

Facebook goes retro with 'Rooms' chat app

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Facebook releases an application that lets people create virtual "rooms" to chat about whatever they wish using any name they would like

Facebook on Thursday released an application that lets people create virtual "rooms" to chat about whatever they wish using any name they would like.

"Rooms" software introduced in the US and Britain for iPhone made its debut as Facebook tries to make peace with people unhappy that real

identities are mandated for profiles at the world's leading social network.

"One of the things our team loves most about the Internet is its potential to let us be whoever we want to be," said a blog post from Facebook's Creative Labs.

"That's why in Rooms you can be 'Wonder Woman' —or whatever name makes you feel most comfortable and proud."

Virtual rooms become home to feeds of pictures, videos, and text.

The application puts a smartphone spin on chat forums that were popular venues for online discourse in early Internet days.

"Forums, message boards and chatrooms were meeting places for people who didn't necessarily share geographies or social connections, but had something in common," the Creative Labs message noted.

The Rooms application was "inspired by both the ethos of these early Web communities and the capabilities of modern smartphones," according to Facebook.

Rooms serve as virtual settings for photos, videos, and text posted in the spirit of taking part in a conversation about chosen topics. Those who create rooms can make participation invite-only or post public links to join.

Release of the application came just weeks after Facebook vowed to ease a "real names" policy that prompted drag queen performers to quit the social network and sparked wider protests in the gay community and beyond.

The huge social network apologized early this month in a bid to quell the

simmering dispute over its enforcement of the policy.

Facebook executives and representatives of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities said they found a solution acceptable to both sides, allowing people to use assumed names, subject to verification, allowing performers like "Sister Roma" and "Lil Miss Hot Mess" to keep those names on Facebook.

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