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Ruth: Facebook users were naive to share private information

By [Daniel Ruth](#)

Years ago, the Bombshell of the Balkans encouraged me to start a Facebook page. She said it would be good for me, although I had no clue what good could possibly come from it all.

Yes, dear, whatever you say, dear. The things we do to humor our spouses.

There was a small problem. I had no idea how to begin a Facebook account. And it is right about here that you've probably figured out I am so technically illiterate I make a Luddite seem like a child of the Age of Enlightenment.

Eventually, the Marigold of Macy's helped me do all the mouse clicking and my Facebook whatever was activated. But simply because I had a Facebook page didn't necessarily mean I would ever use it.

I have never posted anything to Facebook. I don't even remember — or care to — my password. For a little while I would occasionally get emails from people I didn't know or even want to know who yearned to be my friend. I didn't want more friends. The two or three I have are more than enough.

Still, I am more than familiar with the Facebook oeuvre. The Sunflower of Saks is a Facebook habitue. So I am constantly subjected to urgent notifications that Bob is currently spooling pasta at some Italian restaurant, or Biff has just whipped up a fabulous rack of lamb. And really now, while my dogs are as cute as cute can be, your dogs aren't. Spare me.

Recent news accounts have reported that some nefarious company, Cambridge Analytica, violated the privacy of some 50 million Facebook users by accessing their personal information to assist Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign.

Apparently Facebookers were asked to fill out a personality profile to better understand themselves, which is so New Agey. We are a society obsessed with trying to find ourselves even if it involves pouring out our intimate details to an algorithm. Memo to society: Look in a mirror. There you are. Problem solved.

Instead, the personal information was crunched by Cambridge Analytica, with the data then passed on to the Trump campaign to target certain demographic groups.

And what did these people eventually find out about themselves? That they were unwitting chumps?

Everybody is up in arms over the Cambridge Analytica/Facebook scandal. Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg has been on a contrition tour placing full-page ads in newspapers groveling in humiliation.

Congress has been indignantly huffing and puffing. And a movement has begun encouraging the public to cancel their Facebook accounts.

Sure, it is rather tawdry so many naive people willingly provided information about themselves that was then cynically exploited for crass political purposes. But doesn't this say more about the gullibility of the victims

than it does about the dark forces behind the scenes who manipulated the data?

After all, Facebook is nothing more than a huge, honking privacy violation machine. It is not an egalitarian social network uniting the world in a common bond of friendship and sharing. Like so many other cyber platforms, Facebook has become a propaganda weapon, a troller's paradise and an opportunity to sell all manner of stuff. It's the General Motors of hubris.

We have witnessed so many data breaches it is hard to work up too much of a lather over Cambridge Analytica's assault on 50 million Facebook marks. There is probably some 12-year-old sitting in front of a computer in Azerbaijan who already has your Social Security number, banking records, tax returns and blood type at his fingertips. He probably also has your childhood nickname, too, which was Mr. Bubble Pants, which you happily admitted to all your "friends" on your Facebook page. And yes, this will come back to haunt you — forever.

This latest breach of trust will result in some short-term fallout for Facebook, which promised its users it would protect their privacy. Some rules and security features for the service will be enhanced. Perhaps Congress will come up with legislation requiring political activity to be more clearly revealed. That's very nice.

Ultimately, Facebook (and its market value) will be just fine, as long as there are untold numbers of people so eager to violate their own privacy.

But count me out. I don't care about your pets, or your children, or where you happen to be slurping a latte.

And if it is that important that I need to know all that useless stuff, write me a letter. Maybe I'll get around to reading it — eventually.