# Meditation App Calm Was the Most 2020 Brand Partner for CNN’s Election Coverage

During Tuesday night’s CNN coverage of the contentious presidential election, which is still ongoing, viewers might have noticed a tiny brand sponsorship that loomed large due to its contrast with the program’s content. When the cable news network announced key race alerts throughout the evening, the loud updates were accompanied with a “brought to you by” graphic featuring the logo for the meditation app Calm.

It was something of a brilliant marketing move for the brand, which has been investing in advertising during this more-stressful-than-average year. During the first half of 2020, Calm spent $12.6 million on ads, excluding social, according to Kantar. That’s a 220% increase compared to the first half of 2019.

“In what’s been an extremely stressful year, our team is always looking for ways to give consumers a reminder to take a deep breath and tune into themselves,” said Erin Hassey, senior director of growth marketing at Calm.

Data from Twitter shows Calm’s partnership with CNN created some decent buzz. There were 12 times as many tweets about Calm on Tuesday compared to the company’s average since Sept. 1. Indeed, Tuesday saw twice as many tweets about Calm than the previous week’s total.

Hassey explained that Calm’s strategy has involved cutting through the dread people are feeling with ads on social and TV that involve little more than the sound of rain on leaves with a visible countdown timer until the spot ends.

“Calm is given such a unique opportunity to support people as we’re often speaking to consumers on channels that fuel stress and anxiety,” said Hassey. “We’re purposeful in interrupting the stress to offer a healthier way to use your device.”

Hassey noted that while Calm’s CNN key alert partnership was its first election night sponsorship, the company took a similar approach during the presidential debates.

“Themes like anxiety, grounding, mindfulness, anxious and inhale are all present in the coverage of the election, and since this fits with the brand’s purpose, being there was excellent placement,” said Todd Grossman, CEO of the Americas for Talkwalker, an analytics platform. “Audiences lapped it up, applauding the campaign and saying things like the app deserved a download just for being present during CNN’s key alerts.”

Despite the intent, some Twitter users derided the partnership for not reading the room—which was anything but serene.

> *CNN’s election coverage being presented by the Calm app might be the funniest thing that has ever happened.*
>
> *— Stephen Amell (@StephenAmell)* ***November 4, 2020***

Others, however, thought Calm’s decision was wise for both understanding its audience and being aware of its purpose.

> *The @Calm sponsorship of CNN election coverage was a perfect example of knowing the role their brand can play at a specific point in time and tying it back to their value proposition.*
>
> *Great time for a free one week trial for all Americans.*
>
> *— Avish Sood (@AvishSood)* ***November 4, 2020***

> *Loved seeing @calm sponsoring CNN Election coverage.*
>
> *What other brands should have jumped in?*
>
> *— Amanda Goetz (@AmandaMGoetz) November 4, 2020*

Calm's election strategy goes beyond its CNN sponsorship: As election officials continue to count votes in key battleground states, the San Francisco-based startup anticipates stress levels to remain elevated. To meet a potential increase in demand for tools to steady the nerves, the company updated a page of its website, which it initially made in response to the pandemic, with free mindfulness resources such as meditations, stories and soothing music.

"We know this week will be stressful for most, so we're happy to support where possible," said Hassey, who spoke at Adweek's Challenger Brands summit earlier this year.

It's an apt time for Americans to embrace meditation apps. In early October, the American Psychological Association reported that 68% of U.S. adults said the 2020 presidential election is a significant source of stress in their life, up from 52% who said the same prior to the 2016 presidential election. Nearly a third of Americans say the mere thought of discussing politics with family members this Thanksgiving causes anxiety, according to a recent survey by the Harris Poll.

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