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Trophy Hunting in Namibia: A Case of an Unethical Image that is Unjustified?

Technical Report, The ESC Rennes School of Business

January 13, 2016

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the discourse of organized trophy hunting providers, mostly operating in Namibia. With the increasing pressure from opponent groups such as animal rights activists as well as from hunters themselves, trophy hunting operators are increasingly facing questions about the responsibility and sustainability of their activities. This study explores the role of a marketing discourse used in the online marketing communications of one hundred Namibian safari providers. The results of our discourse analysis show that the vast majority of information provided on the sites investigated dealt with the richness of the fauna available for hunting, the quality of the service provided and the competitiveness of the prices of safari packages. Only a minority of safari websites had statements regarding ethics as it relates to trophy hunting. Where cited, ethics was usually spoken of in terms of the tradition of family run business having a social and economic responsibility to the land and local community as a result of the multi-generational nature of their operations. The results of this exploratory study suggest that the conventional wisdom of contextualizing trophy hunting as a cruel and resource-destroying activity is simplistic at best and erroneous at worst, and should be further challenged and studied.

Keywords: hunting, safari, ethics, sustainability, conservation, Namibia, marketing.

Introduction

Hunting has often been portrayed as a romantic and brave adventure in dangerous Africa. For example, in *King Solomon's Mines*, novelist H. Rider Haggard caught the imagination of Victorian England with the account of a fearless hunter, the famous big-game hunter Frederick

Selous who ventured to Africa. The impact of the novel was immediate and resulted in the much idolized figure of the “white hunter” - colonial-minded, aristocratic Englishmen who made their living shooting game and leading wealthy travelers on hunting safaris. In the years leading up to World War I, which some consider the golden age of big game hunting, other legendary hunters joined Selous — most of them European, rich and bored by the constraints of life back home (Steinhart, 1989). The debate for or against trophy hunting has become intense especially due to the media highlighting stories of unethical or illegal hunting methods, which generally portray hunting in a negative light (Barnes and Novelli, 2008; Lindsey, 2008). Recently, trophy hunting became the object of furious debate, with even a call for banning the industry worldwide, as a result of the killing of “Cecil the Lion” by American dentist Dr. Walter Palmer back in July of 2015 (Thornycroft, 2015). Cecil was a major tourist attraction for visitors to Zimbabwe’s Hwange National Park. The large 13 year old male with a distinguished black mane, the leader of two prides containing six lionesses, 12 cubs and one other adult male, was reportedly friendly towards sightseers and a crowd favourite (BBC, 2015). That is until he was shot and killed by Dr. Palmer.

The killing of Cecil the lion has only increased the ongoing debate over the value, ethics and sustainability of big game hunting (otherwise known as safari or trophy hunting). Wilson and West (1981) defined controversial goods and services as those which “for reasons of delicacy, decency, morality or even fear, tend to elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offense, or outrage when mentioned or openly presented.” Proponents of trophy hunting argue that, when well managed and regulated, it is a sustainable activity which helps to protect the environment and maintain biodiversity (Hofer 2002; Novelli and Humavindu, 2005, Novelli, Barnes, and Humavindu, 2006). Opponents usually make an ethical argument against trophy hunting on the grounds of its cruelty, the questionable motivation of self-satisfaction on the part of the hunter, and the belief that killing for sport is something that is fundamentally wrong (Finch, 2004; Hofer, 2002). More troubling is the perception by some that the majority of the economic benefits in Africa go to White landowners who hold a privileged position in the economy due to the past injustices of colonialism and Apartheid (Duffy, 2000; Lindsey et al., 2013).

Hunting in Namibia is officially controlled and regulated by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET). The trophy hunting season lasts for 10 months each year, starting on February 1 and ending on November 30, with authorized hunting hours being 30 minutes before sunrise until 30 minutes after sunset. All trophy hunting expeditions require the use of a licensed / registered guide (or “hunting professional”) as well as a valid permit issued by the MET. Trophy hunting parties are required to use a tour operator that is registered and in good standing with the Namibia Tourism Board (NTB) as well as with the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI). A hunting professional is limited to escorting only two clients for any given hunt and must be present at all times. Parties in search of large cats, i.e. cheetahs, leopards and lions, require that an additional hunting permit be obtained before the hunt commences. Hunts are limited to areas where permission has been given by a property’s owner, with individual hunters being limited to a maximum of two trophies per species for each permit. An estimated 75% of hunting takes place on communal conservancies with the remaining 25% taking place on private lands (a fraction takes place on concessions in State Parks) (Lamprecht, 2007, Lindsey et al., 2007a, Lindsey et al., 2012; NAPHA; Novelli and Humavindu, 2005).

