

Facebook amends 'real name' policy after protests

After passionate and at times angry pleas from various vulnerable communities, Facebook has announced it is to amend its controversial “real name” policy.

On Tuesday the site said it was to test new tools that allowed people to share any special circumstances they felt meant they could not use their real name.

The tool is intended to help people who may have suffered domestic abuse, or in cases where their sexuality could put them in danger.

However, Facebook stood firm on insisting people use “real names” in all but the most unusual situations.

“We require people to use the name their friends and family know them by,” the company said.

“When people use the names they are known by, their actions and words carry more weight because they are more accountable for what they say.

“We’re firmly committed to this policy, and it is not changing.

“However, after hearing feedback from our community, we recognise that it’s also important that this policy works for everyone, especially for communities who are marginalised or face discrimination.”

Intense pressure

The company is also adding a new tool for reporting fake names, requiring anyone who is reporting another user to provide more context for their complaint.

Facebook said it received hundreds of thousands of reports of fake names every week.

“In the past, people were able to simply report a ‘fake name’ but now they will be required to go through several new steps that provide us more specifics about the report,” the company said.

“This additional context will help our review teams better understand why someone is reporting a name, giving them more information about a specific situation.”

The social network had faced intense pressure from rights groups over its hard-line stance on real names.

Founder Mark Zuckerberg was heavily criticised after he suggested that people that use two names, or have an alias, showed a “lack of integrity”.

Drag queens

Last year, prominent drag queens in San Francisco had their Facebook accounts deleted as they were deemed to be violating the real name policy.

After considerable uproar, including a planned protest outside Facebook’s headquarters, the company acknowledged that it had been a mistake to delete the accounts, but said it faced a challenge in verifying people on the network.

It argued that insisting on real names played a role in preventing bad actors on the site has it made people more accountable for what they posted.

“The stories of mass impersonation, trolling, domestic abuse, and higher rates of bullying and intolerance are oftentimes the result of people hiding behind fake names, and it’s both terrifying and sad,” the site said.

“Our ability to successfully protect against them with this policy has borne out the reality that this policy, on balance, and when applied carefully, is a very powerful force for good.”

A group of civil liberties organisations and rights groups formed the Nameless Coalition which has been leaning on Facebook to change its policies.

The new tools announced on Tuesday fall short of the group’s complete suggestions, but representatives from Facebook are met members of the Nameless Coalition at a public event in San Francisco.

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