# Aggressive News Demonetization Is Harming the News Industry When We Need It Most

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Throughout modern history and in times of immense uncertainty, pain and fear, news media has always served as a source of comfort, triumph and resiliency. We've been able to depend on them to deliver information that somehow made the unimaginable digestible and the complex simple, a source of truth when we weren't sure which way was up or down.

Over the last decade, algorithmically driven social platforms have led to a mass exodus of advertising revenue from the pages of many online and print publications. And as people continue to use social platforms as virtual newsrooms and advertising investment follows them, it's severely impacting access to quality journalism. The migration of consumers to digital has caused many news outlets, especially local ones, to fold up shop, merge with other publications or severely reduce their reporting staff.

Now for fear of appearing adjacent to grim news related to Covid-19, advertisers are using avoidance technology to ensure that their brands do not show up next to any news related to the virus. But since most news today is about the pandemic, this only compounds the problem.

## The problem with avoidance technology

Aggressive use of avoidance technology has taken much of the blame for news demonetization. This technology ensures that when ads are bought programmatically, there are parameters in place to safeguard brand safety because adjacency to controversial news is an emotionally charged issue and marketers, understandably, want to protect their brands. But since the majority of stories for credible publications are now focusing on the pandemic, this has led to decreased revenue for publishers at a time we need them most.

This crisis has shown us that the marketing and media community are concerned about news. The industry should use that awareness and build on it.
Semantic avoidance technology is not the enemy. These technologies can actually make it easier for advertisers to support news by enabling each marketer to identify their own sense of brand suitability. The issue is how this technology is being used.

There are simple ways to advertise in news without compromising brand safety, but to avoid hard news, or even bad news, flies in the face of the facts.

## What readers want

The reality is that, in these unfamiliar times, news consumption goes up. The Guardian claimed their digital traffic has increased over 50% compared to this time last year. They have also had nine of their busiest 12 days of all time in the past two months, with video views up 60%. Comscore data reinforces this by showing consumption grows as governments introduce new measures to fight Covid-19.

Recent IAS research suggested that most people do not think negatively of brands for advertising in a hard news space, provided the creative messaging is appropriate. Additionally, Newsworks' research showed the average time a person spends

looking at an ad, called dwell time, is 1.4 times higher in a hard news environment. And that same research showed there is 50% higher engagement rate on premium editorial sites than during free browsing.

Beyond the increased audience rationale, credible media outlets are inherently safer for brands. News publishers with journalists plugged into their local communities that fact check and use technology to manage quality and safety offer a brand safe, high viewability, low ad fraud advertising environment.

## Reconsider news blocking

Outside of articles focused solely on death, death tolls, miracle cures and virus-related disinformation, there may only be minimal risk associated with advertising in today's news environments. Most marketers agree, but sensitivities will always exist.

Marketers should reconsider blocking news. Your agency can help determine your appetite for news scale. If hard news is a worry, there are viable alternatives. However, news may be fine with a light level of support for hard news. Also, evaluate the large and loyal audiences drawn by sections like entertainment, food and sport.

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