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## Little Red Herrings – #DeleteFacebook?

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# Little Red Herrings — #DeleteFacebook [?]

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

Like Neanderthals discovering fire, suddenly everyone is concerned about Facebook and its manhandling of our privacy. The #deleteFacebook movement is now a thing, or, in the more common vernacular, trending. As the kids might say, “Seriously?”

Where have all these people been for the last twenty years? Suddenly everyone who is anyone is now all atwitter since they discovered that Facebook (FB) sold data to **Cambridge Analytica** — let me rephrase that more accurately — since **Cambridge Analytica** “acquired” data on 90 million Facebook users. Now famous people everywhere, like **Elon Musk**, are storming the barricades as if only now their privacy has been shorn and left in tatters.

**Musk** is so unhappy that he immediately deleted all Tesla and SpaceX Facebook pages. Although we have been repeatedly reminded how smart and on the edge **Musk** is, I find it a bit disingenuous that he’s shocked — shocked, I tell you — that Facebook would monetize its data on you and me and the other billion or so users. Did they think that data was never going to be mined by anyone?

**Musk** is not alone. **Brian Acton**, once owner of WhatsApp that Facebook bought for a mere \$16 BILLION, has told all his users to delete their FB accounts, ostensibly laughing all the way to the bank. The list goes on and on: **Sonos** took a more temporary stand, taking down its accounts for one week (a more weak-kneed approach?) **Cher**, **Jim Carrey**, **Mozilla**, and many others are all in high dungeon over FB’s cavalier use of their data. Wait. How did this happen? Wasn’t Facebook an altruistic company from the beginning?

Riii-ghhhh-tttt.

Apart from many anti-**Trump** folks who are angry over the use the **Trump** campaign may or

may not have made of **Cambridge Analytica** data, Facebook’s data use in campaigns is not news. The **Obama** campaign made use of it, and about one million Facebook users gave the campaign access. Furthermore, FB and Google sought out **Obama’s** campaign, essentially asking to be mined for his benefit. There was not then, and hasn’t been since, any hue and cry. While Obamites are claiming purity in this matter, it’s a distinction without a difference. **Obama** valorized the use of social media and most politicians after him have followed suit.

Politics notwithstanding, the point is, as **Scott McNealy** famously (or infamously) said in 1999, consumer privacy is a “red herring” and that “you have no privacy anyway. Get over it.” Although **Zuckerberg** was mute on the issue for days, he finally came forward with his mea culpa: “We have a responsibility to protect your data, and if we can’t, then we don’t deserve to serve you.” There’s an understatement if ever there was one. The fact remains that if FB had done what it promised, and the FCC had done what it is legally supposed to do, none of this would have happened. But FB has always required an opt-out clause for anything that involves your real privacy. Ditto that for every other social media online. Now, **Zuckerberg** faces testifying before Congress why this happened. It should be obvious.

If I had a nickel every time an online personality said that it “values your privacy and it’s very important to us,” I would almost be as rich as **Zuckerberg**. FB, Twitter, Google, and so on, have all made such protestations.

**Sheryl Sandberg** has waxed as elegant as a harp, and as earnest as a nun over how much our privacy means to her and how she and FB do not take it lightly. Did anyone seriously believe this? Even if they did mean it (and it is possible they did), how could they keep that promise when everything ... everything can be hacked and exposed?

We have always told our patrons that the web, whatever its manifestations or modality, is like a postcard sent through the mail. The only difference is that they are sending it through a *global* post office for all the world to see. I have been writing about the web’s privacy problems since the early 2000s and claim, as others have, that social media’s privacy controls are like Swiss cheese. FB and all the rest only magnified those problems.

I know I’m preaching to the choir here. I doubt anyone in our profession is unaware of these problems. But #deletefacebook strikes me as a hilarious response (assuming, of course, that the movement isn’t really more angst over the **Trump** presidency and an overweening desire to find a way to deny this presidency). The decision

to be on FB or *any* social media is to make a decision you have your work, your friends, your whole self, exposed and monetized for the benefit of that social media. While it may not be a dollar for data exchange, it is certainly a data quid pro quo of some kind.

So, let’s dispense with the #deletefacebook and admit that we all should have known better. It’s not as if we weren’t forewarned. 🐼



## The Scholarly Publishing Scene from page 47

balance “digital function and convenience” with “some sense of the physical interaction with the artifacts.” These comments are especially noteworthy inasmuch as scholars are unable to examine the **Arcadian Library’s** holdings in person.

In a note to me later, **Nigel**, a publishing veteran, who holds a PhD in biological anthropology, expanded on his comments: “*Arcadian Library Online* sheds a timely light on the oft-forgotten transmission of scientific and medical knowledge from the Arab and Persian world to Europe, and does so magnificently. The Islamic world inherited and translated much of the surviving wisdom of ancient Greece, but also added greatly to that knowledge in areas such as mathematics,

astronomy chemistry, natural sciences, and medicine. That knowledge entered Europe over centuries and through various routes, but nowhere more so than through multi-cultural and to a point religiously-tolerant Umayyad Spain which became the center of dialogue.

“*Arcadian Library Online* presents clear evidence for this transmission, and for the subsequent cross-pollination of ideas between the Middle East and Europe, through the manuscripts and books within the library’s collection which are reproduced here in high-resolution detail, and in a readily searchable form in English and Arabic, including marginalia and expert commentaries.

“The platform is superbly designed to fulfill the deeply worthy and opportune mission of the library to explain part of the intellectual debt that the West owes to the Islamic world.”

In his **Hawkins** acceptance speech, **Bloomsbury Publishing** CEO **Nigel Newton** said, “I am pleased for both our Content Services division, who digitized the **Arcadian Library’s** collection and launched this award-winning digital archive platform, and our new Digital Resources division, who have taken *Arcadian Library Online* to academic and scholarly libraries and institutions worldwide and are bringing its riches to new generations at a time when the need for inter-cultural understanding has never been more acute.”

As a long-time and still active **PROSE** judge, I’m pleased that the professional and scholarly publishing industry has honored such a wonderful project, which is particularly important at these fraught times. In addition, I’m proud that my fellow judges were able to recognize that an online publication was worthy of the **Hawkins** award. 🐼