One of the groups most responsible for promoting trophy hunting in Namibia is the Namibian Professional Hunting Association (NAPHA). Created in 1974, its self-stated mission is to “promote Namibia as a hunting destination internationally and protect the right to hunt locally.” It is the hunting industry’s main lobbying group, describing itself as having an “excellent working relationship with the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism” as well as being “instrumental in forming new legislation” (source: NAPHA).

The trophy hunting industry is a part of what Pine and Gilmore (1999) coined as “the experience economy.” Today, the trophy hunting “experience” is a vital part of Namibia’s economy, with an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 safari hunters visiting Namibia each year, mainly wealthy individuals from the USA and Europe (Lindsey et al., 2013; Novelli and Humavindu, 2005). Between 2004 and 2007, the value of the trophy hunting industry in Namibia as a whole is believed to have gone from \$US 28.5 million to almost \$US 45 million (Lamprecht, 2009), a positive trend which should only continue given the estimates that travel and tourism in Namibia is expected to grow by over 7% a year in the next decade (WTTC, 2015). The MET says that trophy hunting is, “one

of the most important industries in Namibia in terms of its strong contribution to the Gross Domestic Product; the employment it creates; and the well-being and social upliftment it offers Namibians in rural areas” (Sikopo, 2014). It is believed that each (Namibian) dollar expended on hunting makes a direct contribution of \$0.47 to Gross National Product (GNP) and an indirect contribution of \$0.43 by way of an income multiplier (Novelli and Humavindu, 2005). An estimated 21% of the total income generated by trophy hunting goes to the government, with 40% going to local communities and low income wage earners (Samuelsson and Stage, 2007). Trophy hunting reportedly provides more jobs, at higher salaries, than commercial agriculture or any other land utilization scheme found in communal conservancies in Namibia (Lamprecht, 2009). This revenue is extremely important in a country that is still working to undo the legacy of unequal wealth distribution brought about by Apartheid, and is often recognized as the impetus for the expansion of wildlife conservancies and conservation efforts on land that is communally owned (Ashley and Barnes, 1996; Weaver and Skyer, 2003).

Furthermore, the net effect of regulatory efforts in the trophy hunting industry, both pre- and post-independence, on conservation is believed to have been positive, with wildlife numbers increasing by an estimated 70%, and their diversity increasing by some 44%, on private lands between 1967 and 1995 (Barnes and de Jager, 1996).

Trophy Hunting and Experiential Marketing

The term “trophy hunting,” which can be used interchangeably with “safari” or ‘sport’ hunting, normally refers to tourists who pay to engage in a hunt, usually in the company of a professional guide, with the objective being to obtain a “trophy” (i.e. horns, tusks, skin, etc.) from a rare or exotic animal (Lindsey et al., 2007a; Novelli and Humavindu, 2005). Hunting tours would fall under the domain of wildlife tourism, broadly considered to be encounters with non-domesticated animals, either in their natural habitat or in some form of captivity (Higginbottom, 2004). Unlike photo tourism or other types of guided nature tours (non-consumptive), trophy hunting is consumptive in that it involves the deliberate and premeditated killing of animals (Freese, 1998).

While in terms of economics and marketing, hunting can be considered as a product (Rosa et al. 1999), due to its nature and provision, trophy hunting could be deemed more as a service or

