



FACEBOOK USED TO FEEL like a warm, safe place to share family photos and keep in touch with old friends. Congressional hearings on Russia's invasion of social media, worldwide, has exposed the rotten underbelly of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and many more sites. Americans blindly trust social media out of ignorance. Now that Congress has forced Facebook and Twitter to divulge the ads purchased by the Russians, our attitude toward social media will be changed forever.

False advertising is nothing new. In the 1960s, my grandmother threw out her bottle of Geritol, a liquid vitamin product for people with "tired blood." It turned out that the reason she felt a buzz from Geritol was that it was 12 percent alcohol. In April 2017, Volkswagen was fined \$2.8 billion for installing software in vehicles to cheat on greenhouse gas emissions.

The problem with Facebook is that it has not been screening its advertisers. Facebook failed to disclose to the FBI that Russian propaganda was being posted on the website. Facebook users reading the Russian posts on the company's News Feed assumed that the propaganda was legitimate news. Facebook has promised to solve the problem by hiring 1,000 people to screen ads. Congress may pressure Facebook, a rich company with a \$14 billion cash flow, to add more than 25,000 people to screen their ads.

Twitter has not been screening who posts on the website. Twitter does not ask for a name, address, phone number, or birthday. The design of Twitter also makes it easy for internet robots (bots) to penetrate the system and determine the popularity of a tweet.

Cellphone, tablet, and computer owners are facing a scary fact: Our spam filters and firewalls are not fortresses that keep us safe. Bad stuff gets through. Lone-wolf propagandists generate fake news. So do teenagers in Macedonia. The governments of North Korea, Russia, and other countries, hostile to the U.S., plant false information to sow discord in America. Here's a breakdown of the most common fake news sources:

- **Troll Farms.** The Russian government runs these operations. According to research by *Wired* magazine and the *New York Times*, a typical troll farm employs around 400, mostly young people in their 20s. They work 12-hour shifts in teams assigned to create political posts, non-political posts laced with propaganda, and comments on blogs and websites. The goal of the state-sponsored trolls is to influence the people of Russia who read the fake stories and comments in Russian newspapers. Troll farms also post phony stories on American and European social media.

- **Lone Wolves.** A typical lone wolf was Paul Horner, a prolific creator of hoaxes, who died last month in Arizona at the age of 38. He made up fake news because he thought it was satire. He got a kick out of popularizing lies that were swallowed whole by gullible internet users. Horner said in a 2016 interview with the *Washington Post*:

"My sites were picked up by Trump supporters all the time. I think Trump is in the White House because of me. His followers don't fact-check anything—they'll post everything, believe anything. His campaign manager posted my story about a protester getting paid \$3,500 as fact. I made that up. I posted a fake ad on Craigslist."

- **Sockpuppets.** These are false identities created to manipulate public opinion. Sockpuppets are used to skew online polls or defame a person, organization, or policy.

More TV dramas will be exploring internet hoaxes this fall. The season premiere of *Madam Secretary* on CBS, Oct. 8, will deal with fake news that impacts the state department.

How do we protect ourselves from phony information? Facebook and Twitter will have to do their part in screening the purchasers of ads.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mary Jane McKinney is the founder and CEO of GrammarDog.com LLC, a publisher of grammar exercises. She has used her English degree as a teacher, editor, reporter, and marketing executive. Readers who have questions or comments on this column are welcome to write to the author in care of *The Canadian Record*, PO Box 898, Canadian, TX 79014, or by e-mail at: fifi@grammardog.com.



Youth Cattle Conferences attendees at a dairy: (back row, left to right) Dr. Dan Hale, Paige Holbrooks, Shae Lynn Suttle, Alexandria Harrell, John Michael Fuhrmann, Erin Metzler, and Rocky Gingg; (front row) Victoria Crowsey, Lauryn Carroll, Tara Whitely, and Marcee Cooke.

—PROVIDED PHOTO

Students attend checkoff-funded Texas Youth Cattle Conferences

AUSTIN—Marcee Cooke of Canadian was one of 20 students from across Texas who attended the Texas Youth Cattle Conferences offered in the Panhandle and South Texas regions. Members of Junior Cattle Breed Associations, Texas 4-H Livestock Ambassadors program, and Texas FFA Association were selected to attend the conference through an application process. Marcee represented Hemphill County 4-H and the Junior American Akaushi Association.

"This is our first year to offer two separate conferences for students to see the entire beef industry first-hand, learn from industry experts, and ultimately become advocates for the beef community," said Ryan Moorhouse, chairman of the Texas Beef Council (TBC) board of directors. "The conferences offer a unique opportunity to engage the next generation of leaders in our industry."

Each conference took students on a four-day journey of learning and experiencing the Texas beef community from pasture to plate. The destinations visited along the way were unique to the respective regions of the Lone Star State. Students visited ranches, food-service distributors, processing plants, agricultural media outlets, and spent time in the classroom with collegiate professors.

Students will continue to impact the beef

industry through group projects that focus on their passion within the beef community. Guided by TBC staff and an industry mentor, projects will be executed by the students in their schools and communities across the state. The projects will differ based on student interest and industry need.

Other students attending the conferences were: Alexandria Harrell, Texas Junior Maine Anjou Association; Cade Osborn, Kendall County 4-H and Comfort FFA; Cassie Weishuhn, Lone Star 4-H; Cole Herring, Robertson County 4-H; Erin Metzler, Texas Junior Red Angus Association; John Michael Fuhrmann, Lindsay FFA and Texas Junior Red Angus Association; Killian Grawe, Walker County 4-H and Texas Junior Red Angus Association; Lauren Hillert, Brazos County 4-H and Rudder FFA; Lauryn Carroll, Bangs 4-H; Lexus Yow, Franklin FFA; Madison Council, Texas Junior Limousin Association; Megan Dunn, Shelby County 4-H; Paige Holbrooks, Borden FFA; Shae Lynn Suttle, Wildcat 4-H and Idalou FFA; Tanner Thompson, Florence FFA; Tara Whitely, Sanger FFA; Taylor Pursley, Waco Midway FFA; Tyler Griffeth, Denton County 4-H, Ponder FFA and Texas Red Angus Association; and Victoria Crowsey, Callisburg FFA.

**Our office will be closed on
Monday, October 9 as the nation
observes Columbus Day.
Please stop in Tuesday, October 10,
as we resume normal business hours.**



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