# TACTICS AND PREPAREDNESS

*SKILLS AND SURVIVAL FOR ALL SITUATIONS*

# EXTREME CLOSE QUARTERS CONCEPTS

## A SHIVWORKS PISTOL COURSE

BY **ADAM SCHOLL** PHOTOS COURTESY **SHIVWORKS.COM**

## ShivWorks' "Extreme Close Quarters Concepts" course is also known by the initials ECQC.

The course was developed by Craig Douglas and focuses on how and when to use a pistol from inside two-arms distance. This course presents a fist fight where you have to earn the opportunity to employ your handgun.

Douglas is a former law enforcement officer who developed this material working undercover in narcotics investigations where he was assaulted many times. A lifelong martial artist, he learned very quickly that the majority of his training was irrelevant during these close quarters scenarios, often inside tight spaces such as vehicles. As a result of his experience Craig went back to the drawing board. After a look at multiple practical fighting techniques that had delivered successes, Craig realized that the majority of them had some form of wrestling as their primary delivery system. He worked tirelessly to create a wrestling-based delivery system that could be trained dynamically with minimal injuries to participants and would yield effective results. ECQC, a close quarters pistol course that focuses on shooting from compressed positions, was born.

EQCQ is a 2.5-day course that typically starts on a Friday evening with Craig's instruction on Managing Unknown Contacts or MUC as he calls it. This is a brief lecture on how to deal with unknown persons approaching you. MUC is

# Techniques of Censorship
## Free Speech vs. Social Media Platforms

BY **BRANDEN R. WILLIAMS**

## Platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube allow creators to share content.

As a consumer of information, I believe they have been "nicer" in the past. I believe there was a time when they were freer from the influence of nation-state actors looking to shape your concept of reality than is the case today. Any information found on social media platforms should be scrutinized like special effects in radio, movies and television. What you experience includes both façade and reality.

Censorship as a concept has historically been designed to remove "unacceptable" parts of content for the audience it is prepared for. But today the prioritizing and "burying" of information based on non-transparent, subjective criteria could be considered a tactic in the family of censorship as well. Just like network television versus pay TV, the standards and practices associated with censorship vary on a per-platform basis. Most major social media

platforms now assert that their networks of users were abused, and have started pushing back using their own standards and criteria as users left their platforms for alternatives or just unplugged from social media altogether.

### THE PLATFORMS REACT
Large social media platforms are not unfamiliar with offensive or illegal content being shared through their systems. Facebook, as an example, has algorithms that the company says attempt to automatically remove pornography or illegal content. Those algorithms that decide what you see immediately and what is pushed to the next page are secret, and presumably imperfect and they sometimes draw complaints[1]. In the Facebook example, the official company response to controversial content reminds users that the photos they review are "almost exclusively brought to our

attention" by users like you and me, however, this is a process that could be increasingly automated.

Instagram (owned by Facebook) is famous for their "nipple algorithm" designed to prevent female nudity from appearing on their platform. In 2016, an Instagram account became famous for specifically breaking the nipple algorithm and trying to trick it to be more permissive than it is supposed to be[2]. There are even guides for getting around the algorithm and posting questionable content. Platform maintainers assert that it is reasons like these that require help from their users.

All social media platforms assert that content curation is a shared responsibility. Even if they do not specifically hold pressers to announce this, they all give users the ability to report objectionable content. Any user of the platform can report accounts or content

that they allege violate the platform's policy or that may be deemed "offensive" by its users. As a security professional, I have been targeted by fake accounts pushing pornography or trying to scrape my information on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, and have become familiar with those platform's reporting processes.

I believe every report currently requires human intervention to determine if the report is warranted or not. Depending on the human on the other side of that report, you might get a favorable outcome for you or for the content creator. Regardless, platforms now put some of the onus for content curation on its users, which has some unintended consequences.

### ALL CONTENT IS CURATED

Some think that the Internet is free and information is everywhere, but every site you visit curates content for you based on your usage of the site to keep you there and capitalize on your attention span. Advertising dollars certainly play a part as is evidenced by contemporary news outlets. There is a financial incentive for news outlets to offer "news" their viewers prefer to consume rather than what they don't want. There is also a financial incentive to offer "news" prioritized in ways that please dominant advertisers and outlet owners. After money, the goal of curation could be: political warfare, information warfare, political pandering or "social justice".

China is one of the best examples of censorship masquerading as content curation as a means to protect its political interests. Not only is the Internet censored in the country (and VPN usage to get around the Great China Firewall is illegal), but the search results are curated to back the Communist Party of China via their Google equivalent, Baidu. The average Chinese citizen searching for events that happened on June 4, 1989, for example, will not see the references to Tiananmen Square or the famous "Tank Man" picture. They won't read any accounts of the number of deaths, what the protests were about or unsavory actions taken by the People's Liberation Army (PLA)[3]. According to the information diet available in China, nothing out of the ordinary happened that day.