consumer experience. Holbrook and Hirschmann (1982) were one of the first to theorize that consumption had experiential elements to it. An associated study that dealt with consumer behaviour in terms of an “experience” was Hirschman and Holbrook (1982). They determined that consumer behaviour could be conceptualized in terms of factors related to “hedonic consumption” i.e. the consumption of a good or service which is motivated primarily by the desire to experience joy or pleasure. In the lexicon of marketing, a tourist experience can also be referred to as a consumer experience (Moutinho, 1987; Swarbrooke and Horner, 1999; Woodside et al., 2000), with the tourist being considered as a consumer and the time spent on holiday understood to be their consumption (Quan and Wang, 2004). Furthermore, this experiential marketing paradigm builds upon sensory, affective and cognitive experiences (Schmitt, 1999), all of which would apply to trophy hunting. But Tynan and McKechnie (2009) note that there is still a fairly large degree of ambiguity in the marketing literature as to what exactly an experience is, and a wide array of terms used in conjunction with experience marketing. Same and Larimo (2012) observe that there is a lack of standardization and agreement in terminology, with experience marketing, experiential marketing, and customer experience management (CEM) being used almost interchangeably. Tourist experiences occur outside of a person’s usual surroundings and require a wilful act on the part of the consumer (Bowen and Clarke, 2009). It has been argued that companies don’t provide experiences, in this case the game farms and safari tours that facilitate trophy hunting, but rather create the surroundings and possibilities in which an experience can take place (Schulze, 1992; Mossberg, 2003). Verhoef et al. (2009) proposed a more holistic description of what makes up an experience, taking into account the elements that are both inside and outside the control of the service provider, as well as the activity of looking for, buying and consuming the experience, as well as any after sales interaction and follow up. Furthermore, these experiences can be considered as being internal to the consumer, engaging them on a rational, spiritual, emotional, sensory and physical level (Gentile et al., 2007; LaSalle and Britton, 2003; Schmitt, 1999). Pine and Gilmore (1999) offered a construct comprised of four dimensions in order to more fully explain just what an experience is. In their model, experiences could be differentiated in terms of education, escapism, esthetics and entertainment, with passive participation by a consumer falling into the esthetic and entertainment dimensions, while active participation would be denoted by the educational and escapist dimensions. By engaging in all four dimensions, a consumer could enjoy the optimal tourist experience (Gilmore and Pine, 2002;

Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003). In the case of tourism in remote areas, it has been argued that the consumer is an active participant in the co-creation of the experience (Kastenholz, 2010; Mossberg, 2007), with the nature of this participation being a critical factor in how the experience is later remembered (Knutson and Beck, 2004). Walls et al. (2011) promote the idea that the perceived success of a given experience will largely depend upon the quality of the interactions between the host and guest, and the degree to which the consumer was willing to engage in as many of the dimensions of the experience as possible.

The Ethics of Trophy Hunting in Namibia

The increased study of ethics as it relates to consumer rather than corporate behavior is a relatively new phenomenon (Schlegelmilch and Öberseder, 2010). Ethical consumer behavior, or ethical consumption, has been defined as taking actions and making decisions in terms of “what is good for the society” (Smith, 1990), as well as “decision-making, purchases and other consumption experiences that are affected by the consumer’s ethical concerns” (Bray, Johns and Kilburn, 2011, p. 597). Expanding the scope of the discussion to include vacation and travel, ethical tourism, ideally, concerns itself with the protection of the natural environment, as well as the needs of local populations and their culture and heritage (Lansing and De Vries, 2007). This would complement Williams et al. (1995) who argued that the objective of most tourism policies in general would be the promotion of local cultures and associated societal norms. In this context, when one looks at the social and economic contributions that trophy hunting provides to local communities, a strong argument could be made (albeit, controversially) that this form of consumptive tourism contains many of the elements that would make it ethical as well.

It may be argued that tourism, i.e. the transportation of large numbers of people to distant locations resulting in increased pressure on the local environment and occupants, is an unsustainable activity in the way that it is promoted and experienced (Han et al., 2010; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Weeden, 2002). But trophy hunting represents a viable option for people living in isolated and disadvantaged areas to generate revenue, since hunters are very often willing to hunt in areas that ecotourists might not be interested in visiting due to a lack of picturesque landscapes or an abundance of wildlife (Lindsey et al., 2006). Also, the fees per client generated by trophy hunters are usually greater than those to be had from tourists in general

(Baker, 1997; Lewis and Alpert, 1997). This means that fewer visitors are required to generate a given level of income, possibly reducing the related environmental impact (Gössling, 2000; Mayaka et al., 2004). Trophy hunting, once it is recognized as having financial and economic benefits to local populations, engenders a positive and protective attitude towards wildlife in those populations, resulting in a positive impact on conservation (Baker, 1997; Barnes, 2001; Humavindu and Barnes, 2003, Barnes et al., 2002; Novelli and Humavindu, 2005). This would be especially true for Namibia, where the revenue generated by trophy hunting is seen as being a major factor in the increased development of wildlife conservancies on communally owned land (Lindsey, 2008). There is also evidence that governments, in an effort to promote and protect trophy hunting, try to engage in more constructive and responsible policies and initiatives with regard to wildlife conservation (Hofer 2002; Novelli and Humavindu, 2005). That said, there is still the perception that private farms in Namibia are more efficient and more adept when it comes to conservation efforts, with there being an estimated 21 to 33 times more wildlife located on private property than in nominally Government protected areas (Lindsey et al, 2013). All in all, an estimated 80% of wildlife in Namibia resides outside of protected areas (Lamprecht, 2009).

