



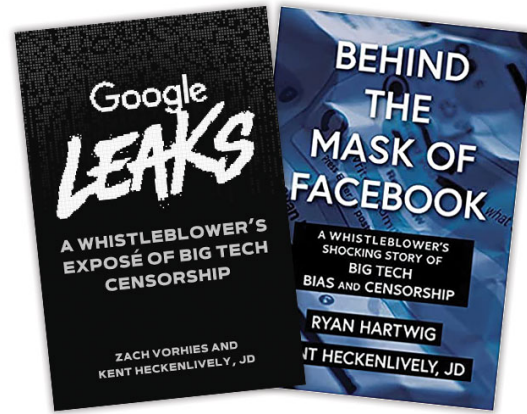
Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 5, 2021

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Blowing the Whistle on Big Tech

Google Leaks: A Whistleblower's Exposé of Big Tech Censorship, by Zach Vorhies and Kent Heckenlively, JD, New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2021, 208 pages, hardcover.

Behind the Mask of Facebook: A Whistleblower's Shocking Story of Big Tech Bias and Censorship, by Ryan Hartwig and Kent Heckenlively, J.D., New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2021, 352 pages, hardcover.



Have you ever joined an organization that you thought was doing good in the world, only to discover later that you were gravely mistaken?

Zach Vorhies and Ryan Hartwig have. The two took jobs with Google and Facebook, respectively, believing they were helping to make the world a better place. When they realized the evil their employers were perpetrating, however, they let the world know about it, becoming undercover reporters for Project Veritas, then political activists, and now authors, Vorhies of *Google Leaks* and Hartwig of *Behind the Mask of Facebook*.

On the surface, the two whistleblowers couldn't be more different. Hartwig is a Mormon with conservative political views. Vorhies is an irreligious liberal, albeit of the old-fashioned variety: respectful of others, in favor of free speech, and inquisitive rather than doctrinaire. Vorhies is a high-tech visionary and entrepreneur who sought employment with Google for the challenge of solving problems via technology. Hartwig was just a guy looking for a paycheck who found it as a content moderator for a Facebook contractor, where he thought he'd "be guarding the platform from the [drug] cartels and pornographers."

"Instead," he soon discovered, "Facebook would declare that a large part of the American public was the real enemy." Google, of course, would do likewise.

Despite their different backgrounds and political persuasions, Vorhies and Hartwig have one thing in common: They trust average people to be able to sort through competing arguments and arrive at the truth, while their former employers insist on silencing those whose opinions they find abhorrent, fearing they might sway the great unwashed toward the "wrong" beliefs.

The Google Archipelago

Vorhies considers the 2016 presidential election the impetus for Google's turn toward the dark side. The super-rich Silicon Valley progressives who ran the company were blindsided by Donald Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton. How could they, with their unparalleled and unprecedented access to information, have failed to see it coming?

The problem could *not* be that they live in an insular world in which they do not come into contact with people with views different from their own. No, the unwashed masses, being "poor, ignorant, and easily



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led” (as the *Washington Post* once described evangelical Christians), had to have been fooled by some nefarious “disinformation” plot, perhaps cooked up by the Russians.

Thus, Google called an “all-hands” meeting the week after the election not to perform some soul searching, but to figure out how to “prevent this from ever happening again,” as Google executive Jen Gennai put it in an undercover video shot by Project Veritas. Company bigwigs made speech after speech consoling their employees as if there had been “a death in the family,” recalled Vorhies. They made sure that everyone knew “who was good [Clinton voters] and who was bad [Trump voters].”

At one point, “a question was asked which would irrevocably change my life,” Vorhies wrote. An employee asked if Google could “do something against this very organized, very intense campaign of disinformation targeted at low information people.”

“I think investing in machine learning and AI [artificial intelligence] could be one way we actually make progress on some of this stuff,” responded Google CEO Sundar Pichai. The only thing hindering this progress was, he said, “a problem of scale and not being able to keep up.”

Vorhies’ interpretation:

The election of Donald Trump was a PROBLEM, which needed a SOLUTION.

“Progress” needed to be made on that problem, and the name of the solution was “machine learning,” which had already been developed. As Sundar Pichai had said, the real problem was how to “scale” it up.

The first part of the solution to the “Trump problem” was to label stories “fake news,” Vorhies discovered when he began searching internal company documents. Positive stories about Trump and negative stories about Clinton — even ones that had solid sourcing, such as the Benghazi scandal — were considered fake and therefore ripe for suppression.