All this curation also created (and fuels) another societal problem in the form of confirmation bias. Golman, Hagmann and Loewenstein, published a study that described how some individuals will actively avoid consuming information that might make them feel bad or be contrary to their beliefs, even in the face of extreme evidence to the contrary[4]. Curation could accelerate this trend by removing views that oppose your predicted profile in the hopes of getting you to return and keeping you on the site when that is the site's priority.

Some curation is extremely targeted, such as with a totalitarian government like North Korea who presents content supporting their leader's "god-like" qualities. It is also important to realize that not all content curation is unpopular. Do you want ISIS followers to be censored from quoting Koranic passages exhorting violence to broader Muslim populations? Do you want child pornography censored? Do you want the most outlandish claim of the political party you do not belong to, to be censored? Expanded censorship and content creation has the power to shift societal views.

### THE HOW-TO OF CENSORSHIP

The term "fake news" was unceremoniously appropriated from the Hillary Clinton presidential campaign by Presidential Candidate Trump to broadly describe false and misleading news stories as well as stories painting his candidacy in a negative light, but the concept existed long before 2016. For examples of how journalists can create fake news to influence outcomes, check out the documentary "Amanda Knox"[5] (about the American accused of murder in Italy) and pay close attention to Nick Pisa, the journalist from The Daily Mail who alledgedly made up stories (or never confirmed their accuracy). See the book *The Smear,* by award winning former CBS reporter Sharryl Attkisson for additional examples of narrative creation within news organizations.[6]

Fake news is a form of propaganda designed to influence your thoughts and feelings, and ultimately to cause you to take an action. These stories will attempt to hack the brain into action in the very same way that phishing attacks or IRS voicemail scams do. They use a headline that may be misleading or false designed to evoke an emotional response in their targeted audience.

After the 2016 election, Twitter, Facebook and Reddit have all announced plans to spot and remove fake news from their platforms programmatically, however, it is worth noting how many political activists and partisans have claimed to serve as advisors for various platforms in this process.[7] Using certain terms in certain ways will score higher in these still-secret algorithms, causing the content to get flagged and reviewed. Creating fake accounts and making them look legitimate is not difficult, but does require time. Alternatively, simply taking over legitimate accounts and using them to insinuate "information" into the public domain can be just as effective. And where Russia and other nation-states have notoriously employed "troll farms" (professional organizations of humans placing propaganda, and disinformation in the public domain) these campaigns are increasingly automated, likely to be scaled ever larger, and certainly will improve in quality.

Another way to sway the masses through a form of censorship is described in the Netflix movie *The Great Hack*—an exploration into the ways Cambridge Analytica built profiles on Americans in the valuable geographical areas who would be most likely to vote for the candidate in question. They achieved this by presenting paid advertising to them at the right time, ultimately bolstering their beliefs (confirmation bias) and encouraging them

x This image has been removed because it violated our content policy.

to voice these opinions to others (and vote).

Censorship doesn't have to be the removal of information. It can also be the suppression of that information by overshadowing it with a louder, amplified voice. For example, ten humans talking about one political candidate versus ten million bots pushing another. The smaller crowd's voice will likely be lost.

## PLATFORMS DO NOT SUPPORT FREE SPEECH

Just because we have a First Amendment guaranteed right of free speech does not mean that the private enterprises supplying these platforms will support it. In some cases, dissenting or controversial voices are completely removed from the network via "deplatforming".

Deplatforming is a term used to describe the censorship of people or topics through overt or covert banning and content removal by the platform. One of the best examples in recent months is the banning of InfoWars and Alex Jones that started in July of last year. The content and accuracy of Alex Jones's work is not relevant to this article, but he remains censored on those platforms. His followers must find other means to get access to his content.

Deplatforming makes news when a content creator with lots of views and followers are booted from the platform, but regular deplatforming happens to creators pushing certain viewpoints without having massive reach. An example from this summer of a wider deplatforming is YouTube's removal of over 200 pro-China channels meant to spread disinformation and oppose the pro-Democracy movement in Hong Kong[8]. Those channels had some popularity, but nothing near the following of InfoWars when it was banned. Deplatforming could be done covertly by simply restricting the number of people the material is presented to without the content creator being aware, or by falsely indicating the numbers of "views", "likes", "comments", etc. This could make popular or profitable content seem unpopular or unprofitable and vice versa in support of advancing a preferred narrative.

