Reddit Considers New Political Ads Policy

At a time when social media companies are debating how best to deal with political advertising, Reddit is testing something new.

While the “front page of the internet” is still accepting political ads—unlike Twitter and other competitors—it is tinkering with how users interact with them, and how comments are moderated. But many users are unsatisfied with the proposed change.

Reddit’s new idea is to decentralize the conversation around political ads and force users who want to comment on an ad to share that ad in a subreddit to discuss it. Under the proposal, the ad will show an autogenerated running list of all the communities where it’s cross posted with links and running upvote and downvote counts for each.

Reddit co-founder and CEO Steve Huffman said he wants to cut down on “unmoderated spaces” on the website, devoid of moderators like those who volunteer to facilitate conversation on individual subreddits.

For most advertising on Reddit, comments are typically moderated by the advertiser and Reddit, but the company “did not feel this was an appropriate process with political ads,” said Reddit spokesperson Allie Mack. Instead, the political advertiser itself is currently in charge of moderating comments on its own ads with the help of Reddit’s AutoMod moderation technology, Mack said.

But, many Reddit users seemed disheartened by the proposed

change. Some said it would push responsibility onto unpaid moderators and make political discussions even more tied to ideological echo chambers on the site.

“Discussion in the ‘context of the community’ sounds like shuffling conversation off to insular communities so that the admins can wash their hands of having to referee the user base that they’ve created,” wrote user JonSnuur in r/SubredditDrama. “Just dumping more responsibility on mods.”

“They are basically in one way not allowing advertisers to self moderate their political ads (to avoid [biased] moderation or lack of transparency), and in another way, they are distancing themselves from the certain dumpster fire that would be the comment section of a political ad seeing that all polar opposite communities would clash on there and letting these clashes happen on subreddits instead,” user GallowBoob, a prominent Reddit moderator, told Adweek.

The proposed change would repeal a recent policy, introduced in April, which mandated that political advertisers allow comments for at least 24 hours. After that one-day window when users could comment, the advertiser—likely a campaign or political action committee—had the option to disable comments, or “lock,” the post.

It was part of a push this spring aimed at improving political discourse and transparency. At the time, Reddit also began requiring political advertisers to work directly with the company’s sales team, rather than its self-serve platform. A subreddit, r/RedditPoliticalAds, was also made as a live database for political ads running on the website.

User DubTeeDub, another prominent Reddit moderator who was involved in the recent successful push to get Reddit to ban hate speech on the platform, told Adweek the most recent change would only make political advertising “more contentious.”

“This policy is only going to increase workload on unpaid volunteer moderators, push users to participate in more divisive or hateful communities willing to share political ads and overall increase toxicity on the platform,” DubTeeDub said.

Reddit recently banned r/The_Donald, a notorious community supporting the president, when it banned hate speech. The company, though, is still accepting political advertising from the Trump reelection campaign and will reportedly run pro-Trump homepage takeover ads, as TechCruch reported.

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