Then Google developed a project called Machine Learning Fairness (MLF) to combat such “fake news.” Essentially, computers would look at data and classify it based on the criteria the company supplied. Favored posts would be promoted, while disfavored ones would be demoted or even quashed altogether. What’s more, MLF would be trained to create a false view of reality in order to promote the Left’s agenda. If a search for “CEOs” returned too many males, for example, the results would have to be “corrected” so as not to reinforce the notion that women rarely reach such positions.

Just to make sure no unapproved news slipped through the cracks, Google also sought to become a “single point of truth,” deciding which stories would be considered news, how they would be ranked, and which news sites would be allowed to earn money as part of the Facebook news feed.

Vorhies saw the plan for what it was: a replication of the Soviet system in which the state claimed a monopoly on truth and punished those who failed to accept it. “I thought, *Oh my, God, communism is coming to the United States and it’s going to be brought to us by Google.*” (Emphasis in original.)

Having recognized what the company was doing, Vorhies began spotting examples of it all over the place. For instance, Trump’s much-maligned tweet “Despite the constant negative press covfefe” actually made sense when one used Google Translate to learn that *covfefe* is an Arabic word meaning “we will stand up!” But when the *New York Times* claimed the word was “meaningless,” Google quickly



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changed its application to return a shrug emoticon instead of “we will stand up!”

Even stories unrelated to Trump could find themselves going down the memory hole if they contradicted the “approved” version of events. Google made an intense effort to suppress stories about the 2017 mass shooting at Las Vegas’ Mandalay Bay Hotel if those stories contained any details suggesting the shots didn’t come from a “lone nut” gunman with no discernible motive — a narrative with holes big enough to drive a Mack truck through. According to Vorhies, “EVERY MAJOR news organization got at least one of their articles about the Las Vegas massacre blacklisted by Google Search,” and half of YouTube’s blacklist was devoted to the shooting (with about 95 percent of all entries related to mass shootings in general).

Speaking of blacklists, YouTube’s also banned a variety of other subjects, including “cancer cure,” “Black Lives Matter,” and “The 8th Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland,” which just happens to recognize the personhood of the unborn. Google’s Android news platform, meanwhile, shut out conservative and libertarian sites.

Socialist Media

At the time Hartwig worked at the Phoenix, Arizona, office of Facebook contractor Cognizant (2018-2020), Facebook’s censorship approach was much lower-tech than Google’s, relying on human content moderators to review offending posts that had been reported to the company and decide whether to leave them up or delete them. It was a very labor-intensive method and took its toll on many of the moderators, who had to review at least 300 posts a day, many of them featuring profanity, pornography, or extreme violence.

The process was seemingly well-intentioned, trying “to come up with reasonable rules for social media,” as Hartwig put it. However, what might appear reasonable to some — allowing all opinions to be heard — does not appear reasonable to others, who believe that views to the right of Clinton’s constitute “hate speech” that should be suppressed. As one Cognizant policy-team member told Hartwig, “I think they’re more likely to make a right-wing person a hate figure [who should therefore be banned from Facebook], but it’s easier to make them a hate figure because the policies are around things that they normally say being considered hate speech.”

Hartwig initially became suspicious of Facebook’s motives in June 2018, when Cognizant employees were given special instructions for moderating posts during Pride Month. First, they were told to be extra-vigilant about hate speech against the LGBTQ community. Then they were informed that Facebook was making an exception to its usual policy prohibiting nudity; any nudity appearing in pride marches, of which there is apparently a considerable amount, was to be allowed. Furthermore, while it was normally policy to delete any posts calling someone “filth,” moderators were not to delete any posts in which an LGBTQ person called straight white males “filth.”

“That was one of the first inklings to me of the political leanings of the company, and that they weren’t interested in a level playing field but wanted to tilt the discussion in a certain way,” wrote Hartwig.

Indeed, such exceptions — almost always in favor of the Left — increasingly became the rule. Advocating or depicting violence against someone was once automatic grounds for deletion, but as the Trump administration wore on, Facebook made an exception for images of Trump’s throat being slashed. Also, posting video of, or praising, post-George Floyd violent protests, including those of Antifa



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(“not considered a hate org,” moderators were told), was acceptable. Saying white men are “the biggest terror threat in this country” should have been disallowed as “dehumanizing” — unless you’re CNN’s Don Lemon, in which case Facebook will let you get away with it. Calling someone an animal in a negative way, even referring to illegal immigrants metaphorically as “leeches,” was against the rules — except when someone called Trump or a police officer a “pig.” Saying a public figure who is also a minor is “retarded” was allowed — until people started applying the term to Greta Thunberg.