Whether you realize it or not, censorship is popular. An uncensored internet would be an uglier and more chaotic landscape. Few citizens want complete internet liberty. Most of us can name a topic or subject we support censoring. We must also understand that because of our tolerance for censorship, our informational diet includes facades that shield us from seeing what we didn't want to see and ever more sophisticated facades are created to

**x This content has been flagged as offensive and removed according to our Terms of Service.**
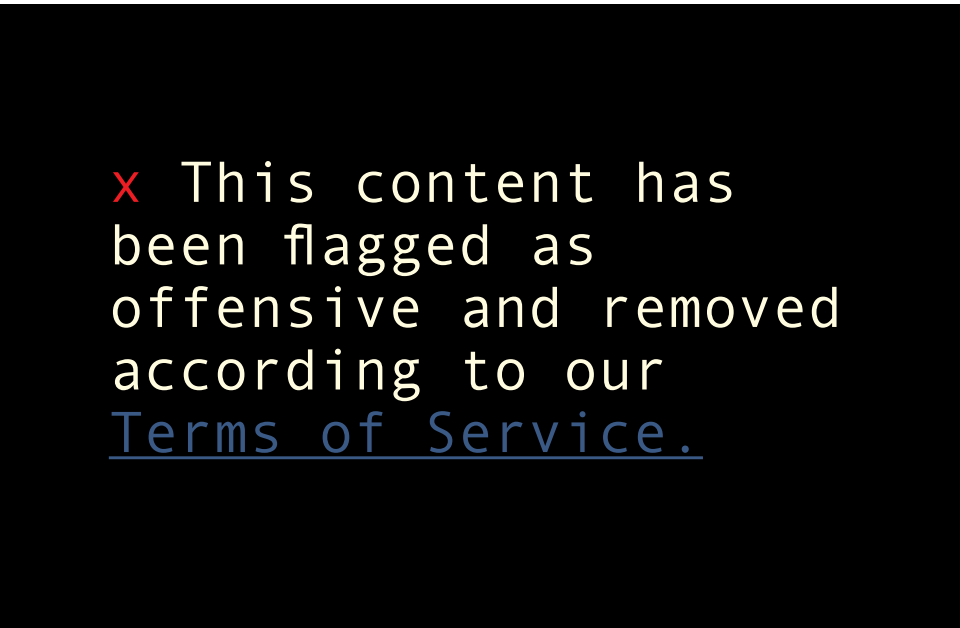
feed us what their creators want to feed us.

The profit motive appears to be the first driver of innovation in this area, but one need only study the history of political warfare as practiced by the KGB during the Cold War to make an educated guess how nation states would be incentivized to use these tools today. And one need only look at the historical examples of Tammany Hall and gerrymandering to form an idea of the incentives that are in place for politicians to solicit the assistance of those who control these tools of influence. Will political moves to regulate these technologies improve the situation, or will they just happen to leave out transparency in favor of creatively defined "fairness"?

Selling a dominant narrative to relevant populations has been a part of warfare and governance since the beginning of history. How much of the narrative you subscribe to today is façade? How much of the narrative that will be presented to you a decade from now will be façade?

## ADDITIONAL READING

See former CBS reporter Sharryl Attkisson's best-selling book: *The Smear: How Shady Political Operatives and Fake News Control What You See, What You Think, and How You Vote.*

David French published "The Social Media Censorship Dumpster Fire" this year to dig into more issues and legal cases. It's worth a read.

The New York Times has a great piece titled, "Countries Want to Ban 'Weaponized' Social Media. What Would That Look Like?" with tons

of referenced articles and research into the topic.

Justin Podur published "Mind Control: How Social Media Supercharged the Propaganda System" this year that digs into the topic of how a privatized free press can serve as a propaganda system. ✓

## BIO

*Branden R. Williams, DBA, CISSP, CISM (**www.brandenwilliams.com**) is a seasoned security executive, ISSA Distinguished Fellow, and technology executive sought by global companies to consult on their digital business initiatives. His latest book on PCI DSS v3.2 Compliance is available via Amazon.*

### SOURCES

1. Breastfeeding mothers, for example, complaining that removing these photos is a form of censorship bad for society as breastfeeding is clinically shown to be better for babies. Facebook has an official statement here: https://brando.ws/2019FBBF
2. Google at your own risk, could be considered not safe for work.
3. Check this article to see an example of what they will see: https://brando.ws/2019CNTS
4. Perhaps my favorite example is how a Flat Earth Society member accidentally proved the Earth was round in a Netflix expose on the group called Behind the Curve. Information Avoidance article reference: http://doi.org/10.1257/jel.20151245
5. "Amanda Knox": https://www.netflix.com/title/80081155?source=35
6. The Smear: How Shady Political Operatives and Fake News Control What You See, What You Think, and How You Vote. https://www.amazon.com/Smear-Shady-Political-Operatives-Control/dp/0062468162
7. Democracy Matters Strategic Plan for Action https://curi.us/files/media-matters-memo.pdf
8. Reference here: https://brando.ws/2019CNYT