

Facebook proposes to end voting on privacy issues (Update)

November 21 2012, by Barbara Ortutay



In this Oct. 10, 2011 file photo, a magnifying glass is posed over a monitor displaying a Facebook page in Munich. Facebook is proposing to end its practice of letting users vote on changes to its privacy policies, though it will continue to let users comment on proposed updates. The world's biggest social media company said in a blog post Wednesday, Nov. 21, 2012, that its voting mechanism, which is triggered only if enough people comment on proposed changes, has become a system that emphasizes quantity of responses over quality of discussion. Users tend to leave one or two-word comments objecting to changes instead of more in-depth responses. (AP Photo/dapd, Joerg Koch, File)

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Facebook said it will continue to inform users of "significant changes" to its privacy policy, called its data use policy, and to its statement of user rights and responsibilities. The company will keep its seven-day comment period and take users' feedback into consideration.

"We will also provide additional notification mechanisms, including email, for informing you of those changes," wrote Elliot Schrage, Facebook's vice president of communications, public policy and marketing, in the post.

Facebook began letting users vote on privacy changes in 2009. Since then, it has gone public and its user base has ballooned from around 200 million to more than 1 billion. As part of the 2009 policy, users' votes only count if more than 30 percent of all Facebook's active users partake. That did not happen during either of the two times users voted and it's unlikely that it will now, given that more than 300 million people would have to participate.

Jules Polonetsky, director of the Future of Privacy Forum, an industry-backed think tank in Washington, said the voting process was a "noble experiment" that didn't lead to informed debate.

Facebook said in June that it was reviewing how to get the best feedback from users on its policies.

Facebook is also proposing changes to its data use policy, such as making it clear that when users hide a post or photo from their profile

page, the "timeline," those posts are not truly hidden and can be visible elsewhere, including on another person's page.

Polonetsky called Facebook's data use policy "kind of a good handbook" and a "reasonable read" on how to navigate the site's complex settings.

But most people don't read the privacy policies of websites they frequent, even Facebook's.

"I certainly recommend that people read it, but most users just want to poke someone and like someone and look at a picture," Polonetsky said.

Facebook's task, he added, will be to continue to evolve its user interface—the part of the site that its users interact with—so that answers to questions are obvious and people don't need to wade through the policy.

More information: Blog post:
www.facebook.com/fbsitegovernance/app_4949752878

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