Trump proved to be as big a bugaboo for Facebook as he had for Google. “My perception,” penned Hartwig, “was that Facebook treated any instance of Trump opening his mouth as hate speech. This treatment trickled down to Trump’s supporters.” Moderators were constantly warned to be on the lookout for pro-Trump posts. A meme comparing Trump supporters to Ku Klux Klan members was OK’d under an exception to Facebook’s bullying policy that permits epithets leftists like to hurl at their opponents such as “racist,” “xenophobe,” and “Nazi.” Any posts favoring Trump’s border policies were deleted. A meme saying genders other than male or female constituted “mental disorders” was initially allowed because it contravened no existing policy, but it was later prohibited as “hate speech” because Trump was considering ordering federal agencies to recognize only an individual’s birth sex. And while Facebook meddles in elections the world over, the 2018 U.S. elections were “a monumental priority” for the company, noted Hartwig. “They stressed over and over the importance of having US content moderators to prevent the Russian interference that [allegedly] happened in 2016” and, in their minds, tricked the rubes in flyover country into voting for Trump.



Pride of face: Facebook made exceptions to its rules to promote Pride Month 2018, including allowing nudity and certain insults — but only from the LGBTQ crowd. *(Photo credit: AP Images)*

Facebook is also intensely interested in matters of race, and despite the fact that the vast majority of the company’s executives are white, it naturally comes down on the side of all other races. (Neutrality is apparently not an option.) According to Hartwig, “Facebook’s own Hate Speech policy allows for expressing pride in one’s own race as long as you don’t put down another race,” but it also says that “white pride ... is a hate slogan, and has always been.” “Black power” is acceptable because it “is a slogan representing a movement in support of rights and political power for black people,” while “white power” is unacceptable because it is considered a synonym for “white nationalism.”

The company doesn’t just hate *white* nationalism, though. “Facebook truly considers nationalist groups



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[of any kind, anywhere in the world] as enemy number one,” averred Hartwig.

The list of Facebook’s interventions on behalf of progressive causes is seemingly endless. From “climate change” to abortion to firearms, “Facebook has become a bludgeon to enforce certain ideas and simultaneously attack so-called ‘wrong-think,’” Hartwig declared.

The Rest of the Story

In the later chapters of their books, Vorhies and Hartwig recount their post-Big Tech lives, including their experiences with Project Veritas and the minor-celebrity status that accompanied it, perhaps culminating for Vorhies when Trump called him “an American hero.” They also suggest ways to defeat Big Tech, such as rescinding its immunity from censorship lawsuits under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act or launching alternative platforms.

Google Leaks and *Behind the Mask of Facebook* are extremely informative books on a vitally important topic: freedom of speech in the digital era. Both offer easy-to-read prose that explains technical concepts in layman’s terms along with copious endnotes and color photos documenting some of their claims. *Google Leaks* reads to some extent like a novel because it tells much of Vorhies’ life story and is quite dramatic at times, such as when Google sent the police to perform a “wellness check” on Vorhies two months after he’d left the company. *Behind the Mask of Facebook*, on the other hand, is fairly matter-of-fact, with little drama; Hartwig’s job as a content moderator simply ended when Cognizant prematurely terminated its contract with Facebook. (He suspects Facebook has since invented higher-tech ways of moderating content “without the fragile flaws of human beings.”)

Credit is also due to Kent Heckenlively, who co-authored both books, for helping Vorhies and Hartwig tell their stories in their own words rather than homogenizing their verbiage. Heckenlively has had his own experience with censorship, having been banned from Australia for three years (starting in 2017) for being “anti-vaccine.”

A few small criticisms are in order. At 352 pages, *Behind the Mask of Facebook* could have used a bit of trimming. While it’s understandable that some examples of Facebook bias would be mentioned in more than one chapter, several of them seem to pop up again and again, giving the text a somewhat repetitive feel. *Google Leaks*, on the other hand, feels a little light on details of Google’s censorship programs in its 208 pages. A relatively small portion of the book delves into those programs; much of the rest is spent on Vorhies’ pre- and post-Google life, which, while interesting, doesn’t exactly fall under the rubric of an “exposé of big tech censorship.”

Vorhies a Jolly Good Fellow

As bleak as things may seem in our Orwellian digital world, it’s good to know that those who have experienced it up close and know its inner workings haven’t given up hope — far from it, in fact. In his epilogue, Vorhies shared these words of optimism:

When people ask me, “Zach, what do you think is going to come of all this?” I always say the same thing.

“Something wonderful.”



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