

5WPR CEO With PR Lessons from Facebook's Misinformation Crisis

Facebook is once again dominating the news cycle, this time with a widely-criticized public speech by Mark Zuckerberg adding fuel to the flames of his testimony before Congress. If that weren't enough, Facebook has unveiled a series of new policies supposedly intended to curb hostile actors and foreign governments from weaponizing the platform ahead of the 2020 presidential elections. Media reaction to Zuckerberg's recent moves has been less than forgiving.

For brands with their own PR crisis on their hands, here are three main takeaways from Facebook's ongoing saga.

1. Transparency without truth is an empty gesture



"Mark Zuckerberg is on a transparency tour," wrote one commentator at the outset of Zuckerberg's counter-campaign this month, "[but] Mark Zuckerberg said a lot of nothing in

his big speech...does it matter if you're being transparent if you aren't really saying anything?"

Modern audiences are more cynical than ever, and hailing transparency for transparency's sake simply won't cut it any more. If audiences find no substance or consistency in a brand's public declarations, not only are they sure to be unconvinced but more unimpressed than ever before. Zuckerberg's failure to recognize this could be a fatal mistake, and proof of just how out of touch he really is.

"If Zuckerberg's relentless optimism is simply a canny PR strategy, then perhaps a new combination of incentives- a regulatory tweak here, a mass boycott there-would be enough to make him change course," writes Andre Marantz of The New Yorker, "The more alarming scenario is that Zuckerberg is actually high on his own supply."

2. Focus on bad behavior, not bad content

If Zuckerberg's current claim to optimism is, after all, just a Public Relations strategy, it seems even Facebook has realized it isn't enough.

In a quick turnaround from comments by Zuckerberg that Facebook would not ban political advertising, the social media platform announced a set of measures intended "to help protect the democratic process and [provide] an update on initiatives already underway."

The policies outline a three-pronged effort to combat foreign interference, increase transparency, and reduce misinformation. In doing so, Facebook has declared war on bad actors and their behavior, not their content.

3. Show, don't just tell

As part of its declarations toward transparency, Facebook has also announced a tangible change to their Pages platform.

“We’re adding more information about who is behind a Page, including a new ‘Organizations That Manage This Page’ tab that will feature the Page’s ‘Confirmed Page Owner,” Facebook announced.

Announcing such a step has been a critical move in assuaging fears that Facebook’s response to misinformation concerns will be a whole lot of hot air. The announced changes are tangible, and specific, and have already done wonders for the platform’s case against critics.

For communications experts, let Facebook’s current saga be a lesson: audience distrust is as rife as ever, and transparency without action is a waste of time. Plan a brand’s crisis response accordingly.



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