Proponents of hunting maintain that a well-regulated trophy hunting industry plays a key role in wildlife conservation efforts, in that, normally, it is aged males (ideally beyond the age of breeding) who are targeted for killing, with an average of no more than 2 to 5% of the population being harvested in any one year. These rates are generally considered as being less than the reproduction rates for most trophy species and as such are deemed to be sustainable if maintained (Bond et al., 2004; Lindsey et al., 2007a). In the case of Namibia, historically speaking, trophy numbers have usually been below the official stated quota, sometimes substantially (Lindsey et al., 2007).

But just as with any industry, there are unscrupulous operators willing to engage in unethical if not outright illegal behaviour. Some of the more egregious practices would be hunting from mechanized vehicles, shooting young or extremely rare animals, using bait or artificial lights to attract quarry, luring animals out of protected areas or National Parks, and engaging in “canned-

hunting,” i.e. killing captive-bred animals in extremely small fenced in areas (Lindsey et al., 2007a).

In addition to ethics, there are also ecological and biological issues as well. Some game farms have been known to introduce species that are not indigenous to an area in order for them to be hunted, with the importation of the black wildebeest into Namibia being just one example. (Lindsey et al., 2006). There are also instances of game farmers manipulating the genetics of certain species in order to promote some desired trait, as well as the questionable practice of the cross breeding of species in order to create new varieties of exotic animals to hunt (Hamman et al., 2003; Lindsey et al., 2009).

Previous research conducted specifically about trophy hunting shows that the vast majority of hunters would be unwilling to engage in a hunt in which fundamental principles of conservation and sustainability were not respected (Lindsey et al., 2006). This indicates that the behaviour of hunters would mirror that of consumers in general. Consumer behaviour research shows that consumers, when making purchases, are adapting their behaviour and increasingly seeking out ethical options (Berry and McEachern, 2005; Creyer, 1997; Han *et al.*, 2010; Harrison et al. 2005; Hendarwan 2002; Mason 2000; McGoldrick and Freestone 2008; Nicholls, 2002; Webster, 2000; Weeden, 2002). Furthermore, it is suggested that consumers are willing to pay more for products that they deem to be produced or provided ethically (Elliott and Freeman, 2001; McGoldrick and Freestone, 2008; Mintel, 1999; Trudel and Cotte, 2008).

In Namibia, it is illegal to engage in practices that violate the “Fair Chase” principals as delineated in the NAPHA Code of Conduct. Fair chase, as outlined by NAPHA, states that hunters should only pursue quarry considered to be, “a free roaming animal or enclosed roaming animal possessed of the natural behavioural inclination to escape from the hunter and be fully free to do so.” Hunters should not use any form of motorized transport and should refrain from killing females with dependent young (source: NAPHA).

Smith (1994) argued that tourism could be conceptualized and discussed in terms of it being a product (here the product being trophy hunting). Just by its very nature, the promotion of a contentious product can be deemed as offensive by certain members of a given community (Waller and Fam, 2005). Waller (2005, P. 11) defined controversial advertising as the promotion of any product that could “elicit reactions of embarrassment, distaste, disgust, offence, or outrage from a segment of the population when presented.” Studies have shown that males and younger people tend to have a greater overall tolerance for controversial advertising (Barnes and Dotson, 1990; Grazer and Keesling, 1995), but companies seen as promoting controversial or offensive products can be the subject of such negative reactions as poor publicity, decreased sales, complaints to regulatory bodies, as well as organized protests and boycotts (Fam and Waller, 2003).

Methodology

Discourse-based research has been used in critical marketing and consumer research since late 1990s and early 2000 (Philips and Hardy, 1997; Käreman and Alvesson, 2001). It has proven its legitimacy in critical marketing linked to environmental issues (Prothero et al., 2010; Kadirov and Varey, 2013). According to Kress (1990, p. 85) it makes “...visible and apparent that which may previously have been invisible and seemingly natural, they intend to show the imbrication of linguistic-discursive practices with the wider socio-political structures of power and domination.”

