

SMOOTH SAILING IN A SEA OF SOCIAL MEDIA UNCERTAINTY

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In recent weeks there has been much upheaval occurring in the world of social media, particularly at the intersection of privacy rights and how “Big Data” exploits users’ content. Under the surface there are many unresolved questions about how marketers utilize Facebook user information and how this same data is exploited by spammers and cyber criminals. Epitomizing this confusion is Mark Zuckerberg’s recent Senate and House testimony on issues related to Russian interference in the 2016 election as well as the recent Cambridge Analytica scandal, both of which have and will continue to prompt changes across the entire Facebook and Instagram platform.

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DigiStream employs investigative tools and techniques that are being affected by the recent news. The most common problem encountered is our Research Analyst’s accounts being repeatedly shut down and mistaken for “bots.” Thus far, the evidence is pointing toward Facebook making the algorithm which detects “vacant” accounts much stricter. Unfortunately, criminal and spam bot accounts look similar to our own. However, we utilize vacant accounts assigned to real Analyst names to comply with Facebook’s user guidelines; the accounts are kept vacant so as not to introduce bias into the Facebook search function (once

you begin to acquire friends and likes Facebook’s algorithm selectively curates search results). Nearly every Research Analyst has had problems with Facebook accounts being flagged and we are still researching how best to combat this issue.

While these changes are frustrating, they do not materially impact the way we locate and investigate people online. Our tested methodology is proving to be a saving grace, and these changes will make it harder for competitors to

continue to conduct online investigations. We have seen no reduction in report quality and we continue to test new approaches and methodologies which has left many of us pleasantly

surprised with the early success of these experiments. Moreover, this shift reflects a larger societal migration from Facebook. We feel Facebook has already reached the height of its cultural relevancy and that users are seeking a change. The #DeleteFacebook movement may be a fad, but it represents the impatience and annoyance people have had with the site for years. Other social media platforms, and the hundreds of other websites online which have extremely useful online data, should be the concentration going forward. Facebook was only ever a small part of the investigative solution.