



TECH

Civil Rights Groups Push for Facebook Ad Boycott

Anti-Defamation League, NAACP and others seek protest of what they say is company's failure to make its platform a less-hostile place

Mark Zuckerberg's stance on posts by President Trump led to an internal uproar at Facebook.

PHOTO: SVEN HOPPE/ZUMA PRESS

By

June 17, 2020 3:30 am ET

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Several American civil-rights groups, including the Anti-Defamation League and the NAACP, are encouraging big advertisers to pull spending from Facebook Inc. to protest what they say is the company's failure to make its platform a less-hostile place.

The campaign, to be announced early on Wednesday, comes after years of private discussions between these groups and Facebook, which the activists say have amounted to little change in the way the social-media giant enforces its policies around hate speech and misinformation. The groups took out a full-page ad in the Los Angeles Times on Wednesday urging advertisers to pull their spending on Facebook for July.

"Today, we are asking all businesses to stand in solidarity with our most deeply held American values of freedom, equality and justice and not advertise on Facebook's services in July," the ad says. "Let's send Facebook a powerful message: Your profits will never be worth promoting hate, bigotry, racism, antisemitism and violence."

What would you do with \$70 billion?

We know what Facebook did.

They allowed incitement to violence against protesters fighting for racial justice in America in the wake of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks and so many others.

They amplified white nationalists by including news sources with known extremist ties in their "fact checking" program.

They turned a blind eye to blatant voter suppression on their platform.

Could they protect and support Black users? Could they call out Holocaust denial as hate? Could they help get out the vote?

They absolutely could. But they are actively choosing not to do so.

99% of Facebook's \$70 billion is made through advertising.

Who will advertisers stand with?

Today, we are asking all businesses to stand in solidarity with our most deeply held American values of freedom, equality and justice and not advertise on Facebook's services in July.

Let's send Facebook a powerful message: Your profits will never be worth promoting hate, bigotry, racism, antisemitism and violence. Please join us.

#stophateforprofit
stophateforprofit.org



Facebook said it was removing more hate speech and using its platform to mobilize Americans to register to vote. On Tuesday, the company said it aims to register four million U.S. voters. The company also said it was under scrutiny from across the political spectrum. “During the past weeks, President Trump issued an Executive Order calling on us not to fact-check political statements, while the Biden campaign called on us to take the exact opposite course,” a spokesman said. “There are competing pressures every day when managing a platform.”

Many of the biggest digital platforms are under political pressure over how they police their sites, heightened by widespread protests spurred by the killing of George Floyd and other issues of police brutality.

Alphabet Inc.’s Google, the world’s largest online advertising platform, blocked advertising from finance blog ZeroHedge.com last week because of what it deemed hateful comments from users posted to the website’s articles. Google also warned conservative publisher the Federalist that it could be in line for the same treatment. The publisher subsequently disabled user comments. A Google spokesman said the action was related to longstanding policy that protects advertisers from being associated with dangerous or derogatory content. Representatives for the Federalist and Zero Hedge didn’t respond to requests for comment. Civil-rights leaders say they have concerns about Facebook’s ability and willingness to avoid the problems of the 2016 election, including misinformation from Russian agents, which targeted black users, as well as voter suppression. The Anti-Defamation League has long pushed Facebook to view Holocaust denial as a form of hate speech.

Activists’ frustration has only compounded since Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg’s decision last month to allow two posts by President Trump that many Facebook employees and outside advocates say broke the company’s content rules. Mr. Zuckerberg’s stance led to an internal uproar prompting more than a dozen employees to take the rare step of criticizing the CEO in public.

Facebook officials listen to advocates’ concerns, activists say, but have enacted few concrete changes.

“We’ve had multiple conversations with them to create some safeguards,” Derrick Johnson, president and CEO of the NAACP, said. “Now we’re approaching four years later, another election cycle. All evidence suggests that the same thing will happen this year and that should not be acceptable by anyone.”

For years, advertisers have been wrestling with how to respond to the controversies at Facebook and other online platforms. In 2017, several companies pulled their spending from YouTube, owned by Alphabet, after they found their ads running alongside extremist content on the site. Sleeping Giants, an advocacy group formed in 2016 to “make bigotry and sexism less profitable” by pressuring advertisers, got some brands to drop their ads on Breitbart News Network, a right-wing media site.

Facebook and Google dominate the digital ad market, and brands are reluctant to turn off the

tech companies' powerful advertising tools. The YouTube boycott, for example, didn't make a major dent in Google's finances.

The groups planning this boycott said they hope this moment will be different given the pressure on companies to show their sensitivity on racism.

Mr. Johnson and Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt declined to say which advertisers they would approach to cut their spending on Facebook. Mr. Greenblatt said the group would start with dozens of companies and build out to hundreds or more as part of what he described as a long-term effort dubbed "Stop Hate For Profit."

"The ad pause is designed to prompt Facebook to finally take action on a series of issues," Mr. Greenblatt said. "We feel a high degree of urgency here that we're not seeing from them." The ADL and NAACP were joined by Sleeping Giants, civil-rights group Color of Change, media advocacy group Free Press and Common Sense Media, which provides parent-friendly reviews of movies and advocates for online privacy.