As the controversial nature of offering a hunting experience has serious implication in terms of marketing, advertising and consumer behaviour, this study fills a gap in the literature by exploring the trophy hunting providers’ discourse via critical discourse content analysis. The decision to use case study methodology was taken based on support in the literature with regards to its appropriateness for exploratory research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Yin 2003), and also its relevance for investigating the elements of ethical discourse in the hunting industry (Lindsey et al., 2006).

Content analysis has become a widely used method of analysis in a variety of social sciences, including marketing. For Krippendorff (2004) discourse analysis is social constructivist,

rhetorical and ethnographic. Krippendorff (2013, p. 24), considers content analysis to be “an appropriate research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use”.

Consequently, a text analysis via a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program (NVivo 11) was carried out to analyze the meaning of verbal messages contained on a representative sample of 100 Namibian trophy hunting websites. This method was chosen due to its propensity to analyse the way the safari providers market the hunting experience and interpret the *à priori* representations about the ‘servicescape’ and the hunting experience that they provide. It was deemed appropriate as well because of its propensity to uncover the underlying set of inside-out values that focus on a company's own capabilities and strengths, while getting the necessary coding and interpretation reliability (Kent, 2000). Specifically, exploration in the context of the present article involves investigating issues, concepts, constructs and contexts as they relate to trophy hunting in order to develop tentative ideas and hypotheses to be put under scrutiny in later explanatory studies (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2010). The data were collected in a quasi-systematic manner from more than 450 website pages of trophy hunting providers who are all members of NAPHA. A subsequent analysis was carried out and interpreted individually by three different researchers and collectively compared and discussed.

In total, 127 websites were accessed either in English (n=120) or in German (n=7) over a period of three months between September and November 2015. After independent assessment of appropriateness and research team consensus, twenty-seven sources were discarded due to their obsolescence (blogs or websites in which the latest news or posting were more than two years old) or poor content (a single scroll-down page with no clickable menus). The final set of one hundred websites was put subjected to detailed scrutiny, searching for mission or vision statements and articles containing ethical/fair/sustainable discourse, using both an automated keyword and manual search. This method generated thirty-three items varying in size from a simple sentence to a single corpus of 550 words that were imported in NVivo 11 where text search queries and word frequency queries were undertaken. The findings are discussed in detail in the next section.

Findings and Discussion

It has been suggested that when it comes to marketing an intangible item like a service or experience, that vivid and dramatic language should be used (Legg and Baker, 1987; George and Berry, 1981). A review of Namibian trophy hunting websites would show that the vast majority would not adhere (either intentionally or unintentionally) to this notion.

Among the websites under study, almost seventy percent (n=67) contained pragmatic and practical information about the lodging, international regulations for travelling with fire arms and ammunition, the type and size of the available fauna for hunting in the area (called ‘game’) and pricing options (all inclusive, per trophy or per day). Only thirty-three trophy hunting providers made statements about their game management policies, reference to the NAPHA rulings or personal hunting ethics. An initial word frequency query of the 50 most frequently cited words (including synonyms) generated the word cloud presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Word tree of the 50 most frequently used words on the 100 safari websites studied

When running the query with only the ten most frequently used words (including the synonyms), the word tree evolves and reveals the following key words (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Word tree of the 10 most frequently used words on the 100 safari websites studied

Among the ten most frequent words, it is worth noting that hunting (n=133) & hunter (n=25), game (n=47), trophy (n=35) and animals (n=32) are primary while ethics (n=24), Namibia (n=21), population (n=20) and sustainability (n=18) are secondary. The weighted percentage of ‘ethics’ is only 1.10% in the collected data and only 0.83% for ‘sustainability’. The text search query results of the word ‘ethics’ shows strong links to the NAPHA acronym and/or to the mission of NAPHA to “ensure and promote ethical conduct, sustainable utilization of natural resources, and to secure the industry for current and future generations.” (NAPHA). Also, historical or past-oriented statements related to the “preservation of the natural inheritance over time” (Node 17) as well as future-oriented statements regarding “keeping the genetic pool for generations to come” (Node 5) could be reasonably inferred as indicating an ethical management philosophy without necessarily using the words ‘ethics’ or ‘ethical’ *per se*. The detail of the text search query is presented in Figure 3.

