Law, Ethics & Corp. Governance

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# Facebook’s legal or ethical duty

Facebook is one of the widely used social media applications, throughout the world. The number of Facebook users accounts for 2.4 billion, which shows its popularity and its massive reach. Though it is right that Facebook has been able to introduce, new and more social-oriented features, but do these features can help Facebook to rescue a victim or otherwise to stop a crime, this is a troubling debate. Considering its popularity, and the massive reach, Facebook has been able to access the information of its users. Those who Sign up to Facebook, permit the Facebook authorities to use their information for specific reasons. Similarly, Facebook has a planned and well- oriented mechanism to interpret the user’s information and use for purposes already agreed with the users. There are some functions of Facebook, which require the user’s information and resultantly, interpret that information and offer them a friend suggestion etc.

The Facebook Live function though doesn’t require prior information, but it does provide a quick and massive reach to the audience. The Facebook Live function is one of its most used features. In the case of Steve Stephens or the Orlando shootings, Facebook live streaming had remained a factor to ignite fear and distress among its billions of users. The legal mechanics, however, suggest that this *live* function is not linked to any administrative or social applicability. Its use may be made for a specific reason and for a specific audience, the legality or ethics, however, remains an idiosyncratic aspect. In both these cases the incidents happened were unfortunate, but in any way, it does not bound the Facebook authorities to rightly or ethically become a party to this incident. Facebook cannot be a party to such incidents (both ethically and legally), because it then negates its projection as a social media application.

# How social media platforms can be more proactive?

Social media platforms enjoy a massive reach. The majority of these applications have access to user’s location, their personal data, their activities and their particular interest. In the case of Facebook, it remains able to monitor the activity of its users and to draw an image of what particular aspects he/ she is into. In view of such important access to any individual’s life and personal likings or disliking, these applications can be more proactive and thorough to review the type of contents which appear on their sites in the following ways:

* *A closer following of an uneasy user:* It is quite obvious that people use social media applications to post stuff they are more into. People share stories and pictures which clearly depicts what particular activities, this user is into. These applications and the artificial intelligence system they employ can easily guess, what this particular individual’s activities can turn into. These social media applications can help that individual to quit that uneasy path, by suggesting him more socially inclusive options.
* *Synchronization with domestic anti-social norms:* The social media applications develop their functions and user interface based on domestic social norms. Their user interface and regulations are user-friendly and are not in clash with the societal norms generally and the user’s interests specifically. If these social media applications are regularized and are provided a space in the development of society, they can be made more proactive to fight such social menaces.
* *Permissibility to use the content as legal evidence:* At present, different social media applications including Facebook does not allow its content to be used as legal evidence in different courts. Though they have adopted this stance for much different reasons, if any such possibility is developed, these social media applications can be developed as a proactive tool to fight different social evils.

# Safeguard measures Social Media platforms should adopt

The user interface of most social media platforms is already vigorous enough to stop or limit such acts of violence from broadcasting. Facebook already requires the user discretion to view such acts of violence or bloodshed. Similarly, social media platforms like What’s App and Instagram have their own mechanism’s to stop such acts of violence from being shared or being used as a tool for intimidation or coercion (Back et al. 2010, 373). However, there are many different measures that could be taken to prevent such acts of violence from being broadcasted. Two of such safeguard measures that can limit the chance of broadcasting such acts are as follow

* *Making the user interface more hands-on against detecting blood or weapons:* The artificial intelligence has helped to distinguish weapons and scenes of violence. Though these technologies are already in place in social media platforms, despite their anti-violence mechanism incidents like Cleveland shooting or Orlando shootings got published. To counter such measures, these social media platforms must adopt the policies of restriction, synchronized with most latest and up- to- date intelligence mechanisms. For Facebook, Instagram and What’s App, these measure are crucial, since they are the widely used platforms.
* *Broadening the programmed blocking systems:* In Cleveland shootings, the Facebook authorities were able to block the account of Steve Stephen after twenty- three minutes of the incidents after the identification by another user. As mentioned above, the social media platforms must work on broadening the programmed blocking systems, which can first monitor such anti-social activities thoroughly and then mechanically restricts the user’s engagement with other friends or followers. These social media platforms can also create a ribbon describing the user as a threat or can mark an alert sign over the user’s profile.

# Ethics oversight mechanisms in Facebook

There has been a debate for many long that Facebook must have some ethical mechanism that should oversight the trending posts. Some believe that Facebook does have such mechanisms, whereas some believe that for political reasons, Facebook authorities have not employed such mechanisms. Since being the world’s largest social media platform, Facebook authorities must develop such a mechanism to limit the influence of bad things over its users. An article published by Forbes magazine mentions that Facebook uses a system based on Artificial Intelligence, which cares for the ethical norms agreed between the Facebook authorities and the user (Shead n.d.). Previously, Facebook has been accused of political meddling, therefore, the authorities find it workable to make things flow over Facebook the way it is unless it is discriminatory, sexually inappreciable or included violence (Back et al. 2010, 373). Throughout, this row between Facebook and different external authorities of the public and private sector, Facebook does not employ an ethical oversight body. However, the events happened lately suggest that Facebook must incorporate an active system of algorithm harmonized with human interpretation to ethically permit things.

In view of the changes taking place and the sensitivity attached, Facebook must have a dedicated team to oversee the ethical aspects of the things. They must be proactive against the content as well, which is running over their platform. It will help Facebook in certain manners, for example, it can restrict some users from publishing derogatory things, will help block sexually inappropriate comments or will help to block the nudity and bareness. Ethical oversight is necessary since the user base of Facebook is large enough that anyone at any part of the world can find it inappropriate or unfitting. It will also help to make Facebook a more credible platform to gauge the interest of the public and their opinion about certain things.

# Changes Facebook should adopt

There can be certain mechanisms Facebook can adopt to encourage the ethical use of its platform. Since the world, we live in today is more sensitive to political orientation, religious norms, personal liking or disliking and race issues, therefore the authorities at Facebook should consider making certain changes. These changes, however, must be people-oriented and should be based on a process that comes not at a clash to anyone’s political or religious views. In order to make Facebook a more vibrant and socially positive platform, Facebook should work on these two changes

* *Must curtail the friend suggestion option:* The artificial algorithm system, Facebook employs offer friend suggestions based on the user’s location or the history of his activities. This friend suggestion options help in developing a certain network which can be misused by people with negative intentions. Though at present it is helping in making societies more inclusive and participatory, there remain wider gaps in making things more workable at a social sphere.
* *Must reorient its live broadcast function:* The Facebook live function is helping to bridge the distances, but in the case of Orlando shootings and the case referred in the article, this function became a tool to spread fear among the general public. The authorities at Facebook can assimilate the artificial intelligence system and algorithm to detect the course of events which can result in bloodshed. This assimilation of the artificial intelligence system and the algorithm with an individual’s activities can benefit in different ways, which will impact the Facebook usage more positively.

# Conclusion

Facebook is a widely used social media platform. Activities being shared or broadcasted using this platform have far-reaching impacts. In the recent past, there had been incidents that suggest some flaws at the end of Facebook authorities. These incidents also became the reason for anti- Facebook feelings voiced at different parts of the world. In order to curb such incidents, the Facebook authorities and its users need to devise a mechanism that is productive and far-reaching in a positive manner for both Facebook authorities and its users.

# References:

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