"Shooting a Death" - Part A

(This case was prepared by University of Georgia journalism student Katie Barlow for JOUR 5170, Advanced Studies in Journalism, based on secondary sources cited below.)

On March 8, 2011, CEO of GoDaddy.com Bob Parsons went on a large game hunting expedition in Labola, Zimbabwe with a team of African guides and a videographer. The target was a "problem elephant." The group, led by Parsons, shot and killed the elephant, sliced up the meat, and fed it to a local village. The videographer compiled the footage into a story about the problems elephants create in these African villages.

The video opens with footage of ruined crops that had been trampled by elephants. Typing at the bottom of the images reads, "Damage is extensive. Unless elephant are stopped, entire crop may be lost."

The second part of the video details the actual hunt itself. Finally, the video closes capturing the local starving villagers slicing up the elephant meat right off of the carcass. "Then the video gets really graphic, as Parsons records villagers who come out in the early morning to slaughter the dead animal, stripping it of its flesh. Oddly enough, this part, which is set to AC/DC's "Hell's Bells," is almost a shameless plug for the company, zooming in at one point on the company's logo." The final caption reads, "Bulls do not return to field. Crops are saved. Many hungry villagers eat."

Parsons posted this video, along many others of African kills, online. The video went viral. There was a strong negative reaction from many members of the community, including organizations such as PETA.

Discuss:

Was it wise to post this video, among many others, online? Did it make a difference to include typed captions about the humanitarian impact of the kill? What is the impact of the close up shot on the GoDaddy logo?

Was it courageous to physically film this type of activity? Was it courageous for Parsons to post this kind of activity in the current political climate?

How should Parsons respond to the negative attention? If he is not solely responsible for the video, how should Parsons handle the videographer?

"Shooting a Death" - Part B

The official response to the video was as follows,

"I spend a few weeks in Zimbabwe each year helping the farmers deal with problem elephants. The people there have very little, many die each year from starvation and one of the problems they have is the elephants, of which there are thousands and thousands, that trash many of their fields destroying the crops. The tribal authorities request that I and others like me, patrol the fields before and during the harvest -- we can't cover them all, there are just a few of us -- and drive the elephant from the fields. The farmers try to run the elephants away by cracking whips, beating drums and lighting fires. All of this is ignored by the elephants. When my team catch elephants in a field (there are never just one) we typically kill one of them and the rest leave for good. After we kill an elephant the people butcher the elephant and it feeds a number of villages. These people have literally nothing and when an elephant is killed it's a big event for them, they are going to be able to eat some protein. This is no different than you or I eating beef. If at all possible we avoid elephant cows and only kill mature bulls. By just killing bulls it has no effect on the elephant social structure (as it is matriarchal) as well as the herd size. The reason is another bull quickly steps up and breeds in place of the bull taken."

The Huffington Post included quotes from this explanation alongside posting the video.

PETA launched a national campaign to close GoDaddy.com accounts.

An animal rights organization named Parsons "Scummiest CEO of the Year." Parsons says he will frame it on his wall in his office.

Discuss:

What do you think of Parsons explanation? What do you think of Parsons reaction to the award?

What do you think was the true intended purpose of the video? Did it meet this purpose?

Is it courageous to challenge organizations like PETA in the manner that Parsons displayed? Was it courageous to defend his actions?

Should Huffington Post, along with several other sites, continue to keep this video posted next to the story online?

"Shooting a Death" - Epilogue

Parsons' response to the accusations of logo placement was, "If I wanted to advertise GoDaddy I would have used one of our gorgeous GoDaddy models, not starving villagers in Africa."

Parsons will continue to hunt these elephants and video the evidence to get the story out there. He says, "Of everything I do this is the most rewarding."

Works Cited

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