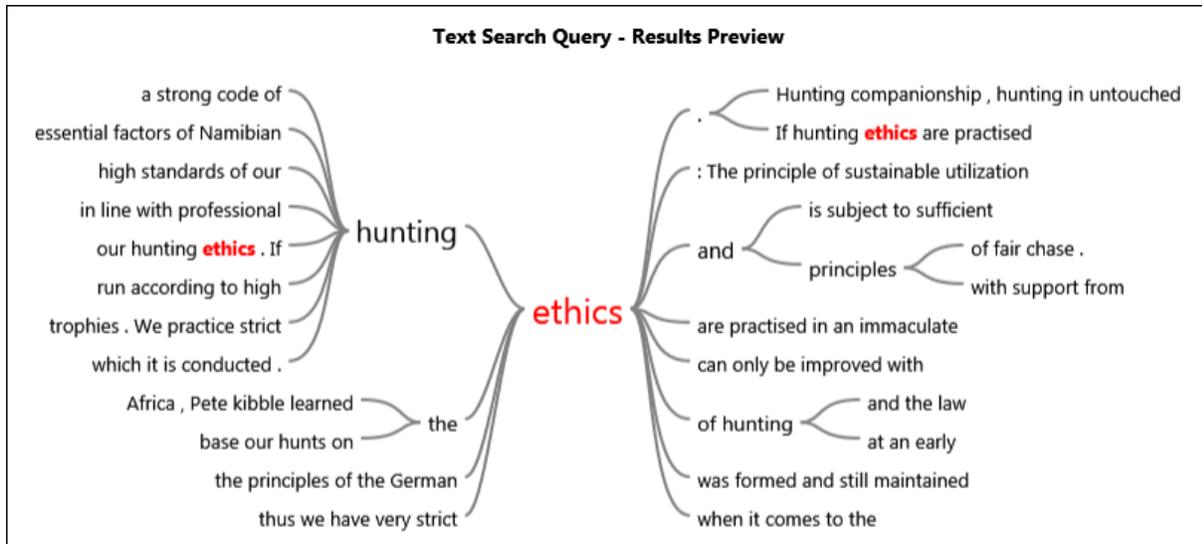


Figure 3: Text search query centred on the synonyms ‘ethic, ethics, ethical’ on the 100 safari websites studied

Despite the fact that the word ‘fair’ is not among the ten most frequent words used, it is rather important to analyse it via a text search query as well. As a matter of fact, the investigated trophy hunting providers have an utmost concern about the fair treatment of the hunted animals called game. This concern is denoted by what can be considered as a representative statement found on one of the websites; “we believe that, in today’s world, sustainable utilization of wildlife plays a major role in protecting and conserving wildlife on the African continent.” More than 80 (n=83) of the safari providers are very specific about the manner in which a fair hunt is to be conducted. It can also be reasonably hypothesized that the target audience of mainly American and European hunters would be more sensitive to this fairness-based approach rather than an ethics-based one. The detail of the text search query centred on the synonyms ‘fair, fairness’ is presented in Figure 4.

