mark Zuckerberg and demanded an explanation to why such outrageous and unwarranted restrictions were placed on

Hunting Consortium's accounts. Hamberlin mentioned that an attack on one hunter by the Tech Giant is an attack on the lifestyle and traditions of all outdoor sportsmen and women. He demanded that Facebook immediately reverse the restrictions placed on the Hunting Consortium's accounts.

After months of not being able to digitally market or communicate with clients amidst the already crippling aftermath of Covid-19, the Hunting Consortium's posts, albums and pictures were restored on Facebook on the 5th of October 2020. By the time of going to press, sharing was still disabled and their URL and e-mail addresses were still banned. Even their reviews are now blocked! Facebook blatantly cherry-picks a handful of anti's reviews from hundreds of positive ones to justify their censorship.



Thousands of posts with hate speech against hunters and conservatives are going unchecked. Facebook, the self-appointed Big Brother of so-called media morals, is purposefully turning a blind eye in favour of liberal's judgemental view-points - whilst we, the silent majority, continue to do nothing but mumble.

It is time that we, as hunters, who cherish and hold our hunting culture and traditions dear, man up, stand up and speak out.

If you or your hunting business has been a victim of Facebook censorship or cyber abuse, please contact Facebook headquarters at +1-650-308-7300 and hold them accountable to mirror the First Amendment of the American Constitution.

You can also report Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Messenger's bullying tactics to **Media Research Center** in Reston, Virginia, USA, via their website, www.mrc.org/contact or fax, +1-571-375-0099. Make sure you provide them with proof in your report.

My sincere thanks go to Media Research Center and Rob Kern for providing me with valuable inputs and background information for this article.
- Author.