Dot Complicated: Untangling Our Wired Lives

By: Randi Zuckerberg
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The Dual Dangers of Social Media: Like/Dislike

Because social media is such a tremendous part of the world today, and indeed of many of our lives, it is entirely predictable that books will be written, blogs posted, and articles discussed on the topic. The legal issues surrounding social media, and in particular Facebook, revolve primarily around cybersecurity and intellectual property; within that large umbrella of law are smaller facets like user contracts, privacy, and information sharing. In reading Dot Complicated, I feel that it provides an essential look into the growing problems attributed to social media.

Randi Zuckerberg, the book’s author, is the sister of Facebook CEO and founder Mark Zuckerberg, and was formerly the Director of Market Development and Spokesperson for Facebook. Currently, she is CEO of Zuckerberg Media and Editor-in-Chief of Dot Complicated, a website dedicated to the digital lifestyle. Zuckerberg has also published Spark Your Career in Advertising, and Dot, a children’s picture book. The book examines the two schools of thinking of social media as a virtuous tool for the masses, and social media as a requirement of the digital age.

“But as she traveled the world, extolling technology’s virtues of giving voice to the powerless, rallying support in times of tragedy and connecting the like-minded, she
discovered it was also leaving users feeling ‘overwhelmed, insecure and confused.’ And so, she says, she began thinking about technology in connection with ‘etiquette, relationships, identity, sharing.’”¹ This New York Times quote of Zuckerberg displays the twofold thought of social media as both a useful tool and as an arduous crutch. With such divergent thought, it is easy to see why the law has such a difficult time encompassing social media; new platforms spring up daily, old platforms get revamped, and existing legislation has to struggle to keep up. Remember when copyright laws were crystal clear before the age of the internet? You authored a book or article, you copyrighted it, and you were more or less safe. These days, every author, musician, actor, and inventor knows that despite a copyright, patent, or trademark, someone somewhere is going to rip them off. A video might be uploaded to YouTube; a song on Spotify or Pandora; a quote on Facebook. How does this change things? Zuckerberg writes her book in a style that is reminiscent of Facebook posts; that is to say, things are exaggerated by words like “amazing” and “awesome” when they are really just normal. Facebook, Zuckerberg hints, is a medium through which ordinary things can become magical. If someone posts that they had a bad day, and people “Like” the status, suddenly there is a world of empathy shown from a single click of a button.

“The business leaders of the future will be three-dimensional personalities, whose lives, interests, hobbies and passions outside of work are documented and on display. Research has shown that when you refuse to share personal details on Facebook with your colleagues, it reduces your likability in the office, when compared to people who do

¹ Judith Martin, *Don’t Be a Jerk*, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/03/books/review/randi-zuckerbergs-dot-complicated-and-dot.html?_r=0
share.”² The legal aspects of this notion, displayed throughout the book, are worrisome. Current legislation is designed to keep in check the activities of people in the real world, and only lately has there begun to be a shift to try and include what those people are doing online, and in cyberspace. Let us not forget the viral sensation that circulated not so long ago that in Facebook’s terms of use lies a clause which in affect states that any and all posts uploaded to Facebook become the property of Facebook. Because in order to use it users must accept these terms, Facebook gives us no choice. With increasing amounts of activity on Facebook throughout the world, it may likely become necessary for businesses to have Facebook pages, as well as Twitter, Instagram, etc. Can it be ethically and legally right to compel our acceptance in such ways?

Zuckerberg naturally writes of the dangers of posting inappropriate pictures and other information online; this should be no mystery to most people. What you post online can be found by almost anyone anywhere in the world. As a book, Dot Complicated is both a “…Facebook marketing insider details and part strategy for navigating the increasing omnipresence of social media.”³ Zuckerberg toes the line between cautionary and effusive praise very well. The book, in keeping with its dual thought process, alternates between philosophy and hard fact. Zuckerberg touches on legal aspects insofar as they relate to the success or failure of social media as a tool for business, but does not really go into great depth. However, since the semi-autobiographical nature of the work is bolstered by the fact that the writer is herself incredibly knowledgeable about what theories she is promulgating, the occasional tangent and philosophical musing can be

² Id.
accepted. There is no doubt that Zuckerberg knows her material thoroughly, and appears to paint an accurate image of how someone formerly at the absolute apex of Facebook views her experiences in the past, and how they inform her future actions. She claims that “…if someone doesn’t want to do business with me because I post photos of my son or my band, well, then maybe they’re not the type of person I want to do business with either.” Her advice seems to be mainly targeted at either huge corporations who have this luxury, or start-up Facebook users who do not know much or care to learn more. Nevertheless, she is able to expand her reach to a larger audience.

_Dot Complicated_ is a fairly easy read – lots of anecdotes, lots of effusive praise and love for her family. However the razor-sharp observations on the state of social media in the world today lends itself to a more scholarly tone. The legal aspects of social media are rampant throughout the book for those with a keen eye, although rarely are they discussed openly. As a law student looking for a treatise on social media law, cybersecurity and privacy law, I advise a look elsewhere. However, if all that is sought after is a book detailing the interesting experiences of one of Facebook’s “first family,” then _Dot Complicated_ certainly delivers on that score.

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4 _Id._