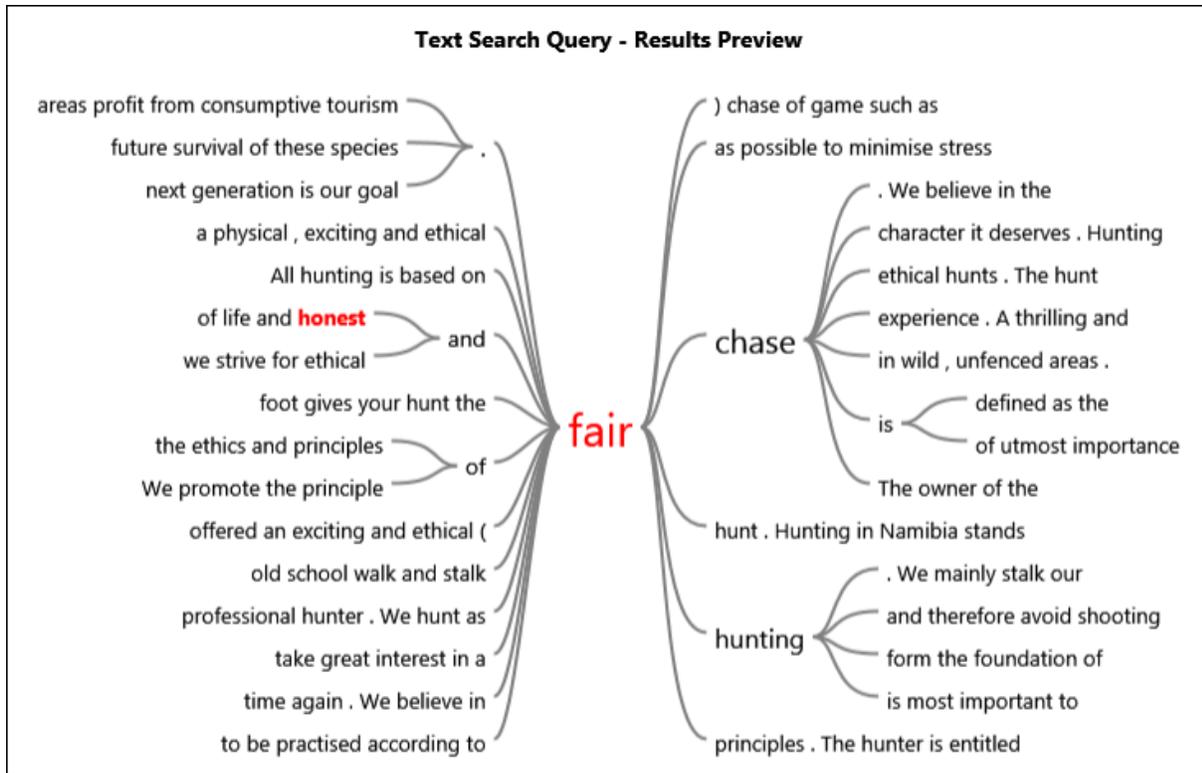


Figure 4: Text search query centred on the synonyms ‘fair, fairness’ on the 100 safari websites studied

Related to the above, another important notion is that of the ‘trophy’ achieved as the consumptive result of the hunting experience. Its value can be measured in terms of aesthetics and the quality of the game killed, but also in terms of it being achieved according to the notions of fair play and as a prize being won in accordance with the hunting rules established by NAPHA. Apart from these aspects, the socio-economic effect of trophies on local population well-being is summarized by one website as: “It is rather appropriate to include the entire biophysical environment, in other words, the economic scope of game and other natural resources have to be developed in such a way that they will contribute directly to raise the living-standard of the local African population.” (Node 25). In this way, the sustainability principles are enounced without being necessarily labelled as such (see Figure 5).

