

## **Book Review**

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**Zucked: Waking Up to the Facebook Catastrophe**  
by: Roger McNamee  
Published 2019  
by Penguin Press  
1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, USA, 252pp  
ISBN: 9780525561354 (hardback)

### *A Silicon Valley investor and mentor sours on Facebook*

Recently, Democratic Presidential Candidate, Elizabeth Warren called for the breakup of Facebook, Google and even Apple. If you do not follow the news very closely, you may have found yourself scratching your head and wondering, "What is that all about?" Given the media circus that has been dominated by presidential exploits, the Mueller investigation, and government shutdowns a lot of important issues are passing under the radar. Unless you are a tech insider, you could be forgiven for not knowing about the controversies that have enmeshed Facebook over the past year. You may have heard about congressional testimonies and you may have heard about the Cambridge Analytica data breach, but the details of how and why this is happening may have escaped you. *Zucked: Waking Up to the Facebook Catastrophe*, published in February 2019, will certainly educate you about the very troubling issues that internet platforms are facing.

Author, Roger McNamee artfully begins with an intriguing set of circumstances in which Mark Zuckerberg and McNamee met. McNamee was able to counsel Zuckerberg when he was deciding whether or not to sell Facebook in 2006. The next two chapters take a meandering path through McNamee's 36 year history as a Silicon Valley investor. In this way, McNamee manages to slip his own autobiography into the book. McNamee does a lot of name dropping including his association with the legend, U2's Bono. In fairness, McNamee does indeed have some very interesting stories to tell and this autobiographical section helps to establish his credibility as a subject expert on Silicon Valley. Indeed, any reader who is not well-versed in the history of internet businesses (such as myself) will be enthralled with the vivid manner in which McNamee portrays the industry and the truly life-altering changes that social media in particular has brought to society.

Next, McNamee describes the somewhat disconcerting corporate culture surrounding Facebook. McNamee asserts that although this unusual culture allowed for astonishing growth and success, it also led to a number of questionable ethical issues on how it handles customer data and privacy. McNamee finds troubling evidence of the unwillingness of Facebook to accept any responsibility for harm caused by its social network. It seems that McNamee is disappointed with Zuck and since Zuck does not take

McNamee's advice anymore, McNamee felt compelled to write this book. In that way, the book comes across as very personal. For me, the most convincing part of McNamee's argument is that there are public health consequences to the overuse of social media based on subtle manipulations that cause users to spend way too much time on their sites. This aspect alone is worth the read just for the way it caused me to re-evaluate my use of social media and if the book would have ended there it would have been great. However, with only about four chapters remaining, the book becomes quite repetitive. McNamee's once balanced analysis was also increasingly becoming one-sided. By the end of the book, McNamee's argument verged on the point of melodrama. While Facebook and social media do have problems, the author's 'chicken little' approach caused me to eventually sour on McNamee's book.