

Legal and Ethical Considerations in Business Communications

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In reviewing the 2009 changes to Facebook's privacy settings, it's apparent that the social media giant significantly expanded the visibility of user information to external developers and third-party applications. This pivot aimed to enhance user connectivity and application functionality but stirred considerable user and media backlash due to concerns about insufficient transparency and consent (Smith, 2010).

From an ethical standpoint, these changes conflicted with user autonomy and confidentiality principles. Users were not adequately informed about how their information would be more accessible nor given sufficient controls to manage this exposure initially. Legally, this stirred issues under various data protection laws, which mandate explicit consent and detailed information about data use (Data Protection Act, 2009). Facebook could have mitigated the ethical backlash by implementing a more robust consent mechanism, allowing users to opt in rather than retroactively managing settings.

Communicating such pivotal changes effectively is crucial. Historically, Facebook's approach in 2009 involved minimal initial communication, followed by reactive adjustments after public outcry. A more proactive strategy would involve detailed pre-release announcements, clear explanations of the changes, and highlighted new controls available to users. Moreover, deploying these communications through multiple channels—emails, notifications, and newsroom posts—would ensure broad reach and clarity.

A spokesperson with deep understanding and credibility, such as the Chief Privacy Officer, would be ideal for delivering these messages. This choice communicates the seriousness with which Facebook regards privacy and helps restore user trust.

Foreign interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election via Facebook involved coordinated campaigns that spread disinformation to polarize American voters and influence the election's outcome. This manipulation sparked intense scrutiny regarding Facebook's ethical responsibilities and legal compliance in monitoring and controlling content to uphold electoral integrity.

In conclusion, Facebook's 2009 privacy overhaul is a critical lesson in ethical transparency and legal compliance in business communications.

Peer Response

Response 1

Your analysis of Facebook's 2009 privacy policy changes succinctly captures the ethical and legal dilemmas that arose. Your emphasis on the need for robust consent mechanisms highlights a crucial oversight in Facebook's strategy. As you suggested, integrating a proactive communication plan has fostered greater transparency and potentially alleviated some of the public's concerns.

However, while suggesting the Chief Privacy Officer as the ideal spokesperson is insightful, considering the scale of the backlash, it might have been more effective if the communication also involved direct engagement from higher executive levels, including the CEO. This could have underscored the seriousness of the changes and demonstrated top-level commitment to ethical practices. Your proposal to use multiple communication channels is a practical solution that could serve as a model for similar situations. Engaging users across various platforms ensures the message is widely received and understood, enhancing transparency and trust.

Response 2

According to the COM 127 4-1 Discussion instructions, we are supposed to write two peer responses. I have addressed the given instructions in one response. Following these instructions, you can quickly write your peer responses to 4-1 Discussions without a hassle.