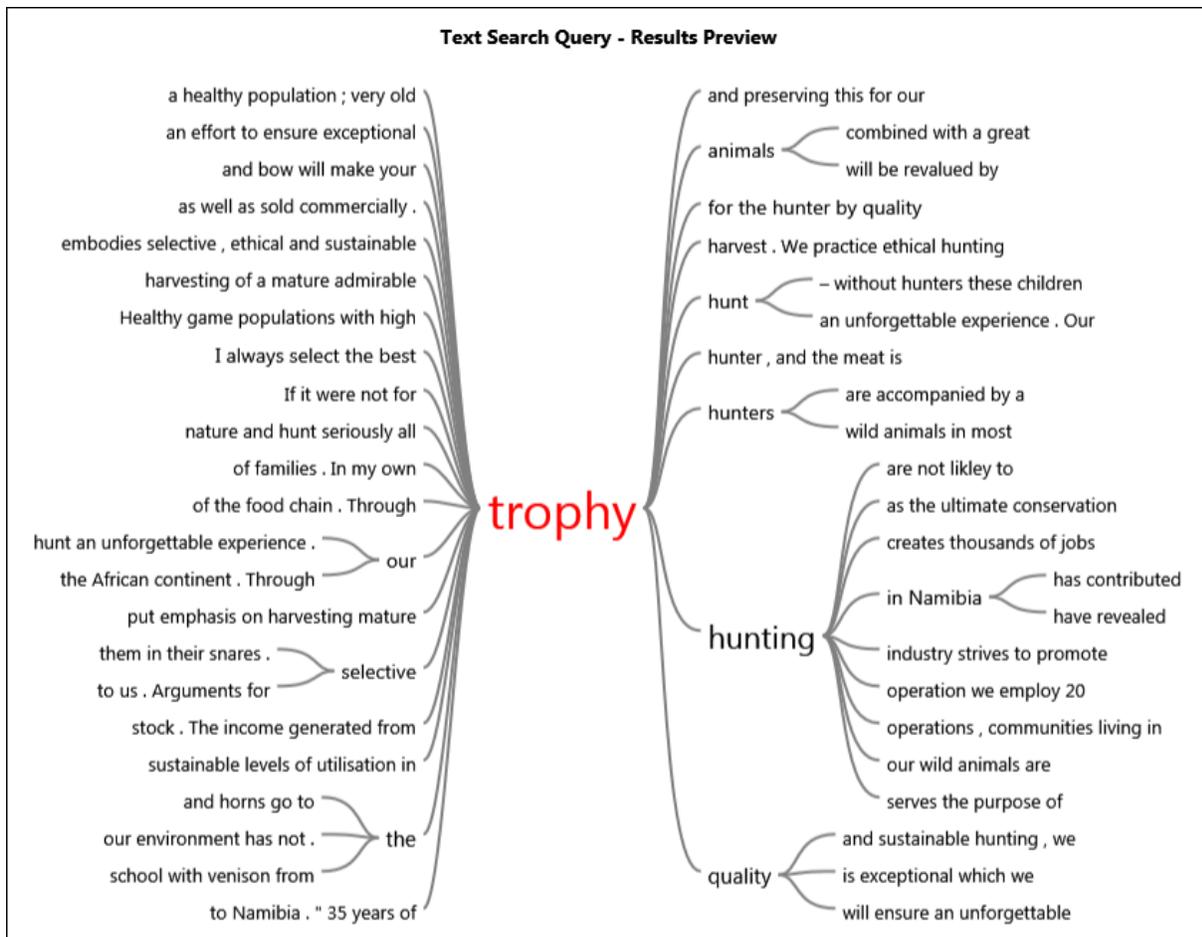


Figure 5: Text search query centred on the word ‘trophy’ on the 100 safari websites studied

Although the above text analysis provided novel and counterintuitive insights, we acknowledge the need to pursue this research by investigating the existing customers’ and prospects’ perceptions of the discourse contained on the trophy hunting specialized websites. Furthermore, there is only limited research showing that the degree to which consumers consider ethics to be important increases with age (Hines and Ames, 2000; Kim and Choi, 2003; Swaidan et al., 2003; Vitell et al., 1991), is greater in women than men (Bewick, 2002; Roberts 1996), increases with disposable income (Barnett et al., 2005, p. 22) and, somewhat paradoxically, is higher for people with lower levels of education (Dickson, 2005). All of this could have serious implications for the marketing initiatives of an industry dominated by affluent, middle aged White men with high levels of education. (Lindsey et al., 2013; Novelli and Humavindu, 2005). It would therefore be useful to undertake a fully-fledged socioeconomic study in this direction.

Conclusion

It would be an understatement to say that trophy hunting is an extremely contentious and heated subject. And with pressures on wildlife only expected to increase with the continued encroachment of civilization upon what were once isolated and remote habitats in the coming decades, cries to ban trophy hunting should only increase. It would be foolish to imagine that people who are adamantly opposed to trophy hunting can be convinced of its merits as a sport or tourist activity, nor should one try. But that said, the results of our study would indicate that much could be done by trophy hunting and safari operators to burnish their sustainable and conservation credentials.

There is much well document evidence that trophy hunting can encourage conservation efforts and help increase wildlife numbers. There is also evidence that it can have a lower impact on the environment than other forms of what can notionally be considered as ‘green’ forms of tourism or ‘ecotourism’. For those game hunting or safari operators trying to compete in this challenging environment, it would appear that it would make strategic and marketing sense to highlight what can be considered as the proven positive aspects of this poorly viewed activity. All of the websites of the safari operators analysed in this study belong to NAPHA. This means that they are (in theory) bound by internationally recognised standards of what can be considered as ethical and fair chase hunting. A more effective promotion of the NAPHA label, and all that it entails, could very well mitigate the charges of unsustainability and calls for an outright ban that one often hears in the West.

Nevertheless, a detailed analysis of the collected data shows that only a minority of the surveyed safari and trophy hunting websites would talk explicitly about their commitment to the environment, sustainability, conservation and the well-being of local communities. The marketing challenge is that, according to our findings, this message is quite often ‘hidden’ and only implicitly stated in the context of the history and tradition of the particular tour operator in question. Thus, it would be highly desirable that both marketing researchers and practitioners help the trophy hunting providers to make their sustainable management philosophy and ethical marketing offer more intelligible to both targeted audience and the opponents.

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