# ‘Stop Hate’ Facebook advertiser boycott gains momentum as Verizon joins

Verizon Communications has become the highest-profile advertiser to announce it’s joining the “Stop Hate for Profit” campaign, which asks companies to pause their Facebook and Instagram ad spending during the month of July.

The movement was started earlier this month by a collection of non-profits and civil rights organizations including the NAACP and Anti-Defamation League. Stop Hate asserts that Facebook has facilitated the spread of hate speech, voter suppression and racism by turning a blind eye to content and publishers that promote hate speech.

**Intensifying internal and external pressure.** Recently, Facebook confronted an employee backlash and virtual walkout over its unwillingness to remove comments by President Trump suggesting violence against Black Lives Matter protesters (“When the looting starts, the shooting starts”). Twitter, by comparison, hid the tweet as violating its terms for “glorifying violence.”

In response to the criticism, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg issued a statement saying, “We’re going to review our policies allowing discussion and threats of state use of force . . . [and] our policies around voter suppression.”

In addition to Verizon, other companies participating in the boycott include Patagonia, the North Face, REI, Eddie Bauer, Magnolia Pictures and Ben & Jerry’s, among others. Some ad agencies are also involved, according to the New York Times. Verizon’s participation will both make it easier for other major advertisers to join the boycott and put pressure on rivals to do so as well.

The Stop Hate campaign appears to be gaining momentum and increasing national attention. Participating companies have millions of Facebook and Instagram followers, potentially helping to amplify its message to consumers.

**Limited financial impact.** July 1 is less than a week away and many industry observers are skeptical that Facebook will be meaningfully impacted by the boycott. While the coverage is negative PR for the company, the dollars at stake are so far relatively small.

In 2019, Facebook reported ad revenues of almost $70 billion and roughly 8 million advertisers – most of whom are small businesses. According to estimates from Deutsche Bank, 76% of Facebook ad revenues come from SMBs. These smaller merchants are unlikely to join the boycott in large numbers because Facebook is a critical marketing platform for them, particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet the boycott has Facebook's attention, and the company is working to prevent it from growing larger. A statement issued to the NY Times, attributed to Carolyn Everson, Facebook's vice president for global marketing solutions, said that the company was talking to advertisers and civil rights organizations about how it could now become a "force for good."

However that's arguably the way the company has always seen itself.

**Why we care.** As indicated, Facebook is unlikely to suffer financially even if more advertisers join the boycott. But it is starting to suffer on the PR front.

During the lockdown period, the company regained some of its lost public trust. However, that's threatened by the current controversy and the perception in some quarters that Facebook is tolerant of racism and hate speech.

It will be interesting to see what happens and whether the broader public becomes interested in the Stop Hate initiative. If awareness grows further, advertisers that continue to spend in July could be stigmatized. This risk could motivate some of them to pull ads out of an excess of caution and brand safety – though it remains to be seen.

